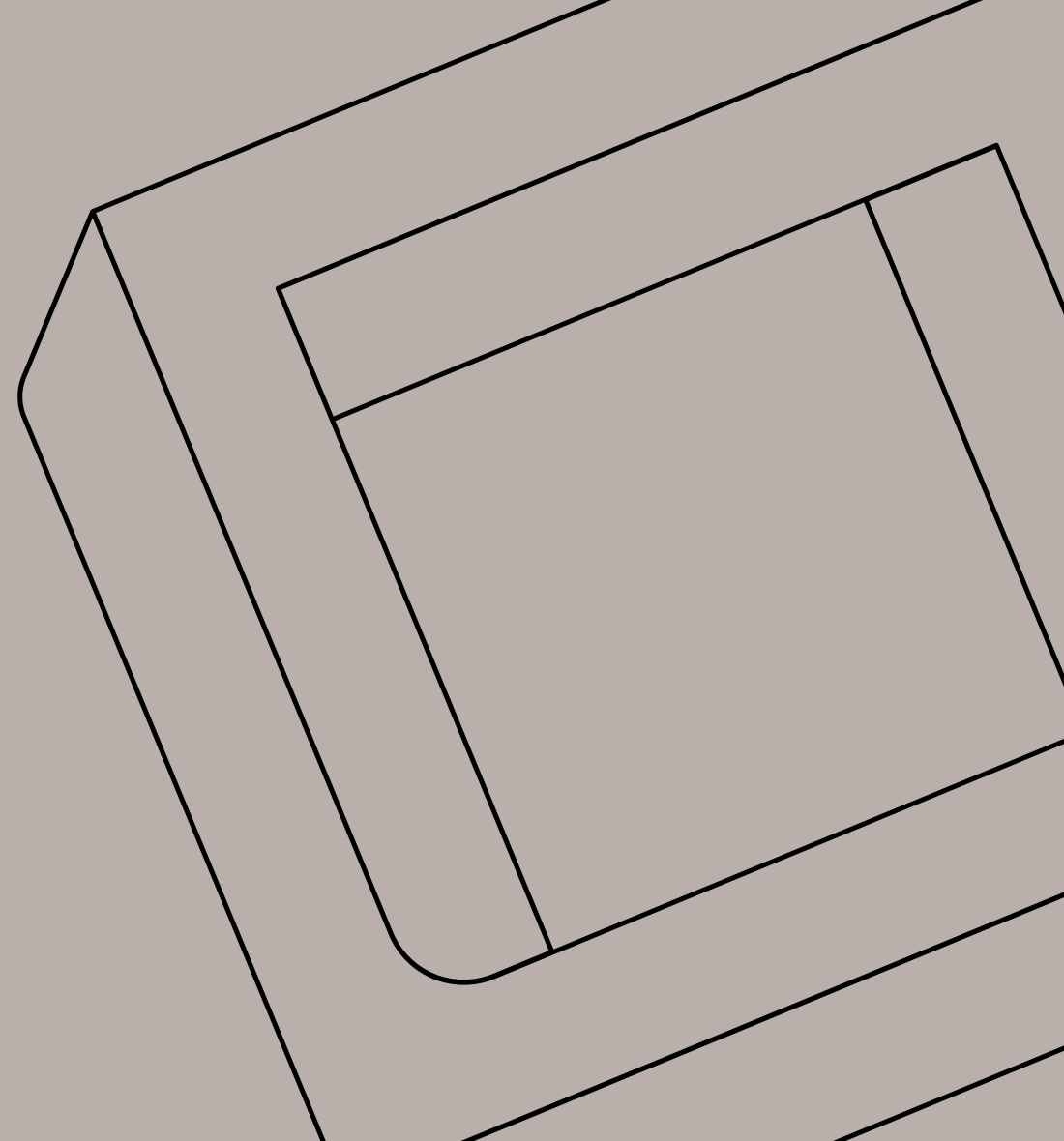


Co-creating ways to navigate and mitigate against mis and disinformation

Report for Ofcom by Verian

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Date of publication: May 2025



Ofcom Foreword

Under the Communications Act 2003, Ofcom has statutory duties to promote and to carry out research into media literacy. The Online Safety Act 2023 added clarification and specificity to our media literacy duties. Amongst other things, it requires Ofcom to build public awareness about a range of media literacy and online safety issues, and a duty to help users understand the nature and impact of disinformation and misinformation, and to reduce exposure to it.

This qualitative report is the culmination of a mixed-methodology programme of research designed to add to the evidence base of understanding of mis and disinformation in the UK. Our [quantitative research](#), published in November 2024, laid the foundations by providing evidence of how UK adults think and feel about “false or misleading” information: where they see it, why they think it's false or misleading, and what they do and feel as a consequence.

Our quantitative survey demonstrates that susceptibility to mis and disinformation is context-specific: there are differences in attitudes and behaviour across topic areas as well as the formats of information. So, rather than specific groups being more susceptible than others, it is more useful to think of groups in terms of their *patterns* of susceptibility. Anyone can be considered susceptible in different ways and at different times, so we took the view that the qualitative stage of the research should include participants from all segments of society. In addition, the quantitative data set allowed us to identify three groups that were of particular interest in relation to mis and disinformation, as they reported encountering it more often, were more concerned about its impacts, expressed an interest in finding out more, and/or had lower accuracy in identifying true statements on a range of topics in the survey. These groups were young people aged 16-34, those from ethnic minority backgrounds, and those for whom English was not a first language. Our sample structure for this qualitative research (set out in Appendices 1 and 2) reflected our desire to hear from a broad sample of the UK population, as well as to specifically give a voice to individuals from these 'overlap' groups* in relation to mis and disinformation.

This report sets out the findings from in-depth interviews, expert roundtables and co-creative workshops, exploring the approaches, messages, and trusted voices that might be most resonant with different groups when countering mis and disinformation.

*We have termed these groups 'overlap' groups, reflecting the overlap in their responses to the range of measures.

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1. Executive summary

Executive summary: Research background and approach

Research background

Ofcom has media literacy duties under the Online Safety Act 2023 to help users understand and reduce exposure to mis and disinformation online and has committed to using an increased range of robust and innovative research methods to gain insights into its priority topics. For more information see [Ofcom's Three-Year Media Literacy Strategy](#).

Research aims

The research engaged with both the general public and specific identified (overlap*) groups who may be more susceptible to mis and disinformation to:

- Explore and co-create messaging to engage both audiences
- Explore and co-create potential support strategies and/or interventions
- Identify trusted voices to deliver the messaging and/or support

Research approach

The primary research consisted of 2 phases:

Phase 1

25 online interviews, 7 with the general population and 18 with individuals that had held a minority view in the past, as well as an expert roundtable session

Phase 2

6 online co-creation workshops with a total of 65 participants

*Note: Ofcom's quantitative research (available [here](#)) into mis and disinformation identified potentially susceptible groups that were of particular interest in relation to mis and disinformation. See slide 14 for full definition.

Executive summary: Contextual research insights

Participants' perceptions of susceptibility were projected on to other generations and shaped their suggestions regarding strategies and messaging to help people navigate mis and disinformation

During the research, younger generations were more likely to consider older generations more susceptible, and vice versa. However, overall participants thought that everyone was likely to be susceptible to mis and disinformation at some stage.

Susceptibility to mis and disinformation was seen to be related to:

- How people consume information
- The type and range of sources
- Awareness of editorialisation and motivations
- Familiarity with technologies such as AI and the online landscape

Participants' perceptions of susceptibility shaped their suggestions regarding strategies and messaging to help people navigate mis and disinformation. For example, older participants suggested that younger generations ought to be reached through social media and encouraged to engage with a range of sources.

Participants reported approaches to seeking out credible information that included triangulation, source validation and quality checking.

Participants across the research reported using a range of information sources, however trust in sources varied.

Executive summary: The barriers to identifying mis and disinformation

Participants that had held a minority view in the past highlighted that the process of transitioning away from that view took time, and strategies to help people navigate mis and disinformation ought to reflect that by running for a prolonged period

Participants reported facing a range of barriers to moving away from a minority view which included: a fear of isolation and loss of identity, confirmation bias, and the time needed to accumulate evidence countering the view held.

The process participants described when transitioning away from a minority view took time, and involved at least 2 of 5 identified catalysts:

- Direct experiences
- Reaching a breaking point
- Exposure to other views
- Discovering new or different information
- Reaching a threshold of competing evidence

Barriers to identifying mis and disinformation identified by other participants included:

Information landscape

- Overwhelming volume of information
- AI-generated or modified information
- Manipulation of facts to construe credible looking (misleading) information

Individual behaviours and skills

- Confirmation bias and echo chamber
- Lack of awareness of existence of mis and disinformation
- Lack of skills to validate information
- Cultural and language barriers to understanding the information landscape in the UK (primarily reported by non-native English speakers in the sample)

Executive summary: Strategies and messaging to help people navigate mis and disinformation

Throughout the research suggestions regarding messaging, trusted voices and strategies to help people navigate mis and disinformation were highly consistent.

Overall, participants and media experts highlighted that there is no one-size-fits-all solution for messaging trusted voices and strategies to help people navigate mis and disinformation.

Participants felt that everyone should be provided support to help navigate mis and disinformation

Participants consistently highlighted that everyone is potentially susceptible to mis and disinformation, and that strategies together with messaging should reflect this. A multi-pronged approach, that makes use of multiple channels (both online and offline) and tailored messaging, would be required to target different segments of the population.

Participants suggested that strategies for navigating mis and disinformation should be designed with skills and confidence in mind

Participants outlined that people with different levels of information and media literacy and confidence will require different strategies. Targeting the confident should encourage critical engagement with other sources. Targeting the less confident should promote safety, reassurance and offer upskilling.

Executive summary: Strategies and messaging to help people navigate mis and disinformation

Participants in both phases of research felt there was a need to make space in society to allow people to talk openly about mis and disinformation

Participants felt that to support people affected by mis and disinformation, the conversation regarding mis and disinformation needs to be mainstream and that we should make space in society to talk openly and in safe spaces about views in a judgement-free way.

In tackling specific pieces of mis and disinformation participants felt a nonconfrontational approach was required

In addition to a nonconfrontational approach, participants felt it was important to present the facts alongside a credible, relevant and trusted ambassador, and that messaging should encourage engagement with a wide range of sources and viewpoints.

Executive summary: Principles for messaging on mis and disinformation and trusted voices

Participants in the research identified three key principles for messaging on mis and disinformation:



Multiple channels (social media, TV, radio, billboards, community spaces, community groups, schools etc.) should be used for messaging to reach a wide range of people.



Messaging should use simple and concise language. Tone should be tailored to the audience (e.g. reassuring for those lacking in confidence) but should in general be positive, encouraging and friendly.



The content of messaging should not incite fear or be shaming. Messages should raise awareness of mis and disinformation and encourage people to upskill and use resources to help them critically evaluate sources of information.

Trusted voices

Participants frequently reported that messaging regarding mis and disinformation should come from all segments of society.

Trusted voices for conveying messaging on mis and disinformation identified included: well-known figures and leaders within the community, respected peers who share commonalities with the target audience, educators, independent experts and professionals.

Media industry experts also highlighted that partnership voices (e.g. experts paired with trusted people in the community) could be powerful for reaching particular audiences.

2. Introduction

Research background

Ofcom has media literacy duties under the Online Safety Act 2023 to "help users understand and reduce exposure to mis and disinformation" and have committed to use an increased range of robust and innovative research methods to gain insights into priority topics, which include "understanding better how we can help various cohorts navigate the challenges of mis and disinformation".

As a result, Ofcom commissioned a programme of work that aims to better understand the groups that may be more susceptible to mis/disinformation, the groups who would be open to engagement around countering these issues and the messages that might more effectively engage these groups. This project focuses specifically on exploring and co-creating messaging to effectively engage both the general public and specific (overlap) groups identified as being more susceptible to mis/disinformation.

Note: The research definitions, including 'overlap groups', can be found on slides 13-14



Research aims

The key aims of the research were to engage with both the general public and specific identified (overlap) groups who may be more susceptible to mis and disinformation to:

- Explore and co-create messaging to engage both audiences
- Explore and co-create potential support strategies and/or interventions
- Identify trusted voices to deliver the messaging and/or support

Note: The research definitions, including 'overlap groups', can be found on slides 13-14

Research definitions (1)

Misinformation: For the purposes of this research project, we defined misinformation as the accidental spreading of false or misleading information.

Disinformation: For the purposes of this research project, we defined disinformation as the deliberate creation and sharing of false and/or manipulated information that is intended to deceive and mislead audiences, either for the purposes of causing harm, or for political, personal or financial gain.

While these are generally agreed definitions, there are a range of views about what specific information is described as mis/disinformation, and on what should be done about it (if anything).

Overlap groups: Ofcom's quantitative research 2024 into mis and disinformation, identified potentially susceptible groups that were of particular interest in relation to mis and disinformation, as they reported encountering it more often, were more concerned about its impacts, expressed an interest in finding out more, and/or had lower accuracy in identifying true statements on a range of topics in the survey. Three groups were identified: Non-native English speakers, minority ethnic groups and 16-34 year olds.

Research definitions (2)

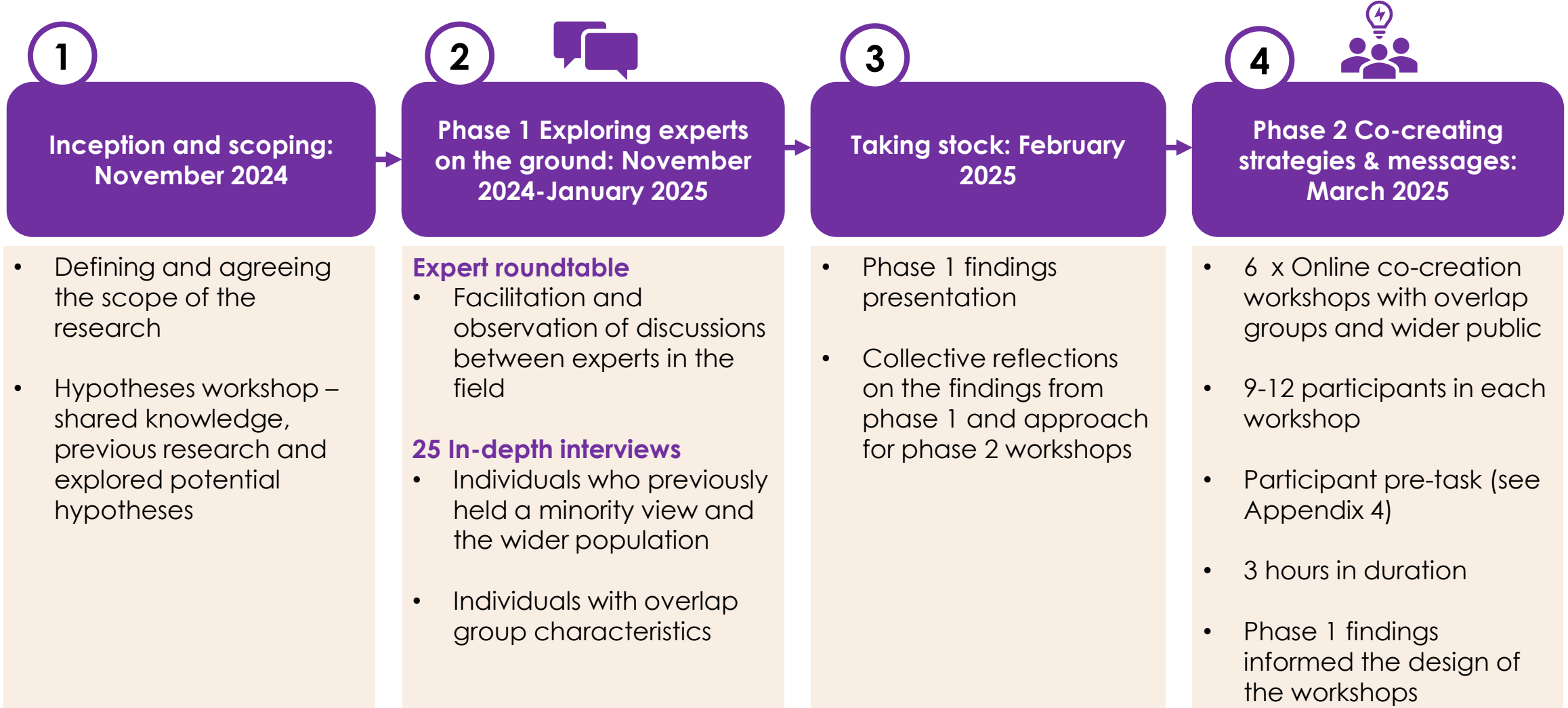
Minority view: Minority views refers to the views on important topics that are not widely held by the UK general population. This term is inclusive of a wide category of minority views and was chosen to enable potential participants to feel more comfortable about identifying their views, rather than using other terms related to these issues such as mis/disinformation. As the phrase does not make a judgment about people's views it enabled potential participants to identify themselves as someone with a minority view in a way that other terms may not have. Please see Ofcom's '[Understanding experiences of minority beliefs on online communication platforms](#)' research.

Cognitive reflection: Cognitive reflection is an individual's capacity for reflection, scrutiny and analysis. Cognitive reflection tests are designed to measure a person's tendency to override an impulsive, intuitive, automatic response in favour of a more deliberate, reflective one.

Traditional media sources: This report uses the terms traditional media sources and traditional news sources to refer to established print, broadcast and digital media and news outlets. There is not a universally agreed definition of traditional media sources, and these are sometimes also known as legacy media, old media or mainstream media, as distinct from 'new media' which tends to include social media platforms, among other technologies. Where participants' quotes mention 'mainstream media' or other terminology, their choice of word/s has been retained.

Research approach

An iterative approach using four stages of research was undertaken to meet the research aims and objectives.



Research sample

Phase 1: Online in-depth interviews



N=25

Two key populations:

- 1: Individuals who had previously held a minority belief or been susceptible to mis/disinformation but no longer do (N=18)
- 2: Individuals from the general population with awareness and/or experience of mis/disinformation (N=7)

Sample characteristics included:

- Non-native English speakers, minority ethnic groups and 16–34 year olds
- Range of demographics including age, gender, social grade, cognitive reflection scores and regions (not nationally representative)

Phase 2: Online co-creation workshops



N=65

- 6 online workshops
- 9-12 participants in each workshop

Three key populations:

- 1: identified overlap groups - non-native English speakers, minority ethnic groups and 16-34 year olds (3 groups)
- 2: Low cognitive reflection scores (2 groups)
- 3: High cognitive reflection scores (1 group)

Sample characteristics included:

- Range of demographics including age, gender, social grade and regions (not nationally representative)

Cognitive reflection scores were established using the CRT-2 test (Thomson & Oppenheimer, 2016) during screening to sensitively recruit for those with lower cognitive reflection. See Appendix 3 for further details.

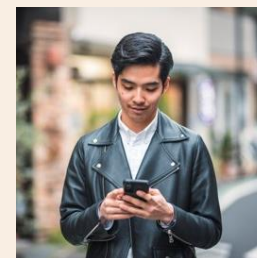
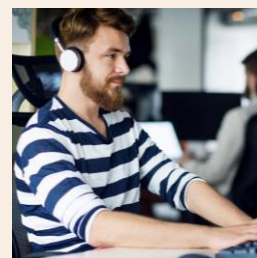
Phase 2 approach to online co-creation workshops



Fictional personas and fictional disinformation were used in the co-creation workshops to support participants to develop ideas and strategies for navigating mis and disinformation.

The fictional personas consisted of:

1. Yasmin, a non-native single parent who struggles with UK media
2. Grace, an older person who is fearful of what she reads online
3. Tristian, who is socially isolated and holds minority views
4. Samir, who is politically engaged but only consumes information and views he agrees with



The fictional personas are utilised in this report to illustrate the types of strategies, messaging and trusted voices that emerged over the course of the co-creation workshops.

The fictional disinformation used in the workshops was that 'the moon is made of cheese'. This fictional example was selected because it was felt to be an uncontroversial and light-hearted topic to work with.

How to interpret the information in this report

This research presentation report outlines findings from 25 in-depth interviews, an expert roundtable and 6 co-creation workshops. The presentation report sets out participants' perceptions regarding mis and disinformation, and strategies that may help raise awareness and facilitate a range of people to spot mis and disinformation.

Qualitative research typically involves small sample sizes and is designed to be exploratory and provide insights into people's perceptions, feelings and behaviours. In reviewing the findings set out in the report it is important to acknowledge that the insights highlighted here are not intended to be representative or highly generalisable. The findings instead outline a range of perceptions that may provide learnings for Ofcom.

The report outlines barriers to spotting mis and disinformation and strategies for navigating mis and disinformation. The terms 'barriers' and 'strategies' were deliberately used with participants to ensure their discussions were broad and that they were able to develop their ideas, having first discussed what makes it challenging for people to navigate mis and disinformation.

Anonymised verbatim quotes and pseudonymised case studies have been used to help illustrate the findings. Where there were sub-group variations in the findings these have been explicitly outlined.

3. Findings

3.1 Contextual insights

This section outlines the insights from both phases of the research regarding participants' information consumption, trust in sources, perceptions of susceptibility to mis and disinformation as well as their concerns regarding mis and dis information.

Participants used a range of information sources but generally reported using traditional media sources and social media for information



Participants described using a range of information sources (these are set out on the right).

Generally, participants cited primarily using traditional media sources and social media for information.

However, some participants reported not using traditional media sources. Other participants reported avoiding social media and expressed caution regarding information received through word of mouth.

A minority of participants said that they seek out academic sources.



Traditional media sources: BBC, Channel 4, ITV, Channel 5, Guardian, Telegraph, Financial Times, local news, Al Jazeera (TV, radio, websites and newspapers) The Economist and New Scientist.



Social media and online communities: Facebook, Instagram, TikTok, YouTube, X (formerly Twitter), LinkedIn, Bluesky, Snapchat (networks and influencers), Reddit and Mumsnet.



Contemporary media sources: Podcasts and Wikipedia.



Word of mouth: In-person and via messaging platforms (e.g. WhatsApp) from friends, family, peers, work colleagues and other parents.



News aggregators: Google, MSN, Apple News and Simple Politics.



Academic sources: Journal articles.

Trust in sources of information varied across the sample



Participants across the sample felt that they had a high level of understanding and awareness of mis and disinformation (1).

Broadly, general population participants described trusting traditional media sources, and information from trusted and respected individuals received via social media or word of mouth.

Participants who were more sceptical about traditional media, and participants that had previously held a minority view, tended to report greater levels of trust in the information they proactively found online and from online communities/ platforms and social media.



Traditional media sources: More sceptical participants and non-native English speakers often lacked trust in 'mainstream news media'.



Social media and online communities: Participants generally reported a degree of distrust in authors they didn't know personally, but comments were often seen as credible opinions. Some online communities were seen as valid sources of alternative views on a topic.



Contemporary media sources: Participants that used these sources often perceived these as valid representations of a range of views on topics.



Word of mouth: Information received through word of mouth from both familiar and respected sources was trusted, information from unfamiliar sources was treated with more caution.



News aggregators: Participants expressed a degree of concern regarding the breadth and selection that news topics aggregators offer.



Academic sources: These sources were highly trusted, however only individuals with higher education qualifications or students in higher education tended to cite using these.

Participants frequently described approaches to finding credible information that included triangulation



Participants described consuming information in both proactive and passive ways.

- Proactive information consumption included seeking out and sharing information on particular topics
- Passive information consumption included information coming through social media or community groups, peers, family, friends

Approaches to seeking out perceived credible information often included triangulation, source validation and quality checking the information (as set out on the right). Triangulation was more frequently reported amongst those with high cognitive reflection scores (2).



Triangulation: Checking multiple trusted sources to corroborate the information (as outlined in the previous slide, these trusted sources varied across the sample).



Source validation: Investigating and evaluating the source of the information to ensure authenticity and trustworthiness.



Quality checks: Looking for consistency in text or the image, checking for spelling mistakes and other errors or malalignments to ensure authenticity and trustworthiness.

During the research, younger generations were more likely to consider older generations more susceptible than themselves, and vice versa



Younger participants were concerned that their parents or grandparents relied on too few sources and trusted them too readily. Younger participants were also worried that older generations lack the skills to identify mis and disinformation online.

Older participants felt that their children and/or grandchildren were unaware of the editorialisation and motivations shaping information. As such, they felt their children and/or grandchildren were more susceptible to mis and disinformation.

Middle aged participants tended to express concern for both older and younger generations.

Participants thought that susceptibility to mis and disinformation was related to:

- How people consume information, the type and range of sources (e.g. reliance on social media)
- Awareness of editorialisation (e.g. political or world view bias)
- Awareness of motivation (e.g. political, monetary and other drivers)
- Familiarity with technologies such as AI and the online landscape (e.g. understanding how online communities and social media work)

Many participants talked about their parents' or their children's susceptibility



“My parents don’t question anything, they just take the news they read as fact.”

(Female, 16-34)

“[Younger people] don't have a holistic view as of yet, so they might be more like impressionable and more easily influenced. Not all young people, of course, but if perhaps if they only use like TikTok and that's where they get all their information from.”

(Female, 16-34, non-native English speaker)

“I am concerned about my parents they cannot recognise real websites from fake ones. They often do not double check [information] before sharing... and they cannot recognise the signs when a video or picture may be AI generated.”

(Male, 35+, non-native English speaker)

“Younger audience[s] tend to believe most things if they are promoted by a celebrity or influencer no matter what they say or sell... I think my eldest daughter is influenced by misleading information because she follows many social platforms.”

(Male, 35+, minority ethnic group)

Despite this, overall, participants concluded that everyone was likely to be susceptible to mis and disinformation at some stage.

Participants reported being concerned about the real-world consequences of mis and disinformation



In preparation for the workshops participants were asked to share with us their concerns about mis and disinformation. Participants described a range of concerns relating to mis and disinformation's impact on individuals and our society at large.

“Misinformation isn’t just about people believing the wrong thing - it has real-world consequences.”

(Female, 35-74, Minority ethnic group)

Impacts on individuals

Participants were concerned about the impacts of mis and disinformation on individuals:

- Physical health (e.g. as a result of not taking vaccines)
- Mental health

As well as the potential for:

- Financial loss and identity theft through scams
- Discrimination, on account of false or misleading information

“It can lead to extreme views, relationships breaking down, people feeling like they have “lost” loved ones.”

(Female, 35+)

Impacts on wider society

Participants were concerned that mis and disinformation would drive:

- Social and/or political divisions
- Wide-spread fear
- Poor policy (through the election of parties/politicians)

“People could be radicalised [by mis and dis information].”

(Male, 35+)

Participants from minority ethnic groups were most likely to report concerns about social divisions and discrimination.

“The spreading of [mis and disinformation] only divides instead of creating a sense of unity.”

(Female, 35+, minority ethnic group)

3.2 Barriers and enablers to identifying mis and disinformation

This section outlines the findings regarding barriers and enablers to identifying mis and disinformation emerging from both phases of the research.

Barriers were identified that related to the information landscape as well as to individuals' behaviours and skills



Information landscape

Key barriers related to the information landscape reported by participants:

- Overwhelming volume of information available through traditional media sources (TV, radio, newspapers), online, via social media and through word of mouth
- AI generated or modified information (including images and voices) making mis and disinformation appear credible
- Data framing, such as using statistics out of context, and manipulation of facts to construe credible looking but misleading information



Individuals' behaviours and skills

Key barriers related to individual behaviours and skills reported by participants:

- Looking for and receiving information that aligns with and/or confirms views (confirmation bias and echo chambers)
- Lack of awareness in the wider population of mis and disinformation and believing information without any critical reflection
- Lack of skills in the wider population to validate information and work out if information is credible and trustworthy
- Cultural and language barriers to understanding the information landscape in the UK (primarily raised by non-native English speakers)

Further barriers were reported by participants that had held minority views in the past



The role the minority view played in participants' lives varied across the sample but generally worked to contribute to individuals' sense of self and social life.

Sense of self and identity:

- The view set them out as unique/ informed
- The view was an area of interest (e.g. passion project)
- The view was in alignment with their community

Social life:

- Holding the view facilitated relationships and community

"I wanted to believe because everybody else was believing [it]."

(Male, 35+, minority view)

"I couldn't not believe because [it was] something she [step-mother] would send me like links on from different sources with articles that were written quite well. So I'd be like, well, why would they go out of their way if it's not actually true?"

(Female, 16-34, minority view, non native English speaker)

Barriers

Fear of isolation:

- Some participants relied on social media for social connections
- Being deeply invested in the communities promoting a minority view led to fear of being mocked or lose of that community for some

Loss of identity:

- Participants that proactively invested in the view described struggling to let go as it undermined their sense of identity

Confirmation bias:

- Participants experienced ongoing confirmation of their view through the information and communities they were engaging with, as well as through social media

Time to reach a threshold of evidence:

- Participants highlighted that accumulating enough trusted competing evidence takes time

The research identified 5 key catalysts facilitating the shift away from a minority view



Participants that had held a minority view in the past described going through a transitional process (i.e. a series of steps that included reflection and evaluation that led to change) when moving away from that view.

The process participants portrayed highlighted 5 catalysts as facilitating the shift. These were:



Direct experience

Having direct, personal experiences that contradicted the minority view held (such as contracting COVID) had significant impacts on participants' views.



Reaching a breaking point

Feeling a need to move away from a minority view when the information or opinions they were coming into contact with started to feel too extreme or weird.



Exposure to other views

Being exposed to other views held by people they respected or trusted.



Discovering new/different information

Independently finding new or different information from sources perceived as credible or trustworthy that contradicted or undermined the minority view held.



Burden of evidence

Participants described evidence to the contrary of their view, building and reaching a threshold over time.

Participants highlighted that transitioning away from their minority view was a process that took time

Participants reported that transitioning away from a minority view took time and involved experiencing at least 2 of the 5 catalysts.

"I don't think there was that one major sort of light bulb moment. I think it was just sort of progression information."

(Female, 35+, minority view)

"It took time. It wasn't in an instant. This [encounter] took place and then I had a bit of first realisation, then a second incidence, second experience and assessment and then a third experience, and then you are like assessing or pondering over it and gradual doubts [led to] having a change of belief."

(Male, 16-34, minority view and minority ethnic group)

"I didn't change immediately on my opinions concerning COVID. I was still, you know, very much against anyone taking the vaccine... [it] took a while, you know, listening to some of this news, researching, hear the interviews [with scientists and doctors on TV news]."

(Female, 16-34, minority view and minority ethnic group)

Participants that had held a minority view in the past found in-person conversations/ information exchanges and engagement in professional environments (such as in work) helped them transition away from that view.

Participants described feeling more receptive to alternative viewpoints when engagement was in-person or in a professional setting.

Catalyst case study 1: Exposure to other views and discovering different information



Monisha* (aged 16-24) once held the view that climate change was a hoax. At that time her family and friends also held the view that climate change was a hoax, and they would often send her social media posts on the topic. Whilst she held that view, she would get into heated arguments with friends, and she often felt isolated at school.

"Anytime anyone would try to disprove it to me, I'd just be mad that they couldn't see like the truth."

When Monisha left home to attend university she learnt about credible sources of information, critical thinking and how to research topics.

"Now I have the ability to actually check it myself rather than just believing what I'm told."

Whilst at university the sources of information she trusted and used changed, and she became more open to other ideas regarding climate change. However, Monisha was reluctant to share these ideas with her family and friends fearing ridicule and ostracisation. Over time she has developed new friendship groups and has come to feel more secure in her own ideas. Monisha now openly shares her views and welcomes new ideas. She has also decided to stop seeing some of her friends at home and some members of her family for her well-being and happiness.



Catalyst case study 2: Direct experience and exposure to other views

Resh* (aged over 35, minority ethnic group and non-native English speaker) once held the view that the Covid-19 pandemic was a conspiracy and that the covid vaccines contained microchips. At that time, he felt confused and scared.

“I just didn’t know what to believe...there was just so much information.”

The majority of Resh’s family, friends and social media followings were sceptical and so he “went with the majority”, despite the fact that his wife felt differently and advised him to trust the government and to get the vaccine like her. The difference in views caused tension and many arguments between Resh and his wife.

Resh remained sceptical until his father died after contracting Covid. His father’s death had a huge emotional impact on Resh, and it took some time for him to accept that his father’s death was as a result of Covid.

The whole experience has led Resh to think differently about the information he uses to form his opinions. Resh also feels that he has come to value his wife and family more.



Catalyst case study 3: Burden of evidence and reaching a breaking point



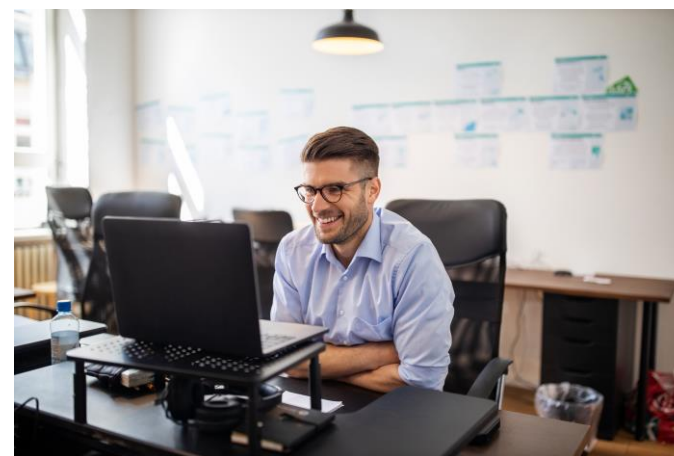
Taz* (16-34, minority view and minority ethnic group) held the view that a hidden group controlled world leaders and set the world order, and when the COVID-19 pandemic struck he believed that it was a conspiracy. Taz was a teenager at the time his views first formed and feels that he was very impressionable, lonely and angry.

"I think when you're that age you're very impressionable. You feel like you're teaching yourself things, but then you go down these rabbit holes."

Taz's views began to change when he realised there was more evidence for the existence of COVID-19 than not; he was seeing doctors and scientists talk about COVID-19 on the news and was finding journal articles about the virus online. Furthermore, he found the idea that there were micro-chips in the vaccines to be too extreme.

The shift in his views regarding COVID-19 made Taz question his other views. Around that time, he started to work with a man with the same views. This experience allowed Taz to reflect, and he realised that he didn't want to be like his colleague in the future.

"I worked with a guy who all he talked about was that type of thing. He had nothing else in his life....he was the one that made me think I don't want to end up like him because I'm sure he started off the way I started off."



3.3 Mis and disinformation awareness support strategies, messaging and trusted voices

This section presents participants' suggestions from both phases of the research regarding support strategies, messaging and trusted voices to raise awareness and enable the identification of mis and disinformation.

Phase 1 findings

Phase 1 consisted of interviews with the general population and individuals that had held a minority view in the past together with a media expert roundtable.

Phase 1 participants had a range of ideas about how to help people navigate mis and disinformation



Strategies for navigating mis and disinformation

Despite engagement with the topic of mis and disinformation, general population participants in phase 1 often struggled to suggest ways to help people navigate mis and disinformation.

However, participants did suggest strategies to:

- Promote awareness of mis and disinformation
- Promote awareness of fact-checkers
- Upskilling individuals (i.e. give people the tools to identify mis and disinformation)

Participants felt strategies should use different channels to target older and younger demographics. Participants suggested that traditional media sources and community spaces could be used to target older generations, and social media to reach younger people.

"Make sure that you're using the right platforms to reach demographics that you want to reach."

(Female, 16-34)

Participants in phase 1 suggested four strategies to help people navigate mis and disinformation:

1. A traditional awareness campaign, using TV, radio, posters and billboards to specifically target older people
2. A social media campaign using engaging content including short videos, to promote awareness amongst younger people
3. In-work training to upskill the general working population (using training similar to phishing and scam training)
4. In-school media literacy education as a route to reaching both children and parents

These participants also felt that validation markers and regulation could help with managing mis and disinformation



Strategies for navigating mis and disinformation

Validation markers

Participants in phase 1 also suggested that validation markers on content could be used widely on social media and other online information outlets such as news media. Validation markers suggested included labels or badges, confidence scoring and warnings (e.g. this is not a verified fact).

“People are too busy to delve into things, but if they had to click through a confidence score before they could read an article [that might help].”

(Male 35+)

Regulation

Some participants thought that strategies should be bolstered by regulation of social media and online platforms to prevent mis and disinformation.

“You could have regulation on social media, Ofcom could explore it.”

(Female, 35+)

Making space in society

Some participants in phase 1 felt that those affected by mis and disinformation feared judgement and isolation, making open discussion difficult. They suggested creating space in society for conversations about mis and disinformation, to make public discussions more socially acceptable and mainstream.

“I would kind of sit on the fence and not really engage in that conversation because I did have a bit of a different perspective [so it is important to encourage open conversation].”

(Female, 16-34, Minority view)

“I think the worst thing to do is to cut [people with minority views] off.”

(Female, 35+, Minority view)

Participants felt that messaging ought to be friendly, simple and unfrontational



Messaging

Message tone and use of language

Phase 1 participants recommended that messaging should:

- Use a friendly tone
- Use plain and simple language
- Avoid shaming language
- Avoid using a confrontational tone

“The tone could be open and friendly, not being critical ... but more like here are some things you could do.”

(Female, 35+, minority view and minority ethnic group)

“The tone should be non confrontational , not patronising, non judgemental, like don't tell people they're stupid or wrong.”

(Male, 16-34, minority view)

Message content

Participants across phase 1 felt that it was important to keep messaging simple, concise and focused (e.g. “tips and tricks” to spotting mis and disinformation).

Participants that had held a minority view in the past suggested that messaging could focus on:

- Encouraging reflection on the evidence and the sources of information being used
- Taking time to examine and triangulate information

“Patience is the key because if you have patience, you'll definitely get accurate information, or if you rush to just pick up any information you hear, you could also be misinformed.”

(Female, 16-34, minority view and minority ethnic group)

In phase 1 a range of voices were felt to be required to deliver messaging on mis and disinformation



Trusted voices

Participants frequently reported that messaging regarding mis and disinformation should come from all segments of society:

- Community organisations
- Social media and online platforms
- Schools and other further and higher educational institutes
- Religious institutions
- Workplaces
- Charities
- Government

Trusted voices suggested included:

- Educators (e.g. teachers and lecturers)
- Community and faith leaders (including Men Sheds)
- Independent experts
- Professionals (e.g. doctors, scientists, pharmacists, educated peers)
- Familiar and trusted individuals (e.g. barber/ hairdresser)
- Trusted social media influencers/ accounts
- Celebrities

"Everyone should be involved in sharing that [messaging] ... to make sure the information is spread wide ... it would require different sources definitely."

(Female, 16-34, minority view and minority ethnic group)

"Well respected people in the community that you trust like police, doctors, lawyers, teachers, local vicar."

(Female, 35+, minority view)

Media industry experts suggested that strategies could focus on upskilling and messaging should be simple and concise



Media industry experts had similar views to the interview participants in phase 1 regarding strategies to help people navigate mis and disinformation, messaging and trusted voices to drive awareness of mis and disinformation.

Below are the key suggestions from media industry experts for driving awareness of mis and disinformation and helping people identify mis and disinformation.

Strategies for navigating mis and disinformation

- Building resilience to mis and disinformation through upskilling
- Use of content validation markers (e.g. kitemarking) and source alerts on social media and online platforms
- Create new spaces (online and in person) for interaction where people discover different views and content

Messaging

- Simple, focused and short
- Relevant to people and connecting on a personal level
- Related to popular topics/issues/narratives
- Make use of the right trusted voices

Trusted voices

- Partnership voices (e.g. experts paired with trusted people in the community) – this suggestion was unique to the media experts
- Well-known figures and leaders within the community
- Peers who share commonalities with the target audience (e.g. age, native language, similar life experiences)

Phase 2 findings

Phase 2 consisted of online co-creation workshops with general population and overlap group populations.

In phase 2 it was felt that strategies should target a broad population as mis and disinformation can affect anyone

General themes for strategies to help people navigate mis and disinformation

Participants felt that everyone could be susceptible to mis and disinformation.

Therefore, strategies to help people navigate mis and disinformation needed to:

- Be broad in scope
- Be communicated through multiple channels to reach everyone
- Use plain, simple English (3)
- Use formats that are accessible and user-friendly

Broadly participants in phase 2 thought that people, including their friends and family, did not seek out help in identifying mis and disinformation. Reflecting this participants said it was important for strategies to meet people where they were at.

Approaches to meet people where they are at suggested included using appropriate channels for the target audience.

Messaging shared via social media, online platforms and search engines were thought most effective for engaging younger audiences.

Messaging via TV, radio, and community spaces (GPs and libraries), were felt likely to engage older people.

Participants in the phase 2 recommended that strategies should focus on raising awareness, education and skills.

It was suggested that strategies could include sign posting, resources and toolkits such as guides on:

- Approaching information critically
- Supporting family and friends impacted by mis and disinformation

Participants felt these resources would allow people to educate themselves and may reach people who might not engage with an awareness campaign.

Phase 2 participants felt that messaging should be educational and non-judgemental in tone



Messaging

Participants suggested that messages for a general audience should:

Be **short, factual but also engaging** to keep peoples' attention.

Note: A short narrative format was thought to be more memorable than strictly factual messaging.

Reassure that everyone can be susceptible to mis and disinformation.

Highlight the challenges people face, such as the volume of information available and new technologies such as AI.

Be educational and seek to **equip people with** media literacy **skills**.

Urge people to **think critically** about information, such as with toolkits or guides.

Be nonconfrontational, take a **neutral tone** and avoid scaring people.

Sensitively encourage people to **question sources** and consider different perspectives.

Perceptions of confidence to evaluate and validate information underpinned the messaging participants recommended in the workshops:

- For less confident individuals, participants felt messaging should focus on reassurance and raising confidence. Messaging should also aim to equip them with the skills to identify mis and disinformation.
- For more confident individuals, participants recommended messaging should encourage engagement with a variety of sources and use of existing skills to evaluate information. Messaging should also promote the benefits of hearing a wide range of views - even if they disagree with these views.

Participants felt that the trusted voices for messaging on mis and disinformation ought to be recognisable experts trusted to communicate important information



Trusted voices

Broadly, participants in phase 2 said that credible, trusted, figures should be the face of mis and disinformation support strategies and messaging.

Credible figures were typically seen as experts in the relevant field and were (ideally) politically neutral. Suggested experts included Professor Brian Cox, David Attenborough and Martin Lewis. Community leaders and community groups were also often identified as trusted voices.

However, phase 2 participants highlighted that these individuals can also be susceptible to mis and disinformation or have their own agenda (4). To address this risk, participants suggested that quality assurance measures to ensure consistent messaging would need to be put in place.

Participant also considered that more sceptical people may not readily engage with credible figures.

Here, participants suggested that people around those individuals, such as friends or family, could filter the messaging to these harder to reach individuals.

Fictional Persona 1: Yasmin

Yasmin is a 40 year old single parent of two little girls and moved to the UK with her family three years ago (5). Yasmin finds information from UK news sources to be confusing and often contradicting.

She often chats with her friends and family about issues and news topics that concern her, and they tell her not to worry about it. She also has friends who are from her home country and chats with them about what they have heard, and they agree that the UK news sources often contradict one another, and that the information is confusing. As a result, they often rely on information shared by family and friends on social media.



Participants thought that Yasmin would be better supported by her local community and her children's school than the general population



Barriers

Participants identified Yasmin's barriers to be her lack of knowledge in where to seek reliable and credible information and as a result, the 'echo chamber' she had created by relying on friends and family.

Strategies for navigating mis and disinformation

Participants thought Yasmin would need education and upskilling via trusted voices such as local community groups that can explain the UK news media landscape. Non-native speaker participants also suggested she seek support from established community members who share her national identity. Community groups could also hold adult education sessions focusing on media literacy and evaluating information.

As a parent, participants thought Yasmin could also be engaged through her children. The school could send educational material which would upskill her by giving her tools to talk to her children about mis and disinformation. Finally, participants thought that signposting Yasmin to online fact-checkers, would allow her to proactively check the media she consumes.

Messaging

Participants suggested that messaging around online safety for her children would engage Yasmin. Messages should be educational but encouraging, and signpost Yasmin to the resources she needs to improve her information skills.

Groups suggested strategies for Yasmin that gave her tools and resources she could use to check information she was unsure about



Participant-recommended strategies included:

- In-person adult education sessions run by a provider that delivers at a local level. These would include training on media literacy, practical training on verifying information and listening to other people's views. Sessions would be advertised via her children's schools, with the message that learning these skills would help her protect her children.
- An acronym that forms a critical thinking checklist to make steps easy to remember. This would help Yasmin when she is confused by information to check if it is reliable and trustworthy.
- A fact-checking service she can contact in person or online to find trustworthy information. She could learn about this fact-checking service through the school and other community spaces she is likely to use (e.g. Doctors, library, activity groups for children) as well as via online pop-up ads.

Groups typically thought that Yasmin needed opportunities and resources to upskill herself.

Participants suggested community-based strategies that would help her gain a better understanding of the UK media with local peers.

Participants also felt that a campaign about 'keeping her children safe online' would motivate Yasmin as a parent to engage with information, advice and events.

“Help her to learn as a parent how to help her children develop these [media literacy] skills.”

(Female, 16-34)

Fictional Persona 2: Grace

Grace is an 82 year old Londoner who lives alone with her pet cat. She enjoys chatting to people and having lunch at her local community centre on a Tuesday and goes to church regularly on a Sunday. One of Grace's friends lost money after being targeted by a romance fraud. This made Grace feel afraid of being online and she refused to use the internet for a long time.

Recently, volunteers at the community centre supported her to set up an email account and social media profile – she was persuaded because she wants to communicate with her sister who lives overseas, and because the volunteers explained she might be able to save money on her bills and by comparing prices of products online. She is following several local community groups and is very concerned about some of the things she has seen reported including a criminal cat theft ring in her area and the risk of violence outside the secondary school at the end of her road.



Participants suggested that Grace requires a positive and in person approach to upskill her on identifying misinformation without becoming fearful



Barriers

Grace's barriers were felt to be her limited internet skills and fear of the internet and for her safety.

Strategies for navigating mis and disinformation

Participants recommended building Grace's confidence to identify mis and disinformation through in person support that can educate her in a safe, positive and social environment. As she has connections with her community centre and church, it was thought that volunteers and church members could talk to her or run relaxed workshops on identifying mis and disinformation. Information on TV morning shows or entertainment TV and radio broadcasts were also considered as potential trusted sources to deliver information and messaging on mis and disinformation.

As Grace was not confident using the internet, participants felt it was important that she had trusted figures to educate her on navigating mis and disinformation. Figures suggested by participants included volunteers, the Church lead and local authority figures such as a police officer or the local MP.

Messaging

Participants thought positive approaches were necessary due to the risk that Grace may isolate herself from a useful tool out of fear. Messages should reassure her and educate her on trustworthy online sources and keeping safe online but not patronise her.

Strategies participants suggested for Grace were similar to traditional awareness campaigns



Participant-recommended strategies included:

- A “spot the difference” campaign to demonstrate how misinformation works. Participants suggested an example of two cat pictures with one having small but meaningful changes.
- Driving awareness of mis and disinformation through radio shows and creating materials that the community volunteers could use to teach her.
- Using entertainment broadcasts, such as a soap opera storyline where someone is scammed or believes mis and disinformation. As a drama, this should be treated seriously but end on a reassuring note. It should inform her about keeping a critical mindset.
- A series of internet awareness events where people talk about their experiences online and experts can provide practical advice on keeping safe. These would be advertised with leaflets in trusted spaces (GPs, community centres) and offer multiple sessions on different topics.

Participants generally thought Grace’s age group would require traditional mediums of engagement. These included leaflets and posters in places she uses such as GPs and community centres.

Groups felt that strictly factual messaging was unlikely to grab Grace’s attention. As a result, participants recommended a light-hearted games or story-telling approaches would be more likely to engage Grace.

“It’s about giving Grace reassurance and concentrating on the positive sides of the internet and how it can help her whilst making her aware of the dangers.”

(Male, 35+)

Fictional Persona 3: Tristan

Tristan is 30 and has always been interested in science. He describes himself as a 'conspiracy theorist' and uses social media to research information about his beliefs. He seeks out a range of sources and finds video content more reliable than first-hand accounts. He encourages the people around him to "question everything" and to believe their own eyes, and not to believe what they see in the 'mainstream media'.

At work, a colleague made a complaint about Tristan for being overly argumentative about a controversial topic in meetings and he is now on a performance improvement plan, which he fears might lead to him losing his job. Tristan is finding himself socially isolated due to his views on climate change and he doesn't call his Dad anymore after they had an argument three years ago.



Participants reported that Tristan's isolation and suspicion required more bespoke and diplomatic approaches than for the general population

Barriers

Tristan's identity as a conspiracy theorist was seen as a barrier to generating support strategies due to his high scepticism for authority and 'mainstream information sources' (6).

Strategies for navigating mis and disinformation

Participants often expressed concern for his wellbeing and felt careful support to encourage him to engage with information without further isolating him would be key. Suggestions included making spaces in society for non-judgemental discussions – both in-person and online. Participants felt this would help avoid Tristan feeling attacked for his views while also exposing him to new ideas.

Participants commonly suggested that online interactive games could be used to help Tristan learn about mis and disinformation or the facts countering disinformation. Messaging in gaming platforms should feel organic and not targeted so that Tristan could feel empowered to find information for himself. Participants also thought Tristan's employer should support him and signpost him to the campaign or to helpful resources.

Messaging

Participants felt that messaging should encourage Tristan to be critical of his information sources so he can find the answer for himself, rather than direct him to official sources.

Participants suggested that Tristan would need more indirect forms of engagement such as online video games or safe spaces in society to feel listened to



Participant-recommended strategies included:

- Embedding messaging within an existing video game, in the background or as a side-quest, or a purpose-built game for a campaign:
 - Embedded in the background as, for example, radio news within a game world
 - Side quest would require the gamer to memorise the story and sequence (related to mis and disinformation) to pass the quest
 - A purpose-built online game around mis/disinformation would allow proactive engagement with the information. The gamer would be motivated by the challenges and puzzles needed to progress.
 - Videos of people playing the purpose-built game could spread the message to others through social media (7).
- Creating moderated spaces, such as online and in-person workshops, where people can express a range of views without judgement and listen to other views. However, groups also thought motivating Tristan to attend would be challenging.

Participants were conscious that Tristan might be suspicious of direct messaging. As such they suggested strategies that were more indirect than those for other personas.

Groups recommended online interactive approaches, such as video games. This approach was thought to give Tristan more control in how he engaged with the messaging.

Participants also suggested strategies where Tristan could interact directly with other people, to counter his isolation.

“You have to make Tristan feel like he’s stumbled upon it himself. Otherwise, he is not going to believe it.”

(Male, 35+)

Fictional Persona 4: Samir

Samir is a 28 year old estate agent who has always had an interest in all things politics. He watches some 'mainstream news channels' and likes the ones that devote more time and care to talking about issues. He also finds social media channels to be useful to see another perspectives on things, particularly with politics, as he feels news outlets have biased narratives.

Samir only engages with people who have the same views as him, as he finds those that have a different opinion to be "blind" to the realities of the world. He used to have an older colleague at his previous workplace that had more extreme views and found this concerning, making him rethink his own views.



Participants felt that Samir would need to understand how viewing other sources of information could benefit him



Barriers

Participants identified that Samir was unlikely to engage with his local community or messaging outside of 'mainstream news channels' and social media.

Strategies for navigating mis and disinformation

Participants thought an online campaign would be the most effective way of engaging Samir. This could involve online pop-up videos or messages on sites and social media, or posters and QR codes that linked to online websites. Some also suggested reaching him via messaging on the 'mainstream news channels' he likes.

Samir only engages with those who share his views, so participants thought Samir would listen to the politicians and celebrities he follows on social media. They could encourage him to consider a range of other views. Participants also suggested advertising web pages and campaigns on online entertainment sources, such as YouTube and podcasts.

Messaging

Participants suggested that messaging should encourage Samir to question the information he hears and to explore opinions outside of his own. It was felt that a broad range of news media and political figures should come together in delivering messaging, and that the tone should be serious but friendly. Participants thought that Samir needed messaging that focused on the dangers of echo chambers and the need to "get out of your bubble" rather than generic mis and disinformation (8). This reflected the need to motivate Samir to engage and for him to listen to different views.

Participants recommended strategies for Samir that target his online presence in social media with easily digestible messaging

Participant-recommended strategies included:

- A misinformation de-bunking comedy show where different misinformation stories are shown each week. Samir would see short clips of the show questioning information through 'mainstream media' and online pop-up videos. These videos would be promoted in search engines and social media.
- Unexpected combinations of voices united in message, recommending people look at different sources of information. These combinations could be differences in terms of views (such as left- and right-wing politicians) or demographics (such as different ethnicities).
- A 'mainstream media' campaign using multiple different news providers to advise people to:
 - check more than one information source
 - not only listen to those who share your own views

It should also provide examples of what can go wrong when false information spreads (financial consequences, social isolation).

Participants generally felt Samir was in an echo chamber and thought that this could be harmful.

Messaging recommended for Samir typically encouraged him to improve his existing media literacy skills and to seek out alternate views.

Groups often emphasised the importance for people with a range of views to be able to discuss these openly and respectfully.

"It can't be an attack, it has to be in a savvy, interesting, edgy way due to the 28 years old young guy thing."

(Male, 35+, minority ethnic group)

4. Appendices

Appendix 1: Interview sample stratification



	Total
Depth interviews	25
Populations	
Group 1: People who have previously held a minority belief or been susceptible to mis/disinformation but no longer do	18
Group 2: General public with awareness and/or experience of mis/dis information	7
Primary quotas	
Non-native English speaker	6
Minority ethnic groups	5
Secondary quotas	
Age	
16-34	10
35-74	12
75 +	3
Region	
England	14
Scotland	4
Wales	4
Northern Ireland	3
Gender	
Male	12
Female	13
Other	
Social grade	
AB	8
C1	11
C2DE	6
Cognitive Reflection	
High	9
Low	16
Group 1: Minority view topic	
Climate Change	7
Vaccines	9
Covid-19	4
Who is really in control of the world	10

Appendix 2: Workshop sample stratification



	Workshop 1: Overlap group	Workshop 2: Overlap group	Workshop 3: Overlap group	Workshop 4: Low cognitive reflection	Workshop 5: Low cognitive reflection	Workshop 6: High cognitive reflection	Total
Total	10	11	11	12	9	12	65
Primary quotas							
Overlap groups							
Non-native English speaker	9	9	8	N/A	N/A	N/A	26
Minority ethnic groups	2	4	2	3	2	4	17
Cognitive Reflection							
High	2	5	7	0	0	7	21
Low	8	6	4	12	9	5	44
Secondary quotas							
Age							
16-34	1	3	4	5	4	5	22
35-74	9	8	6	4	2	5	34
75 +	0	0	1	3	3	2	9
Region							
England	6	5	5	9	5	8	38
Scotland	1	3	3	1	1	1	10
Wales	2	2	1	1	2	1	9
Northern Ireland	1	1	2	1	1	2	8
Gender							
Male	3	5	5	6	5	7	31
Female	7	6	5	6	4	5	33
Other	0	0	1	0	0	0	1
Social grade							
AB	4	4	1	4	4	2	19
C1	3	5	8	5	4	8	33
C2DE	3	2	2	3	1	2	13
Level of Trust in Government							
High	3	4	3	3	4	3	20
Medium	5	3	3	5	2	5	23
Low	2	4	5	4	3	4	22
Level of Trust in Public Broadcasters							
High	4	3	3	3	4	3	20
Medium	4	4	3	4	3	4	22
Low	2	4	5	5	2	5	23

Appendix 3: Cognitive reflection scoring



Cognitive reflection scoring was established using the CRT-2 test during screening.

The test consists of four short questions that generate an initial intuitive answer. The questions have high face validity, and, to address some criticisms of the original Cognitive Reflection Test, do not require a high degree of mathematical sophistication to generate the correct answer. Our research found the average number of correct responses is approximately 2 in 4, which we suggest could be used as the threshold for susceptibility. They are as follows:

If you're running a race and you pass the person in second place, what place are you in? (intuitive answer: first; correct answer: second)

A farmer had 15 sheep and all but 8 died. How many are left? (intuitive answer: 7; correct answer: 8)

Emily's father has three daughters. The first two are named April and May. What is the third daughter's name? (intuitive answer: June; correct answer: Emily)

How many cubic feet of dirt are there in a hole that is 3' deep x 3' wide x 3' long? (intuitive answer: 27; correct answer: none)

Reference: Thomson, K. S., & Oppenheimer, D. M. (2016). Investigating an alternate form of the cognitive reflection test. Judgment and Decision making, 11(1), 99-113

Appendix 4: Co-creation workshop participant pre-task



Participants were asked to complete a proforma answering the following:

Please describe an example of information/news you have seen or heard online or in the media recently (such as a headline or social media post) that seemed false or misleading. (Please do not share any screenshots or images)

- Where did you see or hear it?
- What was it about:
- Why did you think it seemed false or misleading:

Thinking about the people in your life, which one or two people do you think might be more likely than others to believe false or misleading information that is being spread (by accident or on purpose)?

- Who are these people (e.g. parent, child, friend – please do not provide any names):
- What in your view makes them more likely to believe false or misleading information that is being spread (by accident or on purpose):
- What support or guidance could they be given to help them spot and avoid false or misleading information:

Thinking about false or misleading information that is being spread by accident (misinformation) or on purpose (disinformation), what most concerns you about this?

- What are your main concerns:
- What are your concerns for yourself:
- What are your concerns for others: