Ofcom's Making Sense of Media Establish Working Group

Minutes of first meeting held on 6 October 2022, 13.30 - 15.00 hrs

Attendees:

Group attendees: Ben Bradley (TikTok); Philippa Diedrichs (University of West England Bristol); Gareth Finchett (Mencap); Laura Higgins (Roblox); Katy Minshall (Twitter); Vicki Shotbolt (Parent Zone); Antonio Silva (Behavioural Insights Team); Nejra van Zalk (Imperial College London); Arietta Valmas (5Rights Foundation)

Ofcom: Ian Macrae; Claire Levens; Alana Finn; Natalie Mawhinney; David Swanson

Apologies: Rosie Luff (Google); Rebecca Stimson (Meta)

Item 1: Introductory remarks, housekeeping and introductions

- Ian Macrae commenced the working group by explaining the purpose of the Making Sense of Media (MSOM) programme. Three main themes were covered: the context of the programme within Ofcom; how we approach media literacy; and how the team is structured.
- Participating members of the Working Group then introduced themselves.

Item 2: Terms of Reference

- Claire Levens, as chair, confirmed all participating members had been sent and agreed to the Terms of Reference. It was outlined that the group will meet once a quarter between October 2022 and October 2023, with comments during these meetings being unattributed in minutes. It was also confirmed that Ofcom will have one-to-one meetings with participating online platform between main working group meetings, and minutes from these will not be published.

Item 3: Ofcom and Media Literacy

- Claire Levens highlighted that Ofcom interprets its duties to promote and research media literacy under the 2003 Communications Act broadly and sees media literacy as vital to ensuring that users make informed choices, have increased resilience, and effectively participate in online spaces. Claire further set out that work carried out under Ofcom's Making Sense of Media programme (MSOM) intersects with the current Video Sharing Platform regime and the future Online Safety regime.

Item 4: Establish spoke of MSOM

- Alana Finn highlighted that the vision for the Establish spoke of MSOM is for media literacy to be supported by online platforms through their service design, with Ofcom producing best practice principles to facilitate that.
- Alana set out that the working group would focus on on-platform design interventions that are self-activating, timely and choice-preserving because Ofcom think that these can empower users to make informed decisions, to have increased resilience and to participate effectively on online platforms.
- Alana further set out the focus of the working group as being on the practices that sit behind such on-platform interventions and, in particular, on understanding existing practice in that regard and developing a shared view of what best practice could look like.

Item 5: Items for discussion

(a) Working group workplan

- The proposed plan for the working group was briefly introduced by Alana Finn and encompassed the key topics and sub-topics for discussion across the next 12 months to arrive at best practice principles - overarching approach and goals, decision drivers, design process, and testing and evaluating.

- Questions came from members on whether the working group would be involved in user testing of the principles, and whether the segmentation of different demographics of users will be considered when establishing best practice principles. Ofcom colleagues advised that both of these things will be considered at the appropriate point in the workplan.

- A further question was raised on the proposed audience for and aim of the best practice principles. Ofcom colleagues advised that we see the audience as being online platforms, and that we hope they will embed them for the benefit of their users.

- Following questions and discussion, working group members broadly agreed that they were happy with the proposed workplan, with those who wanted to discuss it internally to send comments to Ofcom by COP 14 October.

(b) Research proposal

- Natalie Mawhinney gave an update on a planned research project regarding user attitudes towards in-scope on-platform design interventions. She also explained that the methodology encompasses a recruitment screener, followed by a diary study, followed by focus groups or in-depth interviews with adults and children age 13+.

- Working group members asked a number of questions and flagged a number of relevant considerations. This included whether recruited users would understand or recognise in-scope on-platform interventions well enough to respond. Natalie advised that there will be a consistent effort to help users understand these interventions to ensure quality data capture. A further question asked was whether the current scope of post-qualitative coding categories are deep enough to achieve rich findings, with a suggestion being to take different levels of media literacy and intellectual dimensions into account. Natalie advised that the final qualitative stages are not identified fully for this reason, to ensure maximum effectiveness of the study.

- A question was also posed about whether different languages and cultures could be considered throughout the research as this might affect attitudes towards interventions. Natalie advised that the initial recruitment screener would be nationally representative.

- A concern was raised as to whether certain feedback would unknowingly be filtered out if we were to focus on priority user needs, hazards, or harms that in-scope interventions are targeted at. Natalie and Alana advised that rather than trying to narrow the focus, the research aims to be broad and to encourage users to capture in-scope interventions broadly.

Item 6: Next steps

- Members to send comments on the workplan by COP 14 October 2022.
- Ofcom and online platform members to work together to hold first set of one-to-ones before Christmas.
- Ofcom to organise the next working group meeting for January 2023.