

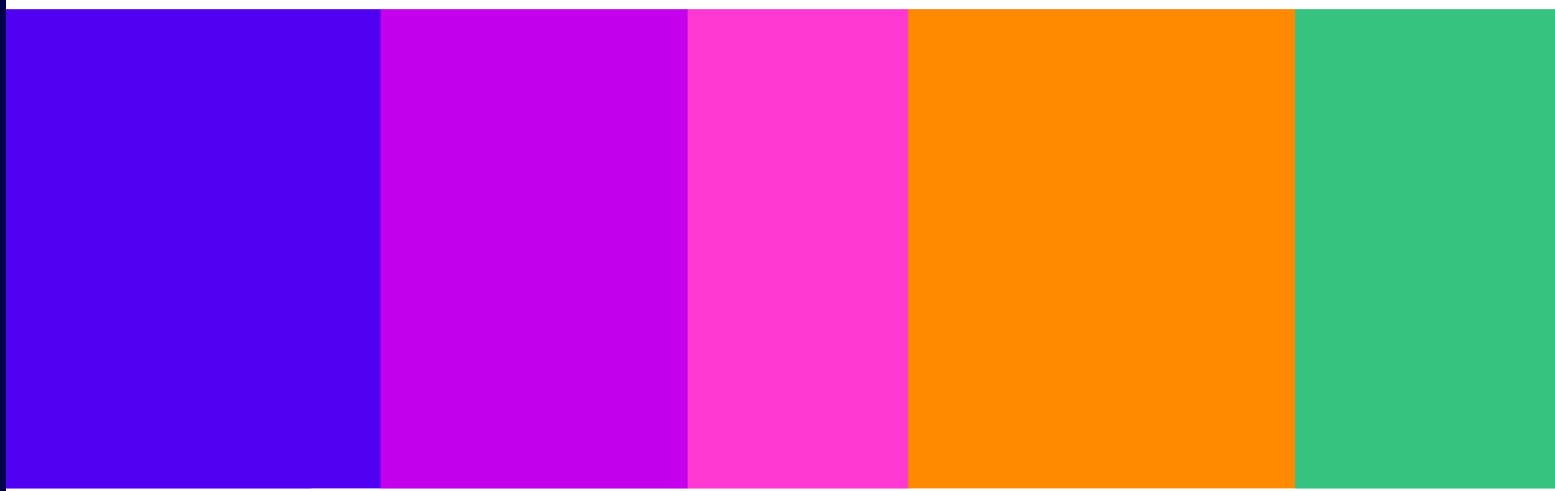
Evaluation Toolkit: Initial review and recommendations report

Making Sense of Media

By Tim Bidey

Report

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Overview

The Making Sense of Media (MSOM) [Evaluation Toolkit](#) was launched in February 2023. The toolkit aims to empower those running media literacy interventions to evaluate their projects and use and share those findings to support the delivery of more effective initiatives in the future.

It consists of a series of how-to guides for planning, carrying out and sharing media literacy intervention evaluations. The guides are complemented by two ‘top tips’ methods documents and two searchable online libraries: [media literacy initiatives](#) and [media literacy research](#).

Ofcom is publishing this review, written by independent design and evaluation expert Tim Bidey, to demonstrate our commitment to being open about our own evaluative processes and to show, with the parallel publication of our updated toolkit, what we have done with this learning.

Tim has over 10 years’ experience working in research and evaluation within and alongside the charity sector. His review aims to: identify key strands of feedback and produce recommendations to inform a second edition toolkit; contribute to Ofcom understanding about ‘what works’ in media literacy evaluation; and explore barriers and mitigations to uptake within the sector.

The review is based on interviews, discussion groups and working sessions carried out between February 2023 and July 2023 with: organisations using the toolkit as part of Ofcom’s Initiate programme (6), whose evaluation experience ranged from very limited to experienced; Ofcom staff and associates (4); the Ofcom Evaluation Working Group (1); and external experts (2). These are complemented by feedback from two events (Ofcom toolkit launch, toolkit test session) and an independent analysis. Data sources are summarised in **Appendix A1**.

It should be noted that Initiate organisations were in the evaluation design stage, so most user feedback around the toolkit focused on the ‘Preparing’ section.

The report is divided into five sections:

- Structure – feedback on the toolkit’s overall structure
- Content spotlights – summaries of the main areas of feedback on content
- Language and clarity – use and explanation of language
- Functionality and accessibility – how easy it is to use the toolkit
- Anticipated value and uptake – perceived value and potential barriers to use

Recommendations are included throughout. They are graded in terms of ‘impact’ – the difference they would make to organisations using the toolkit/using the toolkit successfully – and ‘resource’ – the amount of resource required to implement them.

When the toolkit was published in February 2023, Ofcom made a commitment to ensuring it would be updated periodically, and that it would gather feedback from users. This work has been done and an updated version of the evaluation toolkit, based on the recommendations in this review, can be found on the Ofcom website. This review is being published alongside those improvements to the toolkit to underscore the importance of sharing findings so that others can learn from them.

Recommendations that are considered priorities are also flagged in the summary below. A full list of recommendations is in **Appendix A2**.

Key findings of the review

The three-step 'preparing, sharing, doing' structure of the toolkit is overwhelmingly regarded as logical, easy-to-follow, and the right balance between simplicity and detail. This is in line with the toolkit's aims and the needs of the target audience. The priority recommendation is to move 'designing evaluation questions' into the 'Preparing' section.

Most projects and experts felt the content of the toolkit is broadly appropriate for organisations new to or with limited experience of evaluation. Experts felt that the toolkit included most evaluation 'essentials', but flagged that elements of the 'counterfactual' content were too advanced, most likely infeasible for the target audience and risked deterring organisations from doing evaluation (e.g. the mention of control groups). The priority recommendation is to simplify the section to focus on providing some evidence of causality.

Some organisations struggled to work through the 'planning the process' considerations, interpreting it as a sequential list and not realising that more detailed guidance for some of the considerations followed later in the guide. The priority recommendation is to revisit the framing of this section.

Most projects said creating a theory of change was a useful exercise and followed the guidance without problems. However, the guidance misses a couple of elements that would support the production of higher quality, more effective theories of change. The priority recommendations are to add simple guidance around attribution vs contribution, assumptions and theory of change formats and uses (e.g. fundraising, communications).

Most organisations provided feedback on the evaluation framework template; it was also flagged as part of the independent review. Organisations with no or limited experience struggled to use the framework, in part due to it combining too many evaluation design elements within a single template. The priority recommendation is to redesign the framework and include practical, step-by-step guidance around how to choose/prioritise which outcomes to measure, develop simple indicators and build and use a data collection plan.

Most of the comments on the "Doing" section and accompanying top tips documents focused on potential additions to the section. The priority recommendations are to add additional guidance to existing content into the main body of the toolkit and 'top tips' guides, such as subjective and objective measures, how to design quizzes and how to conduct discussion groups.

The final section of the toolkit is focused only on sharing the results of evaluation. The toolkit does not include guidance on how to use evaluation data to learn and adapt interventions, albeit this was one of the main reasons stated in the toolkit for doing an evaluation. The priority recommendation is to add a short narrative around this into the main body of the toolkit.

The language in the toolkit was regarded as clear, simple and understandable, supported by the definitions call-out boxes integrated throughout. However, a few key terms are missing from the toolkit and several terms are occasionally used inconsistently between different sections and templates. The priority recommendations are to address these and add definitions call-out boxes to the top tips documents.

External experts and projects provided a range of suggestions regarding how to improve the functionality and accessibility of the evaluation toolkit and accompanying libraries. The priority recommendation is to add more hyperlinks within/between sections of the toolkit.

The toolkit's focus on media literacy is seen as its unique selling point, supported by Ofcom's brand and reputation. The publication of the toolkit acts as a shift in how the sector should think about

impact. However, there are also risks that could hinder uptake by the target audience. The priority recommendation is to better emphasise the benefits of evaluation for individual organisations, while longer-term recommendations include building on the toolkit's strengths by adding more media literacy examples and an outcomes bank and continuing to raise awareness of the toolkit with organisations, funders and networks, and consider dissemination models.

In summary the priority recommendations to be addressed in the short-term are:

Ref no.	Recommendation	Impact L/M/H	Resource L/M/H
Structure			
2.1	Move the 'designing your evaluation questions' sub-section to the 'Preparing' section	Medium	Low
Content spotlights			
3.1	Simplify the counterfactual analysis section – removing Randomised Control Trial and control group content, and focusing instead on how to provide evidence of causality	High	Medium
3.3	Revisit the framing of the 'planning the process' section, with explicit explanation that it is a summary of considerations that should be revisited throughout the 'Planning' section	Medium	Low
3.5	Add short guidance in the theory of change section around: a) what types of outcomes organisations can expect to see in the immediate and longer-term – and how their contribution to these will vary; b) assumptions, to make full use of the theory of change process and its benefits; and c) other theory of change formats and uses	Medium	Medium
3.6	Redesign the evaluation framework. One option in line with feedback is to create a separate worksheet for the theory of change exercise (to simplify it into more manageable chunks) and then have a more traditional evaluation framework design	High	High
3.7	Add simple guidance around how to choose/prioritise which outcomes you are going to measure and why, as well as how to develop simple subjective and objective indicators	High	High
3.8	Add simple guidance on how to use the framework once it is complete	High	High
3.10	Add into the main toolkit the importance of using both subjective and objective measures, and more detail in the accompanying document around designing quizzes	High	Medium
3.12	Add more guidance on how to conduct discussion groups	High	Medium

Ref no.	Recommendation	Impact L/M/H	Resource L/M/H
3.13	Add links to free survey tools into the “top tips: surveys and quizzes” document	Medium	Low
3.16	Develop the final section of the toolkit to provide guidance around how organisations can make immediate, practical use of monitoring and data to adapt their projects	High	High
Language and clarity			
4.2	Add missing terms and include as definitions call-out boxes	Medium	Low
4.3	Ensure consistency between terms in the toolkit and evaluation framework template	Medium	Low
4.4	Add definitions call-out boxes to ‘top tips’ documents	Medium	Low
Function and accessibility			
5.1	Check to see if any additional hyperlinks can be added within/between documents	Medium	Low

All other lower priority recommendations are grouped in **Appendix A2**.

Structure

This section summarises feedback about the overall structure of the toolkit.

The three-step structure is logical and easy-to-follow

Organisations and experts were overwhelmingly positive about the “preparing, doing, sharing” structure of the toolkit. Most projects and experts felt this was a clear, logical, easy-to-follow structure that struck the right balance between simplicity and detail, and successfully guided organisations through how to think about evaluation from the start of their project onwards. This is in line with the aims of the toolkit and the needs of the target audience.

“I think that the structure makes perfect sense; it’s logical. We have [our own] toolkit; it’s a similar structure. How do you scope [evaluation], needs assessment, who is your audience, the basic elements of M&E model... that flow makes sense.” – External expert

Several experts preferred the three-step structure to an earlier five-part draft of the toolkit, as well as compared to the structure of other online evaluation toolkits. One expert felt that the three, clear steps meant this toolkit could hold more detail than others (without necessarily feeling longer).

Several of the organisations using the toolkit reported that the structure was a key part of the toolkit’s ‘step-by-step’ approach, which helped make evaluation feel more accessible.

“It’s a very logically laid out document. I really liked the step-by-step approach [of preparing, sharing, doing]... Mark*¹ found it extremely useful as he didn’t have background knowledge or experience of evaluation.” – Initiate project

Content on designing evaluation questions might fit better in the ‘preparing’ section

No comments were made by experts or organisations suggesting changes to the current structure. However, the independent analysis highlighted that the ‘designing your evaluation questions’ section might be better located in the “preparing” rather than the “doing” section.

Key Evaluation Questions are high-level questions that evaluations are subsequently *designed* to answer. Where possible, they should be developed and agreed on in early stages of evaluation planning, in advance of prioritising outcomes and selecting methods.

Recommendations

Ref no.	Recommendation	Impact L/M/H	Resource L/M/H
2.1	Move the ‘designing your evaluation questions’ sub-section to the ‘Preparing’ section	Medium	Low

¹ Names in this report have been anonymised.

Content spotlights

This section summarises the main areas of feedback about the content of the toolkit.

It starts by summarising feedback about what the toolkit does and does not include, before reviewing the following toolkit sections in-depth: planning the process; writing your theory of change; creating your evaluation framework; and doing (methods).

Overall

The level of detail is broadly the right balance for organisations new to evaluation or with limited experience

Most projects and experts felt the toolkit's content is broadly appropriate for organisations new to or with limited experience of evaluation. The projects newer to evaluation felt that the toolkit was broadly accessible to them, while more experienced organisations and external experts felt that the content and level of detail was the right balance for this target audience.

"For me, it's really clear... It sets expectations well.... It's quite a manageable document as well, not overwhelming. It makes the idea of evaluation seem possible to organisations such as ourselves, within your reach." – Toolkit test session participant

"It fills a niche for organisations trying to get a foot on the ladder. That's really important... there is no point in providing a super technical, gold standard that's also beyond organisation's financial resources. It is right that Ofcom have started out at this level." – External expert

The toolkit includes most evaluation essentials

More experienced organisations and external experts reflected that the content covered most evaluation 'essentials', while keeping evaluation as an overall practice broadly accessible to organisations new to evaluation. In addition to how these concepts were explained, this was also linked to the toolkit's provision of supplementary information throughout (e.g., call out definitions boxes).

"Everything I wondered if it would cover – bar definitions [of media literacy] – it did cover. For example, I was thinking whether it would separate process and impact evaluation, how it would talk about one influencing the other – it did that. I wondered if it would talk about when to use percentages rather than numbers etc. – it did that" – External expert

However, some parts of the toolkit are too advanced for the target audience

Some organisations and experts also felt that the toolkit went too far in parts and, in doing so, risked deterring organisations newer to evaluation.

Most feedback on this focused on the 'how to evidence the counterfactual' section. Several projects found this section off-putting, while several experts deemed most of the content in this section (such as control groups and randomised control trials) inappropriate to the target audience. This is

due to the time, expertise and resources they are likely to have access to, as well as what is proportionate for smaller scale interventions. In addition, this section was not felt to provide sufficient information about how to actually do any simpler counterfactual methods.

“She found reference to ‘quasi-experimental design and methods’ really off-putting! She didn’t know what it meant or how she was expected to use the information.” – working session facilitator

“Realistically, ‘before and after’ is likely to be used by the target audience... I mentioned the whole criticism regarding the need for more rigour [in the media literacy sector]... but we also have to be realistic about what people can manage. This toolkit allows people to prove the concept... which in part supports release of funding for more rigorous research down the line.” – External expert

One expert suggested that the main body of the toolkit should focus on simpler, more practical approaches to ‘measuring change’, while advanced material around counterfactuals could be a separate pull out for more experienced organisations. This would create more space for simpler approaches such as significance testing, or qualitative questions around attribution, to be explained fully and usefully.

More experienced organisations also derived benefits

Several more experienced organisations and experts also felt the toolkit was sufficiently detailed to still be useful to people with experience of evaluation. This was partly due to the toolkit’s focus on online media literacy (not seen in other toolkits), as well as the potential to use the document as a ‘checklist’ because much of how it is clearly structured into stages and ‘steps’.

Recommendations

Ref no.	Recommendation	Impact L/M/H	Resource L/M/H
3.1	Simplify the counterfactual analysis section - removing Randomised Control Trial and control group content, and focusing instead on how to provide evidence of causality	High	Medium
3.2	Add checklists at the end of sections to support different uses of the toolkit	Medium	Medium

Planning the process

Some organisations struggled to work through the considerations

Organisations in the toolkit test session struggled to successfully use the ‘planning the process’ section of the toolkit, though it should be noted that they had limited time to read and then engage in the toolkit. Two potential challenges were identified through observation.

First, organisations interpreted the numbered considerations as a list that they needed to ‘work through’ in order – completing one step before moving to the next there and then – rather than a broader set of considerations that should inform their final evaluation design. In practice, this meant that the group was trying to think through potential survey questions prior to designing their theory of change.

Second, organisations were unaware that pages/sections of the toolkit that followed contained guidance to help projects with each of these considerations.

This section might therefore benefit from a more explicit explanation that this section is an overview of key considerations that need to be worked through, and not a set of stages to work through there and then.

A seventh key consideration – defining media literacy

Several experts felt that the toolkit should encourage organisations to define what they mean by ‘media literacy’ – either at the start of their evaluation design or through articulating their outcomes through the theory of change process – and communicate this as part of their report.

“Evaluation in this sector is very much hampered by a lack of an operational definition of media literacy. It’s very hard to evaluate something so nebulous and contested. The way I get around that, I pick a definition and justify why I’ve picked that... as long as you can talk about that and can defend it... have a rationale for it. The toolkit could say, ‘here’s our definition, where do you stand in relation to it, which aspects are you working towards?’” – External expert

One expert felt that as part of this, Ofcom should include their own definition of media literacy at the front of the toolkit, though acknowledge that organisations might define it differently depending on the focus or context.

Recommendations

Ref no.	Recommendation	Impact L/M/H	Resource L/M/H
3.3	Revisit the framing of the ‘planning the process’ section, with explicit explanation that it is a summary of considerations that should be revisited throughout the ‘Planning’ section	Medium	Low
3.4	Add an Ofcom definition and prompt for organisations to define what they mean by online media literacy in the context of their project	Medium	Low

Writing your theory of change

Most projects found writing a theory of change a useful exercise

Most projects found this a useful exercise and followed the guidance without problems. Several organisations highlighted that the fictional example had helped them through the process.

“The theory of change section helped me focus before I went on to the what we are doing part. I could then go back and look at it.” – Initiate project

However, several experts, the independent review and a review of the theories of change produced by Initiate projects using the guidance highlighted missing content that might support the production of higher quality theories of change.

Simple guidance around outcome types, attribution and contribution

The ‘Differences’ section might benefit from explicit guidance that immediate outcomes tend to be changes in awareness, knowledge and skills, while changes in attitudes or behaviour can take longer to occur. This is also appropriate given the target audience for the toolkit and likely type/size of their interventions (e.g. short sessions over weeks or months).

The section could also include an explicit acknowledgement that while projects should be ‘responsible’ for their immediate outcomes (i.e. ‘attribution’), they are only likely to ‘contribute’ to medium- and longer-term changes. This would help them prioritise which outcomes to measure.

“It’s a disservice to the sector for people not to be clear where they can and can’t have an impact. Achieving robust learning outcomes is a great thing, but it weakens some interventions’ credibility to say the behaviour of participants has also changed. People need to be clear on the borders of programme within the wider ecosystem.” – External expert

Simple guidance on assumptions

One expert and the independent review identified that the theory of change section could include a simple explanation of ‘assumptions’. A basic explanation could encourage organisations to critically reflect on the main beliefs that underpin their theory of change (i.e. why/how change will occur), external factors that need to be in place for change to occur as expected (or might stop change from occurring), and help projects prioritise which outcomes to measure.

“It’s one thing to be confident, and another thing to be able to accurately spot misinformation.” – External expert

The benefits of a theory of change diagram

The independent review highlighted that this section only refers to theories of a change as a ‘narrative’ output, with no reference to the potential to produce theories of change as a diagram. Including this as an option may help people with different working styles better engage with the process, and ‘unlock’ other potential benefits of theory of change process (for example, using the diagram as part of comms).

“It was really clear to us to do a theory of change visually with [Ofcom external evaluation support], it was so much easier...” – Initiate project

Recommendations

Ref no.	Recommendation	Impact L/M/H	Resource L/M/H
3.5	Add short guidance in the theory of change section around: a) what types of outcomes organisations can expect to see in the immediate and longer-term – and how their contribution to these will vary; b) assumptions, to make full use of the theory of change process and its benefits; and c) other theory of change formats and uses	Medium	Medium

Creating your evaluation framework

Organisations with no or limited experience of evaluation struggled to use the framework

Most organisations provided feedback on the evaluation framework template; it was also flagged as part of the independent review.

Several organisations with more experience of evaluation successfully used the framework, identifying relevant information from their proposals and adding it into the template. Organisations again highlighted that the worked example had helped them to do this.

However, most organisations that were new to or had limited experience of evaluation struggled complete the framework. Notably, most Initiate organisations required significant external support to complete it.

The framework template combines too many evaluation design elements

The current evaluation framework combines elements of a theory of change framework (top row), logic model framework (row A), evaluation framework (rows C and D) and other elements.

Not all of these elements relate or connect to each other, which means that some of the boxes within the table require completion, while others are not relevant (for example, rows B-D across several columns). However, the parts that can/need to be completed are not clearly marked and caused confusion among users. In rows C-D, there is also some duplication of content in the example that risks confusion between data types (row C) and data collection methods (row D).

"I'm having a moment here with this grid to see if I can follow it..." – Toolkit test session participant

Several organisations reported that instructions within the framework can be easy to miss, potentially as a consequence of how much detail has been included in order to explain all the different elements of the framework. For example, the guidance around long-term impacts, which advises that smaller projects should not necessarily worry about measuring (and reporting) on this.

The framework does not support organisations to plan how to measure outcomes

The multiple roles that the template plays in its current form undermines its main functionality as an evaluation framework and plan: it does not support organisations to plan how to measure an outcome, as well as collect and analyse data.

"Is the framework separate to the evaluation? Do you write the framework and then use it to base your report on?" – Initiate project

A number of elements are currently missing from the framework that are typical for evaluation frameworks and essential to supporting organisations to design, plan and organise their evaluation fieldwork and reporting. This includes the absence of:

- guidance around how to choose/prioritise outcomes for evaluation
- a section in which to add indicators for each output and outcome that will be measured
- columns to record baselines and set targets for each indicator
- columns to detail when data collection should take place and who is responsible for it.

“It could use improvement – when organisations are evaluating impact, what are the specific indicators? For example, you have a project about raising awareness of misinformation and confidence to detect false information... what are the indicators that needed to be included?” – External expert

Additional support might make it easier for organisations with no or limited experience

Organisations suggested a range of methods to help others overcome what felt like the least familiar – and most difficult – part of the evaluation process. This included:

- structuring the previous sections so that the data from each one could be easily carried over to the template
- linking to a recorded video or animation of the framework being completed for the fictional example

“Why not design it so you can fill it in as you go, rather than have a big scary thing at the end. It’s a very intimidating set of pages... it’s not helpful at first glance, but [external Ofcom support] talking us through it bit-by-bit was much better... It needs to be broken down so much more. We would not have been able to do it on our own.” – Initiate project

Recommendations

Ref no.	Recommendation	Impact L/M/H	Resource L/M/H
3.6	Redesign the evaluation framework. One option in line with feedback is to create a separate worksheet for the theory of change exercise (to simplify it into more manageable chunks) and then have a more traditional evaluation framework design	High	High
3.7	Add simple guidance around how to choose/prioritise which outcomes you are going to measure and why, as well as how to develop simple subjective and objective indicators	High	Medium
3.8	Add simple guidance on how to use the framework once it is complete	High	Medium
3.9	Additional completion support – either clearly linking to previous sections of the toolkit to signpost where content can be carried over, or additional content as a worked example (e.g., an animation)	Medium	Medium to High

Doing (methods)

Most of the comments on the “Doing” section and accompanying top tips documents focused on potential additions to the section.

More guidance is needed on objective measures and methods

One expert reflected that the toolkit needed to do more to highlight the importance of objective assessment such as quizzes, while the ‘top tips: surveys and quizzes’ document needed more guidance on how to design quizzes. The independent analysis also flagged this.

“It really needs more advice, guidance and tools to support objectively testing media literacy. It has one example question that is a bit of a lame screenshot. It’s a huge thing in the literature... yes you can ask people if they’re confident, but everyone wants to see objective testing, and we don’t have any go-to tools on it”. – External expert

“If you say you’re improving skills, how are you going to do that? Improving skills always equals a test.” – External expert

A desire to gather data beyond self-reporting was also raised during the launch of the toolkit.

The same expert also suggested that Ofcom could support a (media) literacy organisation to lead the development of more tools and materials to support more objective measurement. For example, a resource bank of standardised, child friendly fake news stories to use in surveys to children to help assess their critical understanding skills.

More (or linked) guidance is needed on accessible tools

Several experts noted that the toolkit does not contain – or link to – any guidance around the creation of accessible data collection methods and tools for use with older adults or people with different types of impairments. This was also raised at the toolkit launch event.

More (or linked) guidance is needed on how to run focus groups

One expert noted that the ‘top tips: interviews and focus groups’ focused more on interviews, with almost no information about how to do focus groups (for example, how to encourage conversation between participants). This gap was also highlighted by the independent review.

The independent review highlighted that neither of the ‘top tips’ documents include any reference to incentivisation (e.g., thank you payments, prize draws etc.).

Links to free tools

One expert felt the ‘top tips: surveys and quizzes’ document could include links or references to free survey tools (with a brief outline of pros/cons).

Ethics, safeguarding and minimising bias raised as a consideration, but with little guidance

The independent review highlighted that little practical information was provided about what to do in regard to ethics, safeguarding and minimising bias. These sections might benefit from some practical ‘essentials’ to guide organisations, such as brief information around voluntary participation, informed consent, safeguarding and confidentiality, or some simple ways to minimise bias.

Recommendations

Ref no.	Recommendation	Impact L/M/H	Resource L/M/H
3.10	Add into the main toolkit the importance of using both subjective and objective measures, and more detail in the accompanying document around designing quizzes	High	Medium
3.11	Link to guidance around how to make key data collection methods more accessible	High	Medium
3.12	Add more guidance on how to conduct discussion groups	High	Medium
3.13	Add links to free survey tools into the “top tips: surveys and quizzes” document	Medium	Low
3.14	Add short, ‘essential’ guidance around ethics, safeguarding and minimising bias to provide projects with more practical guidance	High	Medium
3.15	Consider Ofcom’s role in the broader development of more objective measures and materials for the media literacy sector	High	High

Sharing

The independent review identified that, after ‘doing’ data collection, the final section of the toolkit is focused on how to put together an evaluation report for internal and external stakeholders.

The toolkit does not include guidance on how to use evaluation data to learn and adapt

The toolkit does not include any reference to how monitoring and evaluation data can be used to learn, inform and adapt programme design during the project lifetime. This lack of guidance is contrary to the toolkit’s narrative around one of the main reasons to do evaluation as stated in the introduction: ‘[to] help you learn about your project, apply that learning, make changes to improve the project and make further progress towards your goals’.

Recommendations

Ref no.	Recommendation	Impact L/M/H	Resource L/M/H
3.16	Develop the final section of the toolkit to provide guidance around how organisations can make immediate, practical use of monitoring and data to adapt their projects (e.g. monitoring output data to ensure target audiences are being reached as intended, reviewing outcomes data after cohorts to see if outcomes are being achieved as anticipated etc.)	High	High

Language and clarity

This section summarises feedback about the use and explanation of language in the toolkit.

The language in the toolkit was seen as clear, simple and understandable

Most of the external experts and organisations using the toolkit found its use of language to be clear, simple and understandable, and an appropriate balance between including essential technical terms and staying user friendly.

"The language is pitched in such a friendly way... there's no jargon in there, where there is it's defined on the same page... everyone appreciates learning new terms as long as they are clearly defined... The way it does it is not patronising." – External expert

Minimal feedback was received from participants regarding changes to the toolkit's language, though one organisation new to evaluation felt the toolkit was '**too wordy**'.

The definitions call-out boxes supported comprehension of key terms

Both organisations with experience of evaluation and those with more limited experience reported that the integration of 'definition' call-out boxes throughout the toolkit was especially helpful.

"The explainers of the different terms were really helpful. My background isn't in this area... [Evaluation] is a relatively unknown area, so the general guidance [of evaluation terms] throughout was very helpful." – Toolkit test session participant

However, the independent review highlighted that definitions call-out boxes are not included in either of the 'top tips' documents (for terms such as 'representative sample' and 'statistical significance').

A few key terms are missing from the toolkit or are occasionally used inconsistently

One expert highlighted that the toolkit could explicitly reference 'mixed methods', rather than combining quantitative data 'with qualitative data for deeper understanding'.

The independent review also highlighted occasional inconsistencies between the toolkit and the evaluation framework when describing outcomes. For example, while the toolkit refers to 'immediate' and 'mid-term' outcomes, the framework refers to 'outcomes' and 'short-/medium-term impact'.

Recommendations

Ref no.	Recommendation	Impact L/M/H	Resource L/M/H
4.1	Do not simplify toolkit language any further	n/a	n/a
4.2	Add missing terms and include as definitions call out boxes	Medium	Low

Ref no.	Recommendation	Impact L/M/H	Resource L/M/H
4.3	Ensure consistency between terms in the toolkit and evaluation framework template	Medium	Low
4.4	Add definitions call out boxes to 'top tips' documents	Medium	Low

Functionality and accessibility

This section summarises feedback about how easy it was to use the toolkit.

External experts and projects provided a range of suggestions regarding how to improve the functionality and accessibility of the evaluation toolkit and accompanying online libraries.

Toolkit features

More hyperlinks would support easier navigation

One expert suggested that navigation of the toolkit might be easier if there was more (hyper)linking between the different sections of the toolkit. The same expert also suggested that, where the toolkit links to ‘further reading’, it might be helpful to add a brief explanation of why a document is useful or how it can support an organisation to evaluate (for example, the list on page 19).

Alternative formats might support user engagement

One project commented that some of the information in the toolkit might be easier to understand if it was also presented visually. For example, the ‘planning the process’ steps.

One project felt that it would be easier to work through the toolkit steps if it was presented as a workbook (and/or with a series of worksheets), rather than as an information guide.

“[The current format] is not motivating... make it into a series of books and have space to write in it. Overall, it’s not an active document, without [Ofcom’s external evaluation consultant support] it would have been, ‘oh the drudgery!’, we wouldn’t have made any progress.” – Initiate project

Recommendations

Ref no.	Recommendation	Impact L/M/H	Resource L/M/H
5.1	Check to see if any additional hyperlinks can be added within/between documents	Medium	Low
5.2	Consider the addition of diagrams and/or additional worksheets to accompany key sections of the toolkit (for example, the planning the process)	Medium	High

Online libraries

Potential functionality improvements

External experts were mainly concerned with the functionality of the media literacy research library. Suggestions for improvement included:

- Make clearer that linked articles are open access or abstract only. This could simply be noted at the top of the page (in addition to the Google Search snippet)
- Ensure the ‘date published’ column is consistent and add filtering by month and year

- Add a simple webform (with essential details only) to enable easy submission
- Add clear contact details (for enquiries/more information)

One expert felt it was essential to keep submission and use as simple as possible if Ofcom wanted busy academics or practitioners to make use of the library.

Recommendations

Ref no.	Recommendation	Impact L/M/H	Resource L/M/H
5.3	Upgrade the media literacy research library functionality as outlined above	Medium	Low to Medium

Accessibility

There were some concerns about the accessibility of the toolkit in .pdf format

Ofcom completed all requisite accessibility checks prior to the publication of the toolkit. While several external experts complimented the .pdf format of the toolkit (for example, the ability to easily search for terms), one organisation using the toolkit – and who works with Disabled people – had concerns about the accessibility of the .pdf-only format.

Recommendations

Ref no.	Recommendation	Impact L/M/H	Resource L/M/H
5.4	Consider also publishing the toolkit in HTML format in line with Government Digital Service guidance	Low to Medium	High

Value and uptake

This section summarises feedback about the perceived value of the toolkit and potential challenges that might stop organisations from using it.

Anticipated value

Ofcom staff, external experts and users were asked about what they thought was the main potential value of the Ofcom evaluation toolkit for the target audiences.

The focus on media literacy is a unique selling point

Several participants highlighted that few published toolkits focus on evaluation of media literacy interventions, outcomes and activities (with the DCMS [Digital Inclusion Evaluation Toolkit](#) the closest example).

Most of the user organisations and experts valued the media literacy-focused examples in the body text and call-out boxes were highly valued because of this. However, several projects felt the toolkit could go further and provide additional fictional examples that represent different types of media literacy interventions, as well as provide more guidance around articulation of outcomes and data collection tool design through the creation of a bank of outcomes.

Ofcom's brand and reputation adds weight to the toolkit's messages

Several participants reflected on the value of Ofcom's brand behind the toolkit. Experts felt that organisations might be more likely to trust the information provided in the toolkit and that it has organisation's best interests at heart, due to Ofcom's 'friendlier' market position compared to government departments.

The publication of the toolkit on Ofcom's website might also make evaluation more accessible to organisations who might not otherwise be able to locate resources:

"I think the fact that it's from Ofcom – it's published on their website... [it's] well located. If you Google it, you find it. Or if you think of who might have a toolkit for you to use, I imagine Ofcom would come to mind." – External expert

"We weren't aware of any [evaluation] resources before." – External organisation

The toolkit marks a shift in how the sector should think about impact

Several Ofcom staff and experts highlighted that this toolkit marked a step in shifting provider perceptions of demonstrating impact away from 'reach' (as is common within the media literacy sector) and towards 'change' in individuals and communities.

In addition, the inclusion of suggested 'objective' measures to test awareness and knowledge (e.g., quizzes) was seen as an important resource in a sector that was perceived as over reliant on 'subjective' (i.e. self-reported) measures. Greater uptake of these measures is anticipated to lead to a better understanding of impact among organisations.

“[The toolkit highlights] the importance of having a range of methods and not overclaiming in various ways results they have, or overreliance on a particular type of methodology.” – External expert

Several experts also reflected that the framing, explanation and guidance of how to do evaluation from the start of an intervention adds to the wider narrative that evaluation is something that is beneficial from the start of an intervention onwards and rooted in learning and improving. The toolkit was also seen to support narratives around needs-led and outcome-focused project design.

Several organisations using the toolkit had already benefited from this:

“I think I will use it for future projects, think through more detail at the preparation stage, particularly with bids. I have a habit of diving into the detail of what are doing as opposed to what are we trying to effect” – Initiate project

“What we had been doing was any time we published a resource, we would do an initial feedback survey and small focus groups, but I’m not sure that was linked into impact. That’s what is really valuable about what [Ofcom] are creating and how to make [evaluation] better.” – External organisation

Recommendations

Ref no.	Recommendation	Impact L/M/H	Resource L/M/H
6.1	Build on the key ‘media literacy-specific’ value of the toolkit by adding in fictional examples of different type of interventions, as well as a supporting outcomes bank of measures and questions	High	High

Anticipated challenges

Ofcom staff, external experts and users were asked what challenges might stop organisations running media literacy interventions from using the toolkit, other than time and cost.

Organisations do not see the main benefits of evaluation are for them and their interventions

Most of the experts felt that the toolkit could do more to outline upfront the potential benefits of more rigorous evaluation for organisations and their interventions.

While this is outlined in the ‘why should I evaluate?’ section, experts reflected that the current ‘welcome’ focuses more on sector benefits first and foremost, rather than the individual benefits for organisations (e.g. risk management, learning and improvement etc). It was suggested that a more prominent summary of the key benefits might mitigate potential reasons to not evaluate.

“The first page [of the toolkit] is nice and friendly, but if I was struggling and it didn’t recognise that I’m unmotivated... It needs a, ‘what’s in it for me?’. It’s nice to hear that the media literacy world will benefit, but if I only have three staff...” – External expert

Another expert felt the toolkit might benefit from acknowledging the reality that organisations sometimes have to evaluate to fulfil funding requirements (as opposed to something they have

agency over). In addition, they felt it might also benefit from acknowledging why organisations do not evaluate (e.g. time, cost) and how the toolkit can help overcome these challenges.

Lack of awareness that the toolkit exists

Several experts raised concerns about to what extent organisations would be aware a media literacy specific toolkit exists. They approved of outreach efforts such as the launch event and accompanying workshop series, but also recommended that Ofcom proactively shares the toolkit with key stakeholders delivering media literacy-related work (e.g., schools, public authorities).

One of the attendees at the toolkit launch also suggested sharing the toolkit with media literacy funders, so they could in turn share the toolkit with their grantees.

One of the toolkit test session participants suggested that Ofcom could train/support network organisations (such as Media Literacy Ireland) to have ‘toolkit champions’ who could support uptake among members. This aligns with feedback from Initiate organisations, who spoke about how the toolkit had been easier to use with the external support and guidance provided to them by Ofcom.

Some organisations might still feel overwhelmed by the contents of the toolkit

Several Ofcom staff and external experts acknowledged that, given the target audience the toolkit is aimed at, there is a risk that the toolkit content still feels overwhelming to participants.

While overall feedback suggests that the toolkit is pitched at an appropriate level, feedback from users identifies several potential risks. This included the toolkit feeling too ‘heavy’ on first look due to a lack of section summaries or diagrams.

“I thought it was long and at first that was daunting. As I started to work through it, it was a very logical laid out document.” – user organisation

One organisation suggested the addition of short summaries at the start of each section and checklists at the end to help break down the content of the toolkit into more manageable steps.

Recommendations

Ref no.	Recommendation	Impact L/M/H	Resource L/M/H
6.2	More prominent outline of benefits of evaluations for organisations first and foremost at the start of the toolkit – and funders, other organisations and the sector second	High	Medium
6.3	Series of awareness raising events around key sections of the toolkit, as well as mapping and sharing with key network organisations and funders	High	High
6.4	Consider a “Train the Trainer/Champion” model to support network organisations and funders to help their members use the toolkit	High	High

Conclusions

The review aimed to identify key strands of feedback and produce recommendations to inform a second edition of the toolkit; contribute to Ofcom's understanding about 'what works' in media literacy evaluation; and explore barriers and mitigations to uptake within the sector.

Overall, the toolkit is regarded as well-structured, easy-to-follow and broadly appropriate in content for organisations new to or with limited experience of evaluation. The review identified six key areas for improvement to support the uptake, use and the potential impact of the toolkit:

- The current evaluation framework template does not fulfil its main purpose of supporting organisations to outline a plan for how to measure outcomes. In particular, organisations with no or limited experience of evaluation struggled to use it.
- The theory of change guidance could better support organisations to produce higher quality, more effective theories of change with some simple additions.
- The content around 'counterfactuals' is deemed too advanced and almost certainly infeasible for the target audience. Some simple additions to other methods in the toolkit would also make them easier to implement (e.g. how to do focus groups).
- The toolkit does not include guidance on how organisations can use evaluation data to learn, adapt and improve interventions, despite the toolkit's narrative that this is a major benefit for organisations.
- There are occasional examples of inconsistent language use between toolkit sections and templates, while top tips documents do not have definitions call-out boxes. Other minor edits across the toolkit and libraries could also improve its overall functionality.
- Continued outreach and support is required to ensure the toolkit reaches its target audience and is used.

It should be noted that all of the organisations using the toolkit were engaged in evaluation design at the time, so user feedback is concentrated on the first 'Preparing' section of the toolkit. Feedback from external experts was received on the other sections, accompanying documents and libraries. These sections were also included in the independent review.

Further user testing at a later date might therefore be beneficial to understand how the 'Doing' and 'Sharing' sections work in practice for the target audience, as well as the efficacy of any changes to the first section.

A1 Data summary

Review participants and data collection methods are summarised below.

Stakeholder	Method
Ofcom	Interview
Ofcom	Interview
Ofcom associate	Interview
Ofcom associate	Interview
Initiate project	Interview
Initiate project	Interview
Initiate project	Interview
Initiate project	Interview
Initiate project	Interview
External expert	Interview
External expert	Interview
Toolkit test session participant	Interview
Initiate project	Working session
Evaluation Working Group	Discussion group
Group (Ofcom toolkit launch – internal and external)	Event observation
Group (toolkit test session)	Event observation

A2 Table of recommendations

Ref no.	Recommendation	Marked priority	Impact L/M/H	Resource L/M/H
Structure				
2.1	Move the 'designing your evaluation questions' sub-section to the 'Preparing' section	Yes	Medium	Low
Content spotlights				
3.1	Simplify the counterfactual analysis section – removing Randomised Control Trial and control group content, and focusing instead on how to provide evidence of causality	Yes	High	Medium
3.2	Add checklists at the end of sections to support different uses of the toolkit		Medium	Medium
	Revisit the framing of the 'planning the process' section, with explicit explanation that it is a summary of considerations that should be revisited throughout the 'Planning' section	Yes	Medium	Low
3.4	Add an Ofcom definition and prompt for organisations to define what they mean by online media literacy in the context of their project		Medium	Low
3.5	Add short guidance in the theory of change section around: a) what types of outcomes organisations can expect to see in the immediate and longer-term – and how their contribution to these will vary; b) assumptions, to make full use of the theory of change process and its benefits; and c) other theory of change formats and uses	Yes	Medium	Medium
3.6	Redesign the evaluation framework. One option in line with feedback is to create a separate worksheet for the theory of change exercise (to simplify it into more manageable chunks) and then have a more traditional evaluation framework design	Yes	High	High
3.7	Add simple guidance around how to choose/prioritise which outcomes you are going to measure and why, as well as how to develop simple subjective and objective indicators	Yes	High	High
3.8	Add simple guidance on how to use the framework once it is complete	Yes	High	High

Ref no.	Recommendation	Marked priority	Impact L/M/H	Resource L/M/H
3.9	Additional completion support – either clearly linking to previous sections of the toolkit to signpost where content can be carried over, or additional content as a worked example (e.g., an animation)		Medium	Medium to High
3.10	Add into the main toolkit the importance of using both subjective and objective measures, and more detail in the accompanying document around designing quizzes	Yes	High	Medium
3.11	Link to guidance around how to make key data collection methods more accessible		High	Medium
3.12	Add more guidance on how to conduct discussion groups	Yes	High	Medium
3.13	Add links to free survey tools into the “top tips: surveys and quizzes” document	Yes	Medium	Low
3.14	Add short, ‘essential’ guidance around ethics, safeguarding and minimising bias to provide projects with more practical guidance		High	Medium
3.15	Consider Ofcom’s role in the broader development of more objective measures and materials for the media literacy sector		High	High
3.16	Develop the final section of the toolkit to provide guidance around how organisations can make immediate, practical use of monitoring and data to adapt their projects	Yes	High	High
Language and clarity				
4.1	Do not simplify toolkit language any further		n/a	n/a
4.2	Add missing terms and include as definitions call out boxes	Yes	Medium	Low
4.3	Ensure consistency between terms in the toolkit and evaluation framework template	Yes	Medium	Low
4.4	Add definitions call out boxes to ‘top tips’ documents	Yes	Medium	Low
Function and accessibility				
5.1	Check to see if any additional hyperlinks can be added within/between documents	Yes	Medium	Low
5.2	Consider the addition of diagrams and/or additional worksheets to accompany key sections of the toolkit (for example, the planning the process)		Medium	High
5.3	Upgrade the media literacy research library functionality as outlined above		Medium	Low to Medium

Ref no.	Recommendation	Marked priority	Impact L/M/H	Resource L/M/H
5.4	Consider also publishing the toolkit in HTML format in line with Government Digital Service guidance		Low to Medium	High
Value and uptake				
6.1	Build on the key 'media literacy-specific' value of the toolkit by adding in fictional examples of different type of interventions, as well as a supporting outcomes bank of measures and questions		High	High
6.2	More prominent outline of benefits of evaluations for organisations first and foremost at the start of the toolkit – and funders, other organisations and the sector second		High	Medium
6.3	Series of awareness raising events around key sections of the toolkit, as well as mapping and sharing with key network organisations and funders		High	High
6.4	Consider a “Train the Trainer/Champion” model to support network organisations and funders to help their members use the toolkit		High	High