EXPLORING HIGH MEDIA LITERACY AMONG CHILDREN AND ADULTS

A report for Ofcom by Magenta

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OFCOM FOREWORD

This report is a research project exploring how highly media literate adults and children navigate their online worlds. Our aim was to understand the way in which highly media literate individuals behave in a real-world context and how and why these real-life behaviours might differ from the theoretical 'ideal' [1]. This research also gives us valuable insight into the extent to which high media literacy plays a role in reducing aspects of online harm.

Ofcom has statutory duties to promote and research media literacy. One of the ways we 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 such as this one which deepen our knowledge in specific areas.

The research in this project uses digital ethnography and in-depth interviews to provide 'in-the moment' insights alongside more considered and reflective participant responses, building a realistic picture of what high media literacy looks like in practice. It examines the main drivers of high media literacy and how online gaming, search and social media platforms can support, and at times, hinder this. While the benefits of being highly media literate are discussed throughout, the report also examines the inconsistencies and gaps between awareness and behaviour in a real-world context for participants.

The report highlights the situations and activities on online platforms that even those who are identified as being highly media literate can find challenging and reminds us that 'perfection' in media literacy is not a realistic objective. Nevertheless, the identification of such pressure points enables us to consider where resource might be channelled, both in terms of platform design and in media literacy support interventions.

[1] The parameters of an 'ideally' media literate individual were set by an internal mapping exercise, conducted by Ofcom drawing upon their own and external sources. This work is ongoing, but the latest thinking informed the areas of media literacy that were explored in this research.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Introduction

Ofcom commissioned Magenta to undertake research to understand how those who are highly media literate navigate their online worlds. The research study comprised digital ethnography and in-depth interviews with 40 participants identified as being highly media literate[2]. Participants ranged in age from 13 to 70 years, were spread across England, Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland, and included those from minority ethnic backgrounds. Participants were recruited on the basis of being highly media literate in at least one of online search, social media or online gaming.

Ofcom defines media literacy as 'the ability to use, understand and create media and communications in a variety of contexts'[3], reflecting the wide-ranging nature of media literacy. For the purposes of this research, a highly media literate individual will have the skills, knowledge and understanding to be safe and savvy, as well as the confidence to flourish, online. This need not apply across all technologies or situations – a highly media literate individual will have these attributes in the contexts that are most applicable to them. Throughout this report, we have used the terms 'highly media literate' and 'high media literacy' as shorthand for this appropriate set of skills, knowledge, understanding and confidence. Conversely, 'less media literate behaviour' is used to refer to online behaviour which isn't appropriate for the circumstances, which is at odds with the participant's own goals, or which introduces risk.

How do people become highly media literate?

Many participants built high media literacy slowly over time through numerous positive or neutral experiences, rather than a single defining moment. For some participants however, a negative experience triggered efforts to improve media literacy and change behaviour to avoid repetition, and some participants felt that high media literacy was an outcome of their personality, exemplifying attention to detail or risk aversion.

Participants identified ways they felt online platforms and apps support media literate behaviour, such as blurring potentially offensive images, or providing two-factor authentication. However, participants also described ways that they felt some platform factors hinder high media literacy, such as lack of clarity on algorithm function and difficulty avoiding in-app purchases.

What does high media literacy look like?

Our participants understood the consequences of sharing information about themselves online and were proficient in controlling this information. Participants, particularly those with high media literacy in gaming and social media, considered the type of information they were willing to provide for others to see and often removed or minimised information. Many believed that the more they shared online, the more at risk they would be of being scammed or harmed.

Participants were competent in their knowledge of how online platforms operated and leveraged that knowledge in practice. Many participants demonstrated a high level of technical comprehension by being able to describe how platform algorithms work, as well as how they have used this to their own advantage to curate a content feed that felt personal and relevant to them.

Participants could identify different sources, different types of online content, and demonstrated a wide range of validation techniques. Recognising different styles and sources of content included

[2] The screening process was conducted in two stages. Participants were first asked a series of attitudinal and behavioural questions, including their interpretation of social media posts, search engine results and scenarios in online gaming, depending on the area being recruited for. Participants were then asked to submit a short video response to allow us to further assess true media literacy levels.

[3] Making Sense of Media - Ofcom

being able to identify sponsored and journalistic content, as well as challenge it and use it for their own benefit, for example to learn, achieve a task, or for entertainment.

Our participants demonstrated an ability to manage the majority of their online interactions in a way that was safe, secure, and positive for both themselves and others. Participants were also proficient in remaining vigilant against potential scams and used tools like spending limits and parental controls to maintain control over in-app purchases.

Participants were able to contribute to and partake in positive online spaces while safeguarding themselves against any potential or actual negative engagements. Though they acknowledged that disinformation and toxicity exist online, participants were able to focus their energy on the positives that come from online engagements.

What are the benefits of high media literacy?

This research found that high media literacy gives participants confidence in having a positive experience online and makes them aware of potential risks if those behaviours were not adopted. Some of these benefits had a direct link to their high media literacy; others were more general and might be experienced by those with lower media literacy. Participants identified multiple benefits of being highly media literate, including practical skills to benefit work (e.g. search engine optimisation); identifying and engaging in niche communities; and content creation.

These benefits also extended to the 'offline' world and included: improving knowledge on different areas of interest, supporting with homework; learning new skills, such as cooking or crochet; promoting selves or business interests; making friends, improving confidence and sense of belonging; improving soft-skills, such as communication, leadership and decision making; and relaxation and focus.

What are the challenges in maintaining high media literacy?

Despite being highly media literate, participants faced various challenges in maintaining this behaviour.

While participants took steps to maintain data security, when there were breaches, they were sometimes unsure why this was the case. There was often a presumption that if they had virus checkers, two-factor authentication and used reputable companies, that their data was secure. However, participants were unsure about measures companies had in place to protect things like payment details.

There was a feeling that technological advancements, and their associated risks, were inevitable, and no extra measures could be implemented to mitigate against these risks that the participants are not already taking.

Social and online gaming platforms amplified voices but also vulnerability, creating a difficult balance for authentic self-expression. Social media and online game chats created a challenging tension for participants who wanted to express views but feared backlash in doing so.

There was a lack of understanding on the impact of on-platform report functions. Participants often reported taking measures to report concerning content, though with little clarity on the effects, and many participants were uncertain if their action truly made a difference.

Some participants felt they struggled to control time spent online, which often had a negative effect on their mental health. Some participants found disengaging from digital devices challenging, even when desired.

Our participants noted a need to deploy self-control in terms of their reliance on the internet, and the need to be aware of the risks that come with the ability to access such a great amount of content, particularly in the case of emerging technologies such as AI chat bots.

Where are the inconsistencies within highly media literate behaviour?

While all participants used their high media literacy skills in their area of 'expertise' (social media, search or gaming) for the majority of the time, and most demonstrated transferable skills across the different areas, not all participants consistently applied their high media literacy skills to all aspects of their online behaviour. Almost all participants demonstrated examples of lower media literacy on occasion.

Some participants showed an awareness of how they considered they should behave, but they did not always do so in practice. For example, most participants were aware that cookies track their behaviour and were aware of the implications of accepting cookies. However, many made an informed decision to accept them without any hesitation when accessing websites, despite not wanting their behaviour to be tracked. In some cases, participants engaged in highly media literate behaviour without fully understanding or being aware of what the purpose of that behaviour is. This was particularly the case for younger people.

Many participants were unaware of what a digital footprint was, outside of their posts on social media sites. Participants often showed resignation that many companies had access to a vast quantity of their data and there was nothing they could do about it.

There were several drivers for participants engaging in behaviour that was less media literate, including:

- When participants were rushed for time, they would be less likely to pay attention.
- Participants' media literacy could be driven by their moods.
- When a participant really wanted or needed something, they were more likely to take risks.
- Less media literate behaviour could also sometimes be triggered by peer pressure.

These factors underline the importance of context when considering the extent of someone's media literacy. Media literacy is an amalgam of a range of skills, knowledge and behaviour - related to circumstances - which provide people with the ability to contribute positively to their online world as well as remain resilient to online harms.

1. INTRODUCTION & CONTEXT

1.1 Introduction

Ofcom commissioned Magenta to undertake research to understand how those who are identified as highly media literate navigate their online worlds. The purpose of the research was to:

- gain an understanding of awareness of media literate behaviours, and how these might translate to practice;
- consider the real-life online media literate behaviours and why these are engaged in;
- understand the strengths and weaknesses of highly media literate individuals in different areas of online activity; and
- explore how and why these real-life behaviours might differ from the theoretical 'ideal' of a highly media literate individual.

This report provides a summary of the key findings. Quotes from participants are used throughout to exemplify the points made. These have been anonymised to protect participant identity, and an indicative age range and geographic location are provided. Pseudonymised case studies are also included, with the permission of the participants.

Where platforms are mentioned, the views are those of the participants and not of Ofcom[4].

1.2 Approach summary

The research study comprised digital ethnography and in-depth interviews with 40 participants identified as being highly media literate. Prior to the interviews, participants were asked to complete a range of tasks linked to internet searching, use of social media or online gaming. Participants ranged in age from 13 to 70 years, were spread across England, Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland, and included those from minority ethnic backgrounds. Fieldwork took place between 16th August 2023 and 29th September 2023. A full methodology and sample breakdown can be found in the appendix of this report.

1.3 What do we mean by 'highly media literate'?

Ofcom defines media literacy as 'the ability to use, understand and create media and communications in a variety of contexts[5]', reflecting the wide-ranging nature of media literacy. For the purposes of this research, a highly media literate individual will have the skills, knowledge and understanding to be 'safe and savvy', as well as the confidence to flourish, online. This need not apply across all technologies or situations – a highly media literate individual will have these attributes in the contexts that are most applicable to them. Throughout this report, we have used the terms 'highly media literate' and 'high media literacy' as shorthand for this appropriate set of skills, knowledge, understanding and confidence. Conversely, 'less media literate behaviour' is used to refer to online behaviour which isn't appropriate for the circumstances, which is at odds with the participant's own goals, or which introduces risk.

[4] This may include participant perceptions as to how various functionalities work across platforms, such as content recommender systems. While comments may technically be feasible in some cases, these findings are based on participants' own perceptions, which may or may not be true. It is also worth noting that certain online platforms may be referenced more frequently in the report. This will likely reflect participants' frequency of use of these platforms.

[5] Making Sense of Media - Ofcom

A key component of high media literacy is that it should include higher order thinking skills such as analysis and evaluation. This means taking a critical perspective towards technology and media, including print media and social media platforms. Strong media literacy capabilities depend on users having the right mix of knowledge and skills, and the ability to independently apply them to their online environment. This report focuses on demonstrating these skills through real-life examples of what being highly media literate looks like in practice.

Participants were recruited on the basis of currently being highly media literate in one of three areas (search, social media or gaming), but may not have always demonstrated high media literacy in this area. Participants could have any type of media literacy in the area they were not recruited for. To identify participants, a series of attitudinal and behavioural questions were asked, including their interpretation of social media posts, search engine results and scenarios in online gaming, depending on the area for which they were being recruited.

2. POSITIVE EXPERIENCES AS A RESULT OF HIGH MEDIA LITERACY

High media literacy allows internet users to get the best out of their experiences online. The research identified a broad range of positive experiences that were enabled or enhanced as a result of being highly media literate.

High media literacy gave participants the confidence to ensure a positive experience online, and meant participants were aware of the potential risks should those behaviours not be put in place.

Proficiency in media literacy gave participants additional benefits in the online world. This included practical skills used to benefit work, including one participant who had used their understanding of how search engines display results to improve search engine optimisation (SEO) for their company website. Another participant transferred the video editing skills they learned from making video clips for social media to help them create content for their YouTube channel.

'This lady that was doing the website for the shop I was working for told me about search engine optimisation. It just kind of clicked with me, for my business as a handyman, if I search handyman leads and then look at the top 10 results, look on their website, see what words they write, see what words are more frequent, you'll see those words are associated with handyman and the results at the bottom are all plumber, odd jobs, etc...just using those keywords would make the search better.'
Male, Search, 30-34 yrs, England

Online, participants used their high media literacy skills to identify and engage in niche communities as well as making friends with shared interests and hobbies. One participant edited clips from online gaming and posted them on TikTok, along with content relating to specific films and TV shows. As a result, he connected with thousands of others who have the same interests as him.

'There's a niche for everything on the internet. You can literally find information on, if you like to crochet pink socks, you can find other people who like to crochet pink socks. You can find people who like to knit, who like to read. You can find people who like to do everything you like to do, so there's the community aspect of it.'
Female, Social Media, 25-29 yrs, Northern Ireland

'Games probably for me help making friends because if there's someone that plays the same games as you, it helps you make friends. Especially friends online and on the outside world. If you like the same games, you've got the same interests then.'
Male, Search, 13-15 yrs, England

Participants also noticed the transferability of media literacy within platforms, for instance gaming skills transfer to different games, social media skills on one network are transferable to another, and as people experiment with Generative AI, those with high media literacy in search have discovered their search skills have returned better, more useful, results.

'I learnt about search engine optimisation for my business, so I know what to include in terms of the most frequent words in websites. I've kind of reverse engineered that in my mind, to know how best to search. So, with Chat GPT it's working out which words are going to come up on websites. As well as understanding how far it can go.'
Male, Search, 30-34 yrs, England

However, it should be noted that high media literacy in one online area such as search, social media or gaming, did not necessarily transfer to the other areas. This is discussed more in Chapter 5.

The benefits of high media literacy also expanded beyond the online world for many participants.

Proficiency in media literacy allowed participants to gather accurate and relevant information quickly and easily when searching online, supporting them offline in a number of ways. Some school-aged participants searched online to obtain knowledge about topics being taught at school and to help them complete homework assignments. Others used their skills to plan activities such as holidays or to find places of interest near them, such as the nearest store or a restaurant.

'I love searching new things. If I'm stuck on homework or I'm just interested about a subject, I go on TikTok and YouTube and search about stuff I'm interested in and I can learn new things about those subjects.'
Male, Search, 13-15 yrs, England

Inspired by some of the content they were seeing on social media platforms, high media literacy allowed some participants to learn new skills, or improve existing skills, across different disciplines ranging from cooking to crochet.

'To start with define the people to follow, but once you started to follow them, you see the recipes that they post, see and then give them a go. I guess it's [the same] with most of us as soon as we cook something once or twice, we keep going back to it and sort of get used to how to do it.'
Male, Social Media, 30-34 yrs, Northern Ireland

Proficiency in media literacy across social media also supported some participants within a professional context. One participant, a football coach, used his Instagram and Facebook accounts to promote his work and professional credentials and regularly received job offers via Facebook. Another participant who is a teacher, followed other teachers on X[6] to share resources and teaching tools.

'I was able to see a teacher I follow share a few examples of these developed coloured grids on Twitter, and then I was able to sort of create my own based on his. I used them and I was able to share them with colleagues as well. They were incredible, like they worked really well, their kids loved them. You can see that they're effective and things like that. So yeah, that was from just Twitter and following him and seeing that sort of technique used.'
Male, Social Media, 30-34 yrs, Northern Ireland

In addition, being highly media literate allowed participants to engage in issues that are important to them or charitable causes across social media. This ranged from supporting friends' businesses to raising the profile of causes participants were passionate about.

'So, the chap that runs the company that I do large amount of coaching for, has found great success on things like Facebook and Instagram in promoting the girls' football. So, if I see one of his adverts because I follow him...I want to share it because I want more girls to play football.'
Male, Social Media, 55-59 yrs, England

When it comes to online gaming, participants experienced multiple offline benefits. For example, many participants made friends through gaming which has also improved their confidence and increased their sense of connection and belonging.

[6] At the point of writing Twitter had changed its name to X, however many participants continue to call it Twitter. For the purposes of reporting, we have called it X but left it as Twitter when used in quotes by participants.

'It helped me feel more connected to the world when I was young. There are people I'm chatting to that I've been speaking to for years. We're meeting up in the US this summer for the first time. I'm quite shy usually so it's been good for me.'
Male, Online Gaming, 18-24 yrs, England

'I have friends that I've made online. I don't get too close to them but it's nice to see a familiar username when I log in.'
Female, Online Gaming, 18-24 yrs, England

'I was playing Evony and there was a lovely lady who used to share photos from her job at a Kangaroo Sanctuary. All the baby kangaroos and what it's like to live in Australia. It's so nice to meet new people online.'
Male, Online Gaming, 60-74 yrs, England

Interacting with others online through gaming has also improved some participants' communication skills in an offline setting. One younger female had been playing games since she was five years old and felt her confidence and assertiveness had improved as a result of interacting with different people and having to 'speak up' when she encountered rude or aggressive players. Other soft skills cited included enhanced leadership and decision-making skills.

'I play loads of games that you have to speak up in. Those type of games kind of made me more confident and just like more chatty.'
Female, Online Gaming, 13-15 yrs, Wales

'When you're in a game and no one's taking charge or doing anything, no one's taking on that leader role, someone has to step up in the game, and that helped me a lot. It's kind of helped in real life because you're taking charge, you're the one making all the decisions..... It's helped me a lot, because it's very important to have good communication. If someone's not doing the right thing, then you need to be able to communicate as fast as you can and get that message across to them, so they know what they're doing wrong and help change it.'
Male, Online Gaming, 13-15 yrs, Scotland

Online gaming, particularly mobile gaming, also supported our participants to relax, escape and alleviate stress by allowing them a few moments away from their other responsibilities or work.

'I mainly started playing Genshin as the graphics are just so beautiful. It's so calming to look at and the colours are so nice. It feels really relaxing to just escape into the world.'
Female, Online Gaming, 13-15 yrs, Scotland

'I play Words with Friends to pass the time. It's nice to relax in the mornings over breakfast.'
Male, Online Gaming, 60-74 yrs, England

For some, gaming was used to help focus the mind. As you need to be present and in the moment, to play, it helped participants to forget other things and concentrate on the activity at hand.

Furthermore, high media literacy in online gaming can be monetised. One participant used gaming as a means of generating income.

'I actually make part of my living now from gaming. It's a skill that I've been able to monetise and make part of my career. It's not just fun, it's actually a skill that you can learn.'
Male, Online Gaming, 18-24 yrs, England

Summary

In summary, being highly media literate leads to a wide range of positive experiences online. Participants developed practical online skills such as video editing; used their online skills to enhance their offline experiences through planning holidays or finding places of interest; as well as some who felt it enhanced their sense of connection and belonging through finding other people with similar interests.

3. FACTORS THAT CONTRIBUTE TOWARDS BEING HIGHLY MEDIA LITERATE

3.1 Main drivers of high media literacy

This study identified three main drivers of high media literacy:

1. A drip feed of information learned over time.
2. A trigger moment caused by a negative event.
3. Something integral to personality.

1. GRADUAL LEARNING AND DRIP FEEDING OF INFORMATION

Many participants built their high media literacy slowly over time, with numerous positive or neutral experiences influencing this rather than a single defining moment.

For some participants, their line of work required them to be media literate. For example, one participant was a schoolteacher and he regularly checked and adjusted his privacy settings on social media to limit what pupils are able to see about him online. Others worked in jobs that contributed to their knowledge of media literacy. This included on-the-job training related to media literacy skills, and/or through the nature at the job itself which required the participant to have knowledge and awareness of technology and the online world.

'I used to work in a bank, so I probably know a bit more than most about how to check if a site is legit or to watch out for scammers. We had courses on it at work.'
Female, Social Media, 18-24 yrs, Scotland

'I was a civil engineer, the company were always keen that we stay on top of technology etc. I started out back in the '80s with an Amstrad, then we progressed through desktop PCs, laptops, blackberries, car phones and then mobile phones. I've always had to keep up with tech and new software and feel that I'm pretty technologically savvy.'
Male, Online Gaming, 60-74 yrs, England

School was a key driver of highly media literate behaviour among school-aged participants. Younger participants recalled being taught about online safety and security in computer science or PSHCE lessons[7], as well as in assemblies and as part of an online safety week. Many claimed to be taught this from a young age, year after year, and key topics included staying safe when interacting with strangers online, not giving out personal information, avoiding scams and minimising the risks of viruses.

'In PSHCE classes at school we're always talking about how to stay safe online, cyber bullying, trolls, not to give out personal information.'
Male, Online Gaming, 16-17 yrs, England

'And I guess it's like primary school as well, they teach us some basic things about the internet and things like that. But I feel like I knew more than what the teachers would teach me anyway.'
Male, Search, 18-24 yrs, England

However, some felt that education provided on staying safe online at school was limited, repetitive and for some younger participants, the content was considered old and outdated.

[7] Personal, social, health, citizenship and economic education

'At school they do classes on online safety. To be honest they're a bit dated now... I think the videos we watched were made in like 2007 or something. They don't go into enough detail about WHY we should/shouldn't do things. They just say 'don't talk to strangers'. But I guess it's a start.'
Female, Online Gaming, 18-24 yrs, England

Some participants who grew up as the internet was evolving claimed to have become more knowledgeable and aware of how to be media literate through passively absorbing information, as opposed to making conscious decisions to seek out information around online safety and security. Participants felt this had become intuitive as they had grown up with the internet and everyone was learning at the same time, so they had been drip-fed information over time.

'I feel like online in general I feel quite comfortable. I think part of it is probably the generation I'm in. Like we grew up using computers in school, I had a smartphone earlier than some people. I think things like that, it's practice. Once you've had one kind of phone, moving to a different operating system or using a different app that has a kind of similar interface, things like that are relatively easy.'
Female, Social Media, 25-29 years, Scotland

For younger participants, parents and siblings were a key source of guidance. One thirteen-year-old male was introduced to the search engine Brave by his dad, regularly verified the credibility of websites with him when searching online and was taught the importance of ensuring his software was up-to-date to minimise the risk of viruses and scams. Another example was a fourteen-year-old female whose older brother was an experienced gamer. He taught her to be safe when interacting with others online and to only play games with the people she knows.

'My dad taught me from a really young age. I was really lucky to have a parent so good at computers. We started playing games together as a family when I was about 4 or 5 and he's always told me it's important to stay safe online. He showed me how to get a VPN[8] , to watch out for people asking for your personal details etc.'
Female, Online Gaming, 18-24 yrs, England

'My brother has said; just play with the people who you know and just like stay with your friends or whoever you're playing with. Just stay with them and talk just to them rather than the other people in the server.'
Female, Online Gaming, 13-15 yrs, Wales

Some older participants sought or gained advice and guidance from their own children or grandchildren. One participant had a son who helped him identify misinformation and verify trustworthy news stories.

Another way in which high media literacy had been built up over time was through content creators. Many participants engaged with posts on social media which provided guidance on how to stay safe and secure online. One younger participant saw a post on social media about someone who had been 'catfished'. This reminded the participant of how important it is not to meet up with strangers in real life. In addition, some participants saw posts by content creators which raised awareness of scams, including one participant who became aware of a scam around in-game currency.

'I was practically raised by my computer. I used to spend hours on it every day in my bedroom from when I was very young. The things I've learned I just picked up over time. That and watching YouTube channels like 'Some Ordinary Gamer' or 'Linus Tech Tips'. They make videos about new games that are coming out, new viruses and how to stay safe, how to protect your privacy etc. I trust them because they have millions of followers, have been around for years and they'd get 'taken down' by

[8] Virtual private network

other people if they didn't tell the truth or were trying to scam us. The online world can be brutal!'
Male, Online Gaming, 18-24 yrs, England

Furthermore, nudges and suggestions from the apps, platforms and programmes themselves have facilitated highly media literate behaviour over time. This may be when setting up an account or when a new feature becomes available.

'I just work out how to do things as I go along. The apps are pretty intuitive these days and I find that if I don't like what someone's posting I can just click on their name and one of the options is 'block'. They make it easy for you to do things, you don't have to hunt through lists and menus to find what you're after.'
Female, Social Media, 60-74 yrs, Wales

'Sometimes in a game when you're setting up your profile there's a little mini tutorial with tips like 'don't give out personal info' or 'hit block to stop hearing from someone' etc.'
Female, Online Gaming, 18-24 yrs, England

2. TRIGGERS

A one-off negative experience triggered many participants, who had not previously been highly media literate, to improve their media literacy and change their behaviour to ensure the experience was not repeated.

Having one or more accounts 'hacked' was a trigger point to developing high media literacy for multiple participants, regardless of age. One participant, a younger female, had multiple social media accounts hacked after sharing her account passwords and giving out the details to friends. Numerous rude and abusive messages were sent from her account to friends and family members. An adult participant had her email account hacked, but was unclear how it could have occurred. Experiences of hacking led participants to:

- be more cautious in the amount of personal data they share online, typically on social media;
- change passwords across different online accounts; and
- learn how to ensure they had two factor authentication set up.

'My Facebook account was hacked. It was really upsetting actually as the person was just posting rubbish in a lot of the groups I'm a member of and some of them have kicked me out. I now can't be a member again and it's awful to think the administrators believe I wrote all that stuff. I'm extra careful with passwords now and change mine more frequently.'
Female, Social Media, 60-74 yrs, Wales

'My bank account got hacked a couple of years ago. I still to this day have no idea how they got into it, but that in itself is worrying. You think, oh my God like you know, always now use two factor authentication.'
Female, Search, 30-34 yrs, Wales

'I used to share my passwords with people, and they obviously spread it. I was out with my mum and dad… and then I started getting all these messages from my friends or my phone saying 'what?' My mum was getting messages from parents saying why is she saying this? And so, we just had to, like, shut down my account and tell everyone that it wasn't me. Now I don't share passwords or any information about the account that could be used to get into it.'
Female, Social Media, 13-15 yrs, England

For some younger participants, seeing unwanted content online acted as trigger moment. For example, one male clicked on a link when he was younger which redirected him to 'gruesome'

content. Discovering unwanted content made these participants more cautious about their searching on the internet, what they click on, and in taking more control of curating the information shown to them on social media.

'When I was younger I wasn't in a good place…. I was on Instagram quite a lot back then and kept seeing really shocking, triggering content from people…. One day I just had enough and deleted the app. But recently I redownloaded the app and I've paid a bit more attention to curating my experience. I know I can filter what I see and report posts if they upset me.'
Female, Social Media, 18-24 yrs, Scotland

Some participants had also received unwanted contact online. This was especially the case for female participants who had received unwanted contact through social media.

'I was a bit silly when I was younger, I got into a chatroom and was just giving out my Snapchat to random people. I had a guy send me inappropriate photos and it kind of shocked me. I told my mum and got the lecture about online security etc. Now I'm much more careful and don't really talk to anyone I don't know. I don't seek out strangers anymore anyway.'
Female, Online Gaming, 13-15 yrs, Scotland

'I also had a bit of a stalkery ex-boyfriend a while ago. That experience meant that I really read up on how to block people. Him and his friends, or anyone else I thought might tell him where I was.'
Female, Social Media, 18-24 yrs, Scotland

Some participants had been victims of an online scam and the experience motivated them to improve their media literacy and online 'savviness' to ensure it did not happen again. Scams included purchasing fake products, where either the product does not exist, or the purchase is used to steal credit card details. One participant clicked on a scam advert because he was unable to distinguish it from the 'real' advert, which resulted in a virus being downloaded onto his computer. Another participant made a provisional accommodation booking but later realised the apartment was not real when asked to make alternative payment provision. This experience has encouraged him to double check similar bookings ever since.

'I bought an eyeshadow palette a few years ago from a dodgy website. It ended up with me having to cancel my debit card and change all my passwords, get in touch with my bank etc. I was burned then. I won't be so silly again.'
Female, Social Media, 18-24 yrs, Scotland

'I couldn't find the correct download button because there were so many adverts on my screen that all said the same thing. They all said 'download', and I couldn't tell which one was an advert. If you told me to do the same thing now, I'd probably be able to tell even with all the adverts around, but back then, everything just looked the same to me.'
Male, Search, 18-24 yrs, England

For some participants a single negative event led them to being more cautious across all platforms.

For example, one participant who was hacked stated that not only did she change her passwords, but moving forward she was extremely careful about purchasing anything from any websites, not only from social media. Another female participant had a negative experience while interacting with others while gaming, and this led her to be more cautious about who she spoke to when playing on all games and while on social media. The single negative experience was sufficient to motivate some participants to become more knowledgeable about scams, such as through reading the Money Saving Expert website regularly.

However, a single negative event was not always enough to engender high media literacy across all platforms.

One participant had an experience which triggered her to leave social media due to seeing negative content. Nevertheless, she did not take any action to manage her data safely until after she had been hacked some time later. So, while for some, high media literacy across all platforms and wider online behaviour was triggered by a single negative event, for others it took multiple negative events to happen before making changes.

Not all participants had experienced a negative event themselves, but some had heard about them occurring to others, including friends and family being hacked, scammed, catfished[9], or doxed[10]. Hearing these experiences was enough for some to trigger behavioural changes in themselves.

'You hear things all the time about people who've been scammed, sending money to people in other countries etc. Especially older people. I never want that to be me.'
Female, Social Media, 60-74 yrs, Wales

3. INTEGRAL TO PERSONALITY

For some participants, being highly media literate was perceived to be an intrinsic part of their personality, and media literacy was one area that they demonstrated attention to detail or risk aversion.

Personality traits that such participants suggested were associated with their high media literacy included being a very private person, being conscientious across different areas of life, being the person everyone turns to for help, whether online or offline, and being cautious.

'It's just who I am, I've always been a very private person, quite reserved. I just don't want everyone knowing my business, so I take the time to protect myself online.'
Male, Online Gaming, 18-24 yrs, England

'I do this with my school work too, I always double or triple check facts. I like to know that what I'm saying is right. Staying safe online is similar – just wanting to do things properly according to my dad I guess.'
Female, Online Gaming 18-24 yrs, England

'I'm quite confident online. I have a background in tech support so I'm the person that people go to if something breaks.'
Male, Search, 45-49 yrs, Scotland

Case study: a cautious personality may support high media literacy

Oliver is 17 years old and has just started his final year of sixth form college. When it comes to navigating the online world, Oliver describes himself as proficient but cautious. He's conscious that everything said or done online leaves a trail, and takes extra securities like using 'Reader View' when browsing webpages. For Oliver, this cautiousness extends to the rest of his life, including driving.

'There's a thing you can do with reader view where it just shows the text and nothing else. So if you're looking for something just for information, you can put that on and then you can find it rather

[9] Catfishing is the practice of pretending on social media to be someone different, in order to trick or attract another person.
[10] The term 'Doxing' or 'Doxxing' is short for "dropping dox" 'dox' being slang for documents. Doxing is the act of revealing personal identifying information about someone online, such as their real name, home address, workplace, or phone number, without the victim's permission.

than accidentally clicking on a link because that's I think why they have so many errors in there 'cause they want you to act and click on them. It just avoids you clicking on anything that might not be trustworthy. It's just the text on a page without anything else.'

Summary
There are a wide range of drivers which contribute to the acquisition of high media literacy skills, including negative experiences acting as trigger moments, gradually building knowledge over time, and intrinsic personality traits. Participants leveraged this awareness to thoughtfully manage data, critically evaluate sources, troubleshoot issues, and positively connect online. Their strengths centred on proactive self-protection, with many taking steps to continuously learn more about the online world based on an awareness that things are always progressing.

3.2 How platforms may help and hinder high media literacy

Participants identified numerous ways that they felt online platforms and programmes support media literate behaviour.

Participants felt online platforms do help to facilitate learning and application of behaviours in a variety of ways.

Examples given by participants of how platforms support high media literacy include preventing access to certain content, such as by blurring/blocking content or blurring potentially offensive images. Similarly, adding the ability to ban certain words or hashtags and providing notifications on potential inappropriate content prevented participants from seeing content they did not want to. Other examples given included the incognito search function, clearly labelled sponsored content, making it easy to block or mute people, having a verified 'tick' on social media accounts; two-factor authentication; and having games with distinct time periods, to support with time management.

'I don't know what you call it, but when they like blur the screen and to see you know it might be inappropriate content, I have that turned on now and because you know, sometimes you will just see random stuff and that's quite graphic and which I would rather not see.'
Female, Social Media, 18-24 yrs, Scotland

'I was up at like 2[am] when I was playing with some guy who was 32 and then he messaged me but it was quite nasty. Xbox is quite good with like tracking that down like 'cause you can just report them in there and then they get banned in like the next time. I think you click Y and it reveals what the message was and then you can report it.'
Male, Gaming, 13-15 yrs, Scotland

Although participants acknowledged that platforms could do more to support them, they felt that the primary responsibility to stay safe and secure online rested with themselves.

In summary, while participants felt that responsibility largely falls on users, there was a consensus that platform design choices can also shape behaviours. Participants leveraged these capabilities to customise experiences, control exposures, and self-regulate.

While platforms do take actions which can enhance or encourage high media literacy, participants felt that a number of factors hindered higher media literacy behaviour.

Most participants searching used the platform Google. Participants were aware that algorithms were used in ranking but they were very unclear as to how the algorithm works, and exactly why some search results are at the top. Most thought that results were ranked based on the most popular

results but were unsure whether it also related to their previous searches or whether any other factors such as paid content were taken into account. Some who had used other search platforms commented that they believed they were less consistent in terms of their results but did not fully understand why.

Participants using social media found that sometimes, the recommender system presented content they did not want to see. Some participants acknowledged that it can be a positive thing to see content they might not otherwise see but it can also lead to the participant viewing unwanted content or content perceived to be offensive. Participants also reported that the recommender systems presented content where they felt it was not necessarily clear why the platform thought the participant might want to see that content.

'Algorithm on TikTok will just show you a certain amount of stuff. They'll be a certain percentage that it's pretty sure that you like and occasionally it will just throw in some random stuff and that's kind of one of the joys of TikTok. There will be occasionally stuff that I'm not interested in that at all for example, a guy came up and it was a video with very few views. And he told, an offensive joke about disabled people. And it just was like not only don't I want to see this, but I don't think you should have a platform.' [Participant reported the video]
Female, Social Media, 45-49 yrs, Scotland

Participants described how on video sharing sites, the recommendations that were offered can lead to younger people seeing videos they find distressing. One participant who was a parent explained that the recommendations made it difficult for him to restrict his son's access to content and lead to his son watching a distressing video.

'With YouTube Kids, there are certain channels that I've told my son that he can watch and I have said don't click on anything else. But at that age, you always want to break the rule.....It's not my son that's doing the wrong thing. He sees the thumbnail, he sees the title, he thinks 'yeah, that's gonna be great', and then I'm putting him to bed the next night and he is laid in bed saying 'I didn't like that video that I watched'. It was scary. And I was like, what happened, was it like jumping scary video? And it was one of the people that I had said that he could watch, it was that person's friend's channel. It should have been OK, but it wasn't and it's difficult to tell him he's doing something wrong when he isn't.'
Male, Search, 30-34 yrs, England

In terms of seeing negative content, most highly media literate individuals knew how to block, mute and report content. However, some participants claimed that they did not report content as they did not perceive that the platforms would do anything about it. They had previous experience of reporting content and nothing being done, or they had heard that the platform was not proactive in responding to reports.

'There's so many awful things. There's things that get reported that never get taken down. There is, like, murder videos. There's like dead animals. There's so many awful things.'
Female, Social Media, 25-29 yrs, Northern Ireland

Gaming platforms can make it difficult to avoid in-app purchases.

Participants believed that games are often designed so that players want to purchase content in order to advance in the game, this may include buying extra weapons or new players. Other in-game purchases related to items like skins, which are effectively different outfits for characters in the game. Some participants felt that if a player cannot afford to buy these, they can be teased or picked on, which can put pressure on them to make in-app purchases.

'I remember I used to play this version of Football Manager. They required you to obviously buy the game, but then if you wanted to increase your transfer spend. So if you wanted to buy all players, buy more players in game. You'd have to spend real money on more to get more transfer funds. When it comes to [it, it] just feels like the game's just pay to win?'
Male, Online Gaming, 16-17 yrs, Wales

'I have bought games on the phone in order to escape the constant stream of adverts.'
Male, Online Gaming, 60-74 yrs, England

'Fifa makes me buy Fifa points. For example, at Christmas I bought a few amount [sic] of Fifa points, but only because there was a new promo.'
Male, Online Gaming, 13-15 yrs, Scotland

'Extension packages I only wanted so I could win in the games.'
Female, Online Gaming, 13-15 yrs, Wales

A number of participants mentioned how difficult it was to keep up-to-date with the privacy settings, particularly on social media.

Participants were aware that privacy settings changed regularly, but one noted how she only found this out from news articles. Some participants argued that platforms should make it far easier to find and change privacy settings. Some participants suggested that social media profiles should be private by default, rather than being public by default.

'I suppose there's just lots of different buttons. It's security, and then maybe it's called privacy. And then there's the different settings. So yeah, I guess if it's not something you're looking at everyday or every week, it's… you do lose familiarity with it.'
Male, Social Media 30-34 yrs, Northern Ireland

'I wouldn't know if Facebook had changed their privacy settings unless I'm told by someone or see an article.'
Female, Social Media, 25-29 yrs, Northern Ireland

Some participants commented on how difficult it is to reject cookies, and if you do, the negative impact it can have on accessibility to the content desired. There is high awareness that it can take a number of steps, and often participants simply bypassed it in order to get to a website quickly. Participants felt that if the website/service made it easier to simply 'reject all cookies', more people would do this as they considered that this was preferable behaviour.

'I do accept cookies if I'm tired and I just want to get to there immediately or they make you click more than three buttons.'
Male, Social Media, 18-24 yrs, England

'Most the time I just press enable, like I can't be bothered because most of the time when I press decline it will come up with more pop ups and I just want to get rid of the pop up as soon as possible to get on to what I want.'
Female, Social Media, 18-24 yrs, Scotland

Summary

Platform design and characteristics can sometimes hinder media literacy, due to a lack of clarity about the way in which search results are ranked and the factors that influence recommender systems. This allows harmful or inappropriate content to be accessed, encourages in-app purchases in games, leads to frequently changing privacy settings that are difficult to keep up with, and makes it a tedious process to reject cookies when participants would prefer to do so. This lack of transparency and potential exposure to harmful material, along with privacy settings and design choices that nudge users towards commercial interests rather than their own preferences, can undermine users' ability to navigate platforms safely, critically and in their own best interests.

4. HIGHLY MEDIA LITERATE BEHAVIOURS

This chapter describes and evidences the highly media literate behaviour demonstrated and discussed in the study. As a reminder, we have used the terms 'highly media literate' and 'high media literacy' as shorthand for the set of skills, knowledge and understanding individuals need to be 'safe and savvy' online, as well as the confidence to flourish.

4.1 Data and Privacy

For the purposes of this report, data and privacy refers to the considerations to be made before sharing personal data online, and actions taken to protect privacy online.

Participants were proficient in controlling the information that is available online about them, for example, by removing and minimising information.

Participants, particularly those with high media literacy in gaming and social media, gave careful consideration to the type of information they were willing to provide for others to see. For example:

- when choosing their username, some participants spoke about ensuring their username was gender neutral so that no one could guess even basic demographic information about them;
- providing their date of birth, one participant described how she had removed her year of birth from Facebook as a result of taking part in this study, as she realised it was information that others did not need access to;
- deciding if a 'true' profile picture was necessary as this would enable people to find them who they may not wish to;
- limiting the amount of tracking information on their online behaviour through rejecting cookies, using incognito browsing or proactively choosing a search engine which did not track their behaviour.

Another means for controlling information online was being clear on who could access content. For social media sites, participants were aware of which profiles were public and which were private. Those participants who had set their social media profiles to be private tended to be less concerned about the information they shared as they were confident it was only being shared with those they knew. One male participant, a teacher, disclosed that he took measures to enhance the privacy on his social media after students found him and tried to add him.

Many participants believed that the more they shared online, the more at risk they would be of being scammed or harmed.

Some participants noted that other people could potentially piece together personal information about them from across different websites or games, and use it to locate, scam or hack them. This was of particular concern when considering financial information. Some participants related the deliberate lack of sharing of information, particularly on social media, as a way to try and reduce their digital footprint.

'I never save my card details on my computer or on any sites. I always enter them fresh each time and buy through an incognito window.'
Female, Online Gaming, 18-24 yrs, England

'I just have a picture of the sky, it's just easier that way. Then they don't know I'm a girl, they don't know what I look like or how old I am. There's less to comment on. Less to get in the way of the game.' Female, Online Gaming, 13-15 yrs, Scotland

Some participants made a conscious decision on search engine used, based on the amount of data tracked and stored. Participants cited examples including Firefox, DuckDuckGo and Brave as search engines they perceived to track less of their data and search history.

'So on this website, on this site searching browser that I used called Brave, it comes with an ad blocker. I do like to use it because I just like it when I'm watching YouTube with no ads. That's basically why I use it, no disruptions on my videos.'
Male, Search, 13-15 yrs, England

Many participants discussed practices which helped them to avoid data breaches. The key concerns were around getting a virus or malware; being hacked; being scammed or providing online companies with unnecessary information. This area of media literacy relied on key digital skills which allowed participants to keep their data safe and be confident in enjoying their time online.

To avoid the risk of virus and malware, some participants used defences such as anti-virus software in the hope they would identify any issues. However, most participants took proactive measures, such as keeping software up-to-date, to avoid the risks of accidentally downloading a virus or some form of malware. Another concern for many participants was data security related to hacking and they took measures to avoid this risk, such as making sure they had a strong password or setting up two factor authentication on all their accounts. Some people worried about scams online, which they often linked with the possibility of being hacked. Scams tended to refer to people trying to get participants to buy things from sites that were not legitimate. It also sometimes referred to scams within games, where other gamers might offer in-game currency that was not legitimate.

Views on the use of tracking data and use of cookies varied across participants. While some did not want their online behaviour monitored, because they believed the motivations can only be sinister, others embraced the increased personalised online experience as the benefit they received because of allowing this data to be shared.

'I think the future looks bleak to be honest. All these ad companies buying our data and creating personalised ads that brainwash us into doing things or buying things. It's scary. I don't want them to get their hands on my data.'
Male, Online Gaming, 18-24 yrs, England

'It's actually helpful that it's suggesting things that I might like. I found my latest tattoo artist due to a targeted ad. Thank you Google!'
Female, Social Media, 18-24 yrs, Scotland

'I think they're using it to create targeted ads for me? I guess I wouldn't really want random ads. Having things that are personalised to my taste can only be a good thing.'
Male, Online Gaming, 60-74 yrs, England

'I like that Google saves my search history. It means that I don't have to spend ages searching for pages I use regularly like for coursework and stuff.'
Female, Search, 16-17 yrs, England

Participants took steps to maintain data security, but when there were breaches, some were unsure of how and why this occurred.

Participants assumed that if they used virus checkers, two-factor authentication and reputable companies that their data was secure. However, there was often a lack of knowledge about what measures companies had in place to protect things like payment details. One participant mentioned that he presumed that Google had lots of safeguards in place because it was such a large company

but was not sure what these were. In addition, the participants who had previously been hacked were often unclear on how this happened. While participants assumed anti-virus software made a computer secure, this software was not used consistently by highly media literate people. Some believed that anti-virus software was unnecessary as long as you took other precautions, while some only used anti-virus software on their computer and not on their mobile devices. Few participants could explain why they perceived their mobile devices to be more secure than their computer.

Summary

Overall, participants were aware of the need to protect their data, and all took some measures to do this. Some made sure that they did not engage in risky behaviour, others took more proactive measures such as ensuring they had two-factor authentication and anti-virus software on their devices so they felt protected should someone attempt to hack them or download viruses onto their device.

Our participants were proficient in controlling access to personal data through removing unnecessary details and minimising tracking. Motivations stemmed from wariness and/or exposure to harm, as well as a general desire for privacy. Strengths were in proactive precautions such as using secure browsers or usernames. Weaknesses existed around more advanced protections, for example not all participants were aware of or using a VPN, and steps taken occasionally diverge from theoretical best practices. Ultimately, participants exhibited thoughtful data management grounded in real-world risks.

4.2 Tech and the Online Environment

Tech and the online environment refers to how the environment operates and how knowledge of this is used to inform the way decisions are made online. This section describes how participants interpreted technological features such as algorithms, and thoughts on AI.

Our participants were competent in their knowledge of how online platforms operated and leveraged that knowledge in practice.

Many participants demonstrated a high level of technical comprehension by being able to describe how they understood platform algorithms to work, as well as how they have used this to their own advantage to curate a content feed that felt personal and relevant to them. Many participants reported that they were able to manipulate the algorithm by way of interaction, feeling that they were in control of it and therefore in control of the content that they see. Participants also bookmarked trusted sources for a personal library and used tools such as filters to further customise what they saw online.

'I've deliberately trained my algorithm. Even if I don't want to buy the thing, if my algorithm has done a decent job of getting my preferences right, I will give it a courtesy click like I'm training it.'
Male, Social Media, 18-24 yrs, England

When technical issues arose, participants were often able to draw upon prior experience to tactically troubleshoot technical problems, whether helping themselves or assisting others. Some also cited an innate sense of 'just knowing what to do' due to the fact they had grown up in an online world.

Many exhibited an awareness of emerging technologies including Virtual Reality, Augmented Reality, Artificial Intelligence and deep fakes and the benefits and risks associated with these. Some were

actively using these technologies in their day-to-day lives, including using VR for immersive gaming or AI chatbots for information searches.

Case study: Being highly media literate means I can help others online

Thomas is 13 years old and is an avid online gamer. When it comes to navigating the online world, Thomas considers himself to have strong skills. He uses these skills not only for himself, but also to help others online. This includes his friends from real life, as well as those he doesn't know or considers friends. He teams up with his friends when they're playing an online game to make sure they feel supported. A moment he is particularly proud of is reassuring and helping other Discord users during a time when the servers went down. He remained calm and took charge to guide others through, what he considered to be, a stressful time.

'It was an opportunity to speak to people and help people out, a way to boost the server, and make people's time there a lot nicer'.

Awareness, use of, and attitudes towards emerging technologies such as AI and VR varied across participants.

Some were aware and kept up-to-date on new innovations in the online world such as Generative AI and deep fakes, but were not actively using them. Others had embraced emerging technologies and were using them regularly to enhance their online experience. For some participants, advancements in emerging technologies were viewed with trepidation, particularly around the likelihood of being scammed and not being able to recognise fake content. One younger participant discussed his fears in the future of scammers using his voice to trick his family into giving them money. There was a feeling that technological advancements, and its associated risks, were inevitable, and no extra measures can be implemented to mitigate against these risks that the participants are not already taking.

'AI is quite frightening. Deep fakes are amazing. There are all these videos going around of scammers using grandkids' voices to phone up old people and ask for money to get them out of an 'emergency'. Crazy to think that soon we won't be able to tell what's real and what's fake, it's scary.'
Male, Online Gaming, 18-24 yrs, England

'[Generative AI is] quite good for the first part of bigger searches. So when I'm wanting to get something new or looking into something...I want to know everything about it. With [search engines] it's quite limited to how you can search stuff. Sometimes if I want to ask it, ask [Generative AI], can you give me a breakdown of XYZ with a BCD? And it will bring this up and then I'll take that information to the search engine.'
Male, Search, 30 -34 yrs, England

Being able to effectively navigate the online world allowed participants to acquire a large amount of knowledge and skills that they used in their offline lives. However, this came with a responsibility to stay in control of how much they relied on the internet, in order to protect problem solving and thinking skills.

Many participants used online tools and content to facilitate and learn about activities offline. For example, hobby-based skills such as looking after animals, watching and copying craft tutorials or learning cooking techniques. Some participants were also embracing emerging technologies to support with work and study-related learning needs. However, some felt that there were risks associated with this. One participant said that she noticed her problem-solving skills deteriorating due to relying too heavily on Google for her homework.

'When it came to problem solving questions which I hadn't done before, I found that I struggled more and I realised. That's because that I've not, you know, applied problem solving skills more often. Like I've just gone straight for the answer using Google.'
Female, Search, 16-17 yrs, England

Summary
Our participants were adept at navigating the online landscape through both savvy platform use and a strong grasp of the underlying technologies powering the internet. From curating feeds and results pages and advising and supporting others, to being the ones to adopt new innovations, they interacted strategically and competently based on their understanding of the digital environment. However, with this power of knowledge comes a requirement for self-control in relation to reliance on the internet; there is a need to be aware of the risk of the ability to access such a great amount of content, particularly in the case of emerging technologies such as AI chat bots.

4.3 Information Consumption

Information consumption refers to how online content is generated and the ability to critically analyse this.

Our participants were capable of identifying different sources, types of online content, and demonstrated a wide range of validation techniques.

Recognising different styles and sources of content included the ability to identify sponsored and journalistic content as well as challenge it and use it for their own benefit, for example to learn, achieve a task, or for entertainment. Participants used various strategies to evaluate the trustworthiness of online sources and validate the accuracy of content. When searching, they looked for signals like secure links, high-quality writing and images, and certification symbols to identify credible sources. Participants also looked for 'clean' links, without any numbers or perceived random letters in the link. Additionally, they relied on well-known brands which have an inherent reputation while remaining sceptical of sponsored content and biased messaging.

Participants also demonstrated critical thinking about how portrayals online may differ from reality, and interpreted sponsored content as biased, potentially avoiding it for this reason.

When choosing which sources to trust, many validation techniques were employed, including checking multiple sites or sources for the same information, tracing back to original sources, reading user reviews, reverse image searching, looking for signs of authenticity such as padlock symbols and verified link content (https) when searching, sense checking a social page or profile by viewing historical content, reviewing profile details, and checking follower count and type of follower.

In consuming content both via search engine and on social media, participants leveraged tools such as filters to find relevant results and cultivate a base of trusted creators.

Case study: Digging beneath the surface to validate information online

Arthur is 30 years old working full time as a teacher. In his online life, he takes a number of steps to make sure he feels confident and satisfied with the information he consumes. One recent example includes use of a reverse image search tool to confirm if a rental property was really what was being advertised. On this occasion, Arthur uncovered that it was in fact a fake company, as he located the

images and found that they had been stolen from another source. Arthur also does a lot of cross checking. For example, when searching for a service on Facebook, he pairs this with some research on trusted review sites, as well as critically evaluating the profiles to view their history and real-life activity such as recent posts and live location check ins. Arthur takes the time to put the work in, but it means he feels confident and positive in what he consumes online.

'I reversed image searched some of the pictures that they sent of the apartment. And I was able to then, like, obviously stop connecting with that spammer, who was trying to like, pretend they had this apartment, that they didn't.'

Summary

Participants showed diligent consumption habits that thoughtfully assessed the reliability and objectivity of online information. From cross-checking facts across sources to scrutinising search results, participants were proficient in mitigating risks of misinformation and bias through their savvy consumption patterns. Participants felt in control of the information they consumed and articulated their awareness that there can be a significant difference between what is shared online versus the reality. Their discernment allowed them to navigate the digital space safely, efficiently and positively.

4.4 Online Consequences

Online consequences refers to an understanding that actions online have consequences offline, resulting in an awareness that there is a need to govern online interactions.

Our participants demonstrated an ability to manage their online interactions in a way that was safe, secure, and positive for both themselves and others.

Participants limited the amount and type of personal information shared online to protect their privacy. Steps such as using separate accounts, blurring photos, and withholding location details until necessary were evidence of an awareness of how online interactions can lead to offline harm if sufficient precautions are not taken. Participants also actively avoided content that could negatively impact mental health, such as toxic communities or games that they personally perceived to be too violent. If exposed to harmful material, they quickly removed themselves from the situation, reported offenders, and in some cases, sought support from others.

'I'd say when I was younger, and I was playing Fortnite and that I joined someone, and they just started swearing. So, I blocked them then. From then on I've been more sensible just to leave and report them.'
Male, Search, 13-15 yrs, England

Participants were also proficient in remaining vigilant against potential scams and used tools like spending limits and parental controls to maintain control over in-app purchases. Many took a blanket 'zero spend' approach to their use of social media and gaming, based on the perception that this is the most effective way to reduce risk of overspend and becoming addicted to in-app spend mechanisms.

Participants felt social and online gaming platforms amplified voices but also vulnerability, creating a difficult balance for authentic self-expression.

Social media and online game chats created a challenging tension between a desire to express views and fearing backlash in doing so. On one hand, participants wanted to share perspectives on issues they care about, whether related to politics, social movements, or personal beliefs. Putting values

into words and finding like-minded connections online provided validation and felt like the right thing to do. However, participants were aware that opening up also invited potential criticism or even abuse from those with differing or extreme opinions. The feeling of anonymity and reach of social media platforms made some participants feel that attacks were both likely and impactful. The contradiction felt by participants forced constant risk assessment around sharing views online. Though rewarding when responses are positive, the potential reactions of unknown and hostile audiences deterred individuals from posting what they really wished to post.

Case study: enjoying the combative nature of platforms

Dan is 19 and spends a large amount of his time online engaging in 'arguments' on social media, as this is what he enjoys and feels compelled to do based on a need to 'correct' people. He sees open-forum platforms as fundamentally combative, with the platform built with tools that encourage a 'battleground'. Conversely, he appreciates platforms with closed-off communities, which he feels allows for more controlled and positive debating. Despite enjoying partaking in debate, he reports a change in his behaviour over time after feeling that this behaviour was resulting in him feeling angrier in his offline life and was contributing to unhealthy outlooks on the world. He now questions his motivations and tries to avoid purely performative fights.

'It's just making yourself angry. Sometimes you'll be like oh this person is a neo-Nazi, I need to go confront them. You're not changing hearts and minds, you're making yourself annoyed. This is a big problem, I think, with the internet and especially [on open-forum platforms] you go straight out of an argument with, like, an actual neo-Nazi, and then you go into an argument with, say, a mildly transphobic 55-year-old conservative woman who lives in a room. And sometimes I'm like I need to be careful that I am talking to two very different people.'

'That's what I appreciate about [platforms with closed communities]. You know, you might not get the joy of, say, finding a new random, lovely thing, but everyone in that discussion is, like, clearly, someone who is kind of invested in that topic.'

There was a lack of understanding of the impact of on-platform report functions.

Our participants reported taking measures to report concerning content, though with little clarity on the effects. They used in-platform reporting tools to flag inappropriate posts, profiles engaging in abuse, or other violations of community guidelines. However, many were uncertain if their action truly made a difference. They were not able to articulate what happened next after using a report function, and the lack of feedback from the platform and ongoing presence of harmful material left participants sceptical of the report function impact. Still, with few other options, they continued to report users and content that they felt was inappropriate or harmful. Participants felt that reporting would have greater impact on platforms with human moderators.

'There is no way you can report someone that realistically. Nothing's gonna happen.'
Male, Social Media, 18-24 yrs, England

'You can 'report' accounts that post horrible stuff. It does work as we all reported this fake account that had trolled my friend and it got taken down.'
Female, Search, 16-17 yrs, England

Some participants reported struggling to control time spent online, which often had a negative effect on their mental health.

Some participants found disengaging from digital devices challenging, even when desired. Many said that they consciously wanted to safeguard wellbeing by spending less time online, with some reporting correlated negative effects such as lack of ability to concentrate for long periods of time, or feeling anxiety from missing out if they can't check in online. However, despite feeling that they wanted and needed to spend less time online, as well as an awareness of how to do so via methods including screen time monitoring and apps such as Forest, some were still not able to do this. One participant described an experiment she carried out on herself which comprised deleting all social and online apps from her mobile device for a month to try and break the habit. During this time, she reported uncontrollably picking up her phone and navigating to 'random apps like the calculator'. The experiment was not successful and she redownloaded the apps, and now still feels that she spends an unhealthy amount of time online.

'I just think it's like become such a habit and especially now working from home as well when you know they have done like hard 20 minutes kind of work. And then I wanna break instead of actually getting up and having a walk around or something, I'll just sit there and scroll my phone and I do think it's unhealthy but it's just habit that is quite hard to break.'
Female, Search, 30-34 yrs, Wales

Perceptions of what is safe, secure and healthy when it comes to screen time varied. Ideas around screen time differed by age with those who are younger typically spending more time online and feeling less concerned about this than older participants.

'I spend about 4-5 hours a day gaming but I'm not worried about it...my little brother spends around 12 hours a day online, so I don't think what I do is that bad.'
Male, Online Gaming, 16-17 yrs, England

'I play Words with Friends or another puzzle game for about an hour each day, over breakfast or when I'm waiting around at the tram stop or in the doctors waiting room. I'm not addicted at all, I just do it to pass the time. If a game becomes boring or I feel like I've had enough I just exit.'
Male, Online Gaming, 60-74 yrs, England

Parental locks can be used to set limits for younger participants.

'My mum used to set a limit on my WIFI connection so that I'd go to bed on time and not look at my phone. She turned it off when I hit 13 and now there's no limit. I can spend most of the day on my phone especially in the holidays when I'm not at school. I'm not worried about my screen time, I know it's a lot but all my friends do the same.'
Female, Search, 13-15 yrs, England

Case study: a young person wants time limits put on her phone

One 13-year-old girl believes that spending too much time online is not good for your mental health, and '*there is a risk you can become addicted*'. While her parents have never specifically asked her to limit the amount of time she is online, they have said '*it's not good for you*'. As a result, she believes it will be a good thing to have limits set. She thinks 90 minutes to two hours is reasonable amount of time to be on social media each day during the week and three hours each day at the weekends.

While she likes being on her phone, when the limit is up, she says she would '*go outside and play*' instead.

Participants felt that controlling screen time is important, but many found themselves unable, or not willing, to do so.

Summary
Our participants demonstrated a range of cautious behaviours driven by an understanding that online actions can have offline consequences. From self-censoring to reporting harmful content from others, participants acted responsibly online by recognising actions can affect the real-world safety and wellbeing of both themselves and others. However, there was a gap between awareness of consequence and actual behaviour when it comes to ability to manage time spent online. Many of our participants felt that they spent more time than they wanted to online, but were not able effectively reduce and manage this despite being aware of the tools and support available to help them do so.

4.5 Online Engagement

Online engagement refers to a knowledge of how to positively engage with others online and contribute to a positive online environment for all, while understanding the risks of engaging with others online.

Participants were able to contribute to and partake in positive online spaces while safeguarding themselves against any potential or actual negative engagements.

Though they acknowledged that disinformation and toxicity exist online, participants were able to focus their energy on the positives that come from online engagements. They took steps to verify real identities, checking profiles for authentic activities over time and consistency across platforms, and employed strategies including video calls, cross-channel confirmation, and audio chat while gaming to help validate that they were engaging with real and safe people. Many had found an online community, which allowed them to engage in respectful interactions to find meaningful support, advice, and relationships with likeminded individuals. Participants also demonstrated an understanding that the content they share and/or create can have an impact on those exposed to it, therefore careful consideration was taken when sharing and creating content.

Some participants found it hard to balance being authentic and oversharing on social media.

Some participants felt challenged in finding the balance between projecting positivity and being their authentic self online. On one hand, they felt that sharing primarily upbeat content motivated and inspired others while sparing them negativity and safeguarding the poster against any harm as a result of sharing vulnerabilities. However, participants also acknowledged that realistic life includes ups and downs. Therefore, only highlighting the smiles and successes online creates unrealistic portrayals that others feel pressured to live up to. Participants were aware that this 'perfect image' can fuel insecurities and have a negative impact on the mental health of others.

Case study: Enjoys seeing others content, but no desire to share personally

Kathy is 30 years old, living in South Wales and working in HR. She's a self-described social media addict, spending about five hours each day browsing Instagram, Facebook, LinkedIn and online news outlets. However, when it comes to posting her own content, she is a private person and only shares happy moments, but respects those that are more open online.

'I think there is that typical thing of people only showing the best parts of their life, which I do as well. I only really post things if I'm on holidays, it's more for my own memories. And whereas, you know, some friends post a lot more openly about their mental health struggles and stuff like that,

and I think that's great. It's just personally, that's not for me. Like, I don't feel that I need to overshare every element of my life to the world.'

Summary

Our participants demonstrated an ability to not only partake in but also contribute to positive online engagements. They were able to think critically to mitigate risk when engaging with others, which left space for them to support and be supported, to find entertainment and enjoyment, and a to feel a sense of community and belonging.

5. INCONSISTENCIES IN HIGHLY MEDIA LITERATE BEHAVIOUR

5.1 Gaps between awareness and behaviour

Not all participants consistently applied their high media literacy skills to all aspects of their online behaviour.

Some participants demonstrated an awareness of how they felt they *should* behave, but they did not always do so in practice. For example, most participants were aware that cookies track their behaviour and were aware of the implications of accepting cookies. However, many made an informed decision to accept them anyway without any hesitation when accessing websites. Some participants did report that they then would often delete cookies at periodic intervals, such as every month, but often accepted them in the immediate instance to be able to access the website more quickly. They also felt that in some cases, not accepting cookies negatively impacted their ability to access a website.

'I get the usual cookies that we all just say okay to. I could be signing away our life, our mortgages and our life savings but I think everybody these days just accepts cookies.'
Male, Search, 45-49 yrs, Scotland

'And if I need to look on, then I'll accept them. If not, I'll just reject them all, 'cause it's really annoying. Or I'll just delete them after.'
Female, Search, 16-17 yrs, England

A number of participants felt that they spent too long online. For example, one participant mentioned that they spent 35 hours per week gaming. They felt this was too long and it negatively affected other parts of their life, but did not cut down on the time they spent online. Although participants were aware of the ability to put their own limitations on screen time, they often did not take this action. One male participant had set his own screen time limitations on his phone. However, upon finding that his allocated time was used up by mid-morning, he would then circumvent his own restrictions by using the web version of social media platforms as they do not get tracked on the allotted time.

'Honestly, I spend way too much time online, like way too much and it's like really sad. But it's even to the point where I can't really watch a TV programme without like scrolling on my phone in the background. And I just think that's really sad.'
Female, Search, 30-34 yrs, Wales

'I guess I just find ways around it [set time limitations]. So I find that if I went Incognito on Google it wasn't tracking the time. So if I was running low on the time on the browser I was able just to go back on to Twitter and do it that way.'
Male, Social Media, 30-34 yrs, Northern Ireland

Being highly media literate did not necessarily mean that participants always used the internet in positive ways.

A small number of participants cited examples of online behaviour that they were aware had negative implications or risks for themselves or others, such as creating fake accounts, but they engaged in the behaviour anyway.

In some cases, participants were engaging in high media literate behaviour without fully understanding or knowing what the purpose of that behaviour is.

Although it was possible to see good practice in their actions and behaviour, when probed on their reasoning behind this some were often unable to fully explain. This was particularly the case with younger people, who had been given information by their parents or school about staying safe online, what to do and not do, but were unaware of the reasons or potential risks if not followed. In one case the participant simply looked for the padlock by the website address, but acknowledged they do not know what the padlock means or how this keeps her safe.

'The only reason that my privacy settings are the way they were then is because my mum and dad's [sic] scared me into making sure everything was private, like so it wouldn't have been otherwise.'
Female, Social Media, 25-29 yrs, Northern Ireland

In another case, a participant did not understand fully the role and function of cookies and defaulted to disabling cookies rather than making an informed choice.

'Quite honestly, I don't know whether it does any good, but you know you disable cookies, and does that just mean that you get irrelevant adverts rather than tailored adverts? Or what? I don't know, but you can't get past without doing something, so I normally disable cookies.'

Male, Gaming, 60-74 yrs, England

Many participants were aware of their digital footprint and some engaged in behaviour which they believed would help to reduce their digital footprint.

Participants who wished to minimise their digital footprint adopted strategies such as using VPNs to hide their location, not using their real name online, not creating content on social media, deleting old accounts, and using search engines which do not track data. However, many participants also engaged in such behaviours, despite not being aware of what a digital footprint was, outside of their posts on social media sites. There was often a resignation that many companies had access to a vast quantity of their data and there was nothing they could do about it. One female participant continued to use a search engine despite concerns over the amount of data the platform was collecting about her. Another participant, recruited for their media literacy in relation to search, was aware of their digital footprint but they felt that as they were not a celebrity or influencer, the information that they chose to share would not be viewed widely.

'I mean, nothing's off the Internet. Once it's on there. I mean, you can find my Facebook page. If you type my name into Google like one of the top results is my Facebook page. That's just the way it is, and I mean anyone can find it. They won't be able to see anything on it, but they can find it no problem. And everyone has a digital footprint like you're there, you're on the Internet. If you're on the Internet, you have a digital footprint on whether that's something that you share really widely or if you have a lot of public or private profiles and things.'
Female, Social Media, 25-29 yrs, Northern Ireland

'Whilst I have a Google account, I'm not throwing my name and e-mail address and stuff out there. I'm not hugely social media person, so if I search for my name on Google I'm not gonna get many hits. And yes, I have done that. Because I choose not to live my life in a solely online or I'm not an influencer, I'm not a big poster and I'm not a celebrity. So I would say that there's not a big digital footprint for me in terms of can I be found. I think anybody could be found with the right tools and the experience.'
Male, Search, 45-49 yrs, Scotland

For most participants their media literacy was cross-category, in that those who were highly media literate when using social media, were also highly media literate gamers or searchers.

However, there were a few cases where high media literacy did not necessarily cross over between categories. One young male participant was a highly media literate gamer, but did not have an understanding of how to verify information when searching. In another case, a participant who was savvy on social media and demonstrated high media literacy when searching was less confident when it came to gaming. For some participants the difference in confidence comes down to the platform, and whether this gives them control over privacy, security and content. For example, one participant felt less safe on social media than when using search engines, as she feared seeing distressing content.

'I don't really know what to trust when searching. I guess if it has lots of likes that means it's true? Or if like a celebrity is saying it, someone I've seen before.'
Male, Online Gaming, 16-17 yrs, England

'I would say that I'm most savvy on social media, I just spend the most time there and am more familiar with how it all works. Gaming is something I'm less confident with. I tend to play single player games or games that aren't super popular so I don't know exactly how it all works.'
Female, Search, 16-17 yrs, England

Summary
There are some gaps between awareness of ideal media literate practices and actual behaviours in various online contexts. Participants exhibited a nuanced relationship between knowledge and action, with instances where awareness did not translate into practical implementation due to a range of external factors. For example, making an informed decision to accept cookies with an understanding of the potential privacy implications, highlighted the impact of convenience and habit on decision-making. Similarly, some participants felt they were spending excessive time online but struggled to curb their behaviour, even when equipped with tools like screen time limitations. There were instances where participants engaged in activities such as creating fake accounts demonstrating that high media literacy does not always align with positive internet usage. Moreover, some participants demonstrated media literate behaviour without a full understanding of the purpose, revealing a gap in comprehension, particularly among younger individuals who had received information from external sources like parents or schools.

5.2 Drivers for less media literate behaviour

There were a number of different drivers for participants engaging in what could be perceived as less media literate behaviour. For the purposes of this report, 'less media literate behaviour' is used to refer to online behaviour which isn't appropriate for the circumstances, which is at odds with the participant's own goals, or which introduces risk.

When participants were rushed for time, they were less likely to pay attention, and so behaved in ways that were unusual for them.

This included doing things for convenience, such as accepting cookies despite the individual not wishing to have their online behaviour tracked and knowing that cookies tracked their behaviour. Others made other conscious decisions, such as turning on the location setting on Google maps, due to being in a rush, when in less rushed circumstances they may avoid location sharing.

'I know it sounds stupid after what we've just been talking about but if I'm honest I just click accept if I can't be bothered.'
Female, Social Media, 18-24 yrs, Scotland

'I do accept cookies if I'm tired and I just want to get to there immediately or they make you click more than three buttons.'
Male, Social Media, 18-24 yrs, England

Participants' media literacy was sometimes driven by their moods.

When people were feeling particularly strong emotions, they were more likely to act in less media literate ways. Participants who felt particularly sad, angry or happy were triggered to act in ways that they might not usually act. One younger participant found themselves getting into arguments with others online when they were angry. This led to her feeling threatened and even more angry, and saying things online that she might not ordinarily do. For others, their moods affected the amount they wished to chat to someone online, such as wanting to talk more when in a good mood.

'Once I got threatened, I got angry and also I was talking back because I was angry.'
Female, Social Media, 13-15 yrs, England

'When I'm happy I'm more confident, I'm more likely to talk to strangers online, I might turn on my audio and actually chat to people. When I'm sad I generally feel more cautious, I don't want to talk. I play by myself or with my real friends.'
Female, Online Gaming, 13-15 yrs, Scotland

Although there was an awareness of less media literate behaviour, when a participant really wanted or needed something, they were more likely to act in less media literate ways.

For one participant, they needed to access the BBC for their homework and so accepted cookies that they would normally choose to reject to be able to complete the task. The want or need for a particular item or activity meant that they put their concerns aside just for that instance.

'We wanted garden furniture and bought it from Facebook Marketplace for stupidly cheap...I should have known it was a scam...'
Male, Online Gaming, 60-74 yrs, England

Non-media literate behaviour were also sometimes triggered by peer pressure.

One participant noted how he felt pressured from his alliance in a game to make purchases to further their campaigns. He was subject to negative comments from others in the alliance, to the point that he did make some small purchases, but eventually quit the alliance as it was too much for him. Another participant commented that there was often pressure in games to purchase additional clothes, as you were perceived less favourably if you did not have them.

'It got to the point where some people were putting pressure on you to spend money. I'm a right cheapskate when it comes to gaming and you know I'll pay two or three pounds for a game but then if in this Evony game, you can buy stronger troops and reinforce your city walls or whatever if you pay for it rather than just waiting for your wealth to accumulate through the game.'
Male, Online Gaming, 60-74 yrs, England

'Once you join into one game and you haven't got any like Roblox clothes, then they like kind of go up to you and say oh no and stuff like that and then obviously I wanted to buy Roblox so I got them one time.'
Female, Online Gaming, 13-15 yrs, Wales

However, finances were a barrier for some to behave in a way they perceived to be better. One participant said they were unable to engage in a perceived highly media literate behaviour (using a paid-for VPN), as she simply did not have the money.

'I know that some people use VPNs and stuff but I just don't have the money to spend on stuff like that.'
Female, Online Gaming, 13-15 yrs, Scotland

It was also sometimes the case that people did not necessarily behave in media literate ways around people they know or perceived to be friends. One participant discussed how she allows her friends access to her phone, and although she will insist on them using incognito mode to search, she does not concern herself with any other activities they could get up to on her phone. She does not see why they would want to access anything else, so does not protect herself. Another child participant discussed how they had allowed a friend of a friend to access their e-mail account to be able to download a game. Other reasons to trust people were simply because they knew them so well and could not see what damage they could potentially do.

'I sent it over to my [family member] like I don't know if this is fake news or not, but in reality, something like this could easily exist. Then it was like two or three days later, the exact article came up on BBC News and I sent that over to my [family member]....If there's many bots and stuff I didn't really take that into consideration when I sent this post..'
Female, Search, 16-17 yrs, England

'My friend, he comes to my house to play on PlayStation. I think someone from my friend's account, he asked me if he could download FIFA on his console 'cause I have free for digitally, so he asked me to give him my email and password. Because I thought it was my friend, I gave him my email and password.'
Male, Online Gaming, 16-17 yrs, England

Summary
There is a spectrum of drivers which can influence participants' engagement in less media literate behaviour. Time constraints emerged as a significant factor, with participants opting for convenience-driven choices, such as accepting cookies or adjusting privacy settings without due consideration when pressed for time. Emotional states, ranging from happiness to anger, were identified as influencing factors that could lead to less media literate actions, manifesting in arguments, altered communication patterns, or impulsive online decisions. Importantly, this results in a lack of consistency in media literate behaviours.

OFCOM AFTERWORD

The findings set out in this report show us what 'high media literacy' looks like in the real world. It is clear from the research that high media literacy enables and enhances positive online experiences. For some participants, high media literacy in one area of online life carried across to others, but this was not necessarily always the case.

This research gives us valuable insight in helping to address the question as to whether and how high media literacy plays a role in reducing the impact or incidence of online harms. We have seen that our participants are aware of the potential risks in the absence of media literate behaviours, which minimises the chance of them encountering online harms. Mitigating behaviours adopted by our participants included:

- controlling the personal information that they share online;
- validating online sources;
- use of tools such as spending limits and parental controls.

Participants were also seen to take a resilient and proactive approach to online social interaction, which reduced the impact of upsetting or harmful content when it was encountered.

Some of our sample had previously had negative experiences, which had acted as a catalyst to the development of high media literacy skills. Participants sought out the expertise to minimise the chance of the event reoccurring. Others also built high media literacy slowly over time through numerous positive or neutral experiences, or felt that high media literacy was an outcome of their personality.

There was a tension at times between the behaviours that participants knew would be 'ideal' or more media literate choice online and their real behaviours in the moment. Many participants put trust in online providers to protect their personal details without understanding the parameters of this, and many seemed resigned to data being stored and collected. Many of our highly media literate sample reported feeling an 'inevitability' about the future risks and potential compromises that they felt would come with technological advancements. If participants were feeling rushed or under social pressure, or if they were experiencing intense moods or desire for a particular item, many acted in ways that would not be considered highly media literate. Participants sometimes struggled to balance the desire for privacy with the desire for access to products and services, and many experienced difficulty in regulating their time online. Although there was an awareness, this highly media literate group still behaved in less media literate ways in some circumstances.

These findings, together with our Day in the Life qualitative research and Adults' and Children's media lives trackers, form a picture of 'real world' media literacy which is, to some extent, transient and individual. Media literacy behaviours can be seen to be influenced by context and to fluctuate across situations and in response to the changing media landscape. This underlines the importance of media literacy support across all life stages.

While the research identified ways in which online platforms support media literate behaviour, such as providing two-factor authentication and flagging offensive content, it also displayed how the functioning of some platforms hinder high media literacy for some participants, such as the lack of transparency of how algorithms operate, the lack of feedback from platforms following reporting and how difficult it is to avoid in app purchases. The research indicates that platforms could be doing more to support media literacy through the design of their platforms. The insights in this report provide evidence that good media literacy by design can foster more media literate audiences which

results in increased positive experiences online and increased awareness of potential risks. These findings will help us to focus both our work with platforms and our own pilot initiatives to improve media literacy, such that the gap between ‘real world’ and ‘ideal’ behaviours can be reduced.