

About Shout Out UK (SOUK)

Founded by Matteo Bergamini in 2015, SOUK was launched to fix the lack of political education in schools by bringing young people together to talk and learn about politics. Shout Out UK (SOUK) is now a multi-award winning education platform and creative social enterprise. Fusing education and tech with film production and animation ensures we create world-class programmes on Media & Political Literacy and high impact Democratic Engagement campaigns. Shout Out UK is on a mission to protect and amplify democracy by ensuring political and media literacy education is as widespread as possible, and available to all citizens in and out of school, regardless of their socio-economic background, ethnicity, or gender.

Introduction

The ongoing Covid-19 crisis has demonstrated two critical issues with UK politics - widespread depleting trust in democratic institutions and low levels of media literacy amongst the general public and young people. As the Bennett Institute for Public Policy found this year, the extent of global dissatisfaction with democracy is at its highest since records began ([Foa et al: 2020](#)). The [Edelman Trust Barometer](#) also reveals that in 2020 no major institution was viewed as both trustworthy and competent, and governments and the media were perceived to be neither. In addition, research by the [Reuters Institute from May 2020](#) determined that 48% of the British population “rated the government relatively trustworthy in late May, down from 67% six weeks earlier”. The report also finds significant evidence for growing concerns over the spread of false or misleading information about the virus. With the World Health Organisation (WHO) declaring an ‘[infodemic](#)’ around the accelerated spread of Covid-19 misinformation, it has become even more vital to introduce effective interventions that break the vicious cycle of misinformation and depleting trust towards democratic institutions. Media and political literacy education is one of the most effective solutions to this.

What is media literacy education

Being media literate is rooted in critically evaluating the content of the information one consumes, recognising facts from opinions and knowing where and how to fact-check information before sharing it online. These skills are vital for responsible and good citizenship - it ensures that individuals’ personal and political opinions are rooted in facts, as opposed to misinformed rhetoric and/or propaganda. Despite the significance and growing mass of evidence showcasing the positive effects of media literacy education, the subject is not actively taught as a part of the UK’s formal education system. Yet, they are the most straightforward way of promoting good digital citizenship and digital safety for young people when online.

Shout Out UK's (SOUK) efforts

Current media literacy provision at schools is limited to Relationships, Health & Sex Education (RHSE) lessons for secondary school students and Relationships Education (RE) lessons for primary school children, following the recommendations from the initial consultation response of the [Online Harms White Paper](#) from April 2019. In particular, the paper recommends the integration of the following elements into RHSE:

- How to stay safe online.
- Critically considering information and how people present themselves online.
- Rights and responsibilities.
- How data is gathered, shared and used.
- The benefits of rationing time spent online.

Despite the Department for Digital, Culture, Media and Sports (DCMS)'s recognition of the importance of integrating media literacy into young people's education, both the initial and the full consultation responses fail to address the under-provision of teachers' training around the topic. Anecdotal evidence, gathered by Shout Out UK staff during regular communications with teachers, suggests that formal and informal educations are experiencing a lack of confidence to address topics, such as misinformation, disinformation and mal-information with their pupils. They have also reported feeling uncomfortable and under-trained to discuss with their pupils topics, such as extremism and radicalisation, and the role of social media in this process. This has been listed as one of the main reasons why they seek the support of external providers to deliver this material. The limited teaching of media literacy education, however, can have detrimental consequences for young people's ability to identify misleading rhetoric and information, which could translate into depleting trust towards democratic institutions and politics as a whole.

In response to this, Shout Out UK developed and launched two programmes, which directly address the under-provision of media literacy education in secondary schools. In April 2020, we worked with **130 young people across the UK**, engaging them in our Digital, Media Literacy and Journalism programme. The programme was launched in partnership with Nesta and the Department for Digital, Culture and Sport as a part of Nesta's **Future News Fund programme**, which aimed to bridge the gap between individuals and local journalism, as well as to build their trust towards public interest news. We worked specifically with young people in areas with low electoral participation levels and obtained the following results:

Table 2: Impact of Media Literacy education

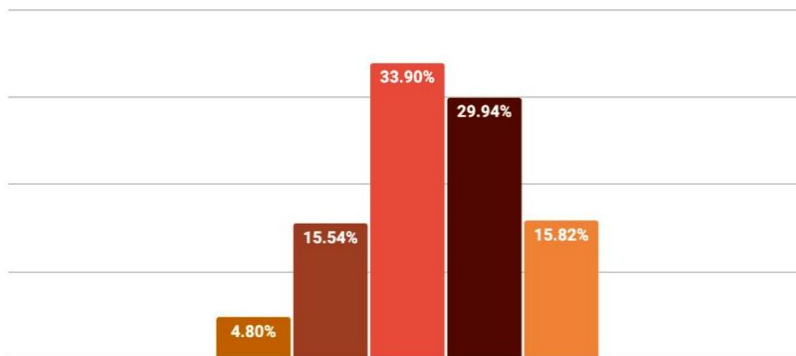
Statement/Question	Pre-project survey results	Post-project survey results
'I believe local journalists would listen to what I have to say'	33.1% of participants 'Strongly Agreed' and 'Agreed'	71.8% of participants 'Strongly Agreed' and 'Agreed'
'I feel confident to voice my opinions on the issues I care about'	36.2% of participants 'Strongly Agreed' and 'Agreed'	91.5% of participants 'Strongly Agreed' and 'Agreed'
'If I wasn't sure a story was true, and I wanted to share it, I'd fact check it first'	36.9% of participants 'Strongly Agreed' and 'Agreed'	89.4% of participants 'Strongly Agreed' and 'Agreed'

The pre and post-project survey results above provide us with an indication that media literacy education has been successful in meeting its expected outcomes - namely, to strengthen young people's understanding that not all information they encounter online is factual and to incite them to fact-check the articles they read online, both of which underpin the realm of responsible digital citizenship. We are also happy to report that the project helped increase young people's confidence to speak up on the issues they cared about, demonstrating that media literacy education's benefits stretch beyond critical thinking and ability to fact-check information. This is another element of good digital citizenship and online safety, especially when combined with a strengthened understanding of the impacts of misinformation and disinformation. This means that young people have learned to exercise their freedom of expression, while being aware of the dangerous repercussions of spreading misinformation online.

Furthermore, evidence from our Extremism and Media Literacy programme indicates that educational interventions are impactful for strengthening young people's confidence in recognising extremist rhetoric and conspiracy theories online. Below you can view the pre and post-programme results from a **90-minute-long online session on Extremism and Media Literacy with 356 secondary school students, aged 14-15**. Pre and post-programme results for two survey questions are exhibited below.

'I know how to identify a conspiracy theory'
Pre-programme results

■ Strongly Disagree ■ Disagree ■ Neutral ■ Agree ■ Strongly Agree



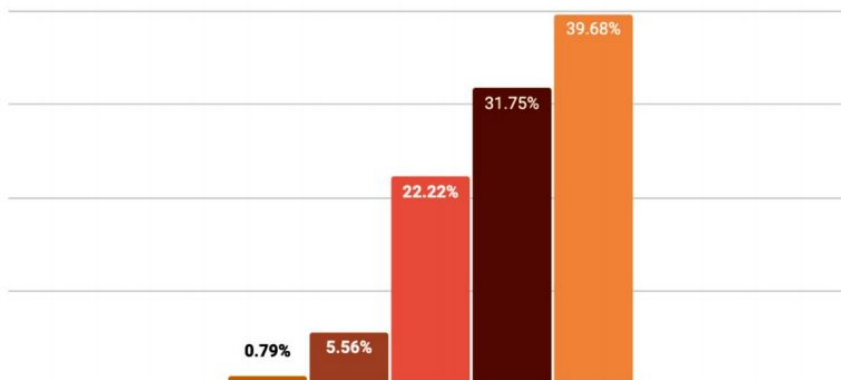
Before programme delivery:

45.76% Strongly Agreed and Agreed with the statement

20.34% Strongly Disagreed and Disagreed with the statement

'I know how to identify a conspiracy theory'
Post-programme results

■ Strongly Disagree ■ Disagree ■ Neutral ■ Agree ■ Strongly Agree



After programme delivery:

71.43% Strongly Agreed and Agreed with the statement

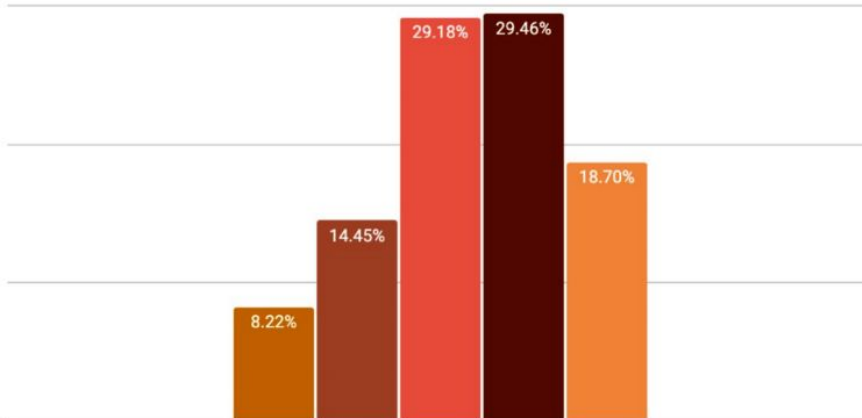
6.35% Strongly Disagreed and Disagreed with the statement

Pre and post-programme survey data indicate that the interventions had helped students improve their knowledge and confidence to identify conspiracy theories, with 71.43% of students agreeing and strongly agreeing with the statement 'I know how to identify a conspiracy theory' after participating in the programme, compared to 45.76% prior to the session. These results also demonstrate that educational interventions are a fruitful avenue for ensuring young people's digital safety.

Linked to this, the students were asked to rank the statement 'I can identify extremist views'. The results demonstrate that after learning about the dangers of extremism and how it has evolved in recent years in online spaces, young people display higher levels of confidence and ability to identify extremist views - 71.43% of students agreed and strongly agreed with the statement after participating, compared to 48.16% prior to participating. Like with the previous question, these results shed light over the possible interventions needed to strengthen underage children's safety online.

'I can identify extremist views' Pre-programme results

Strongly Disagree Disagree Neutral Agree Strongly Agree



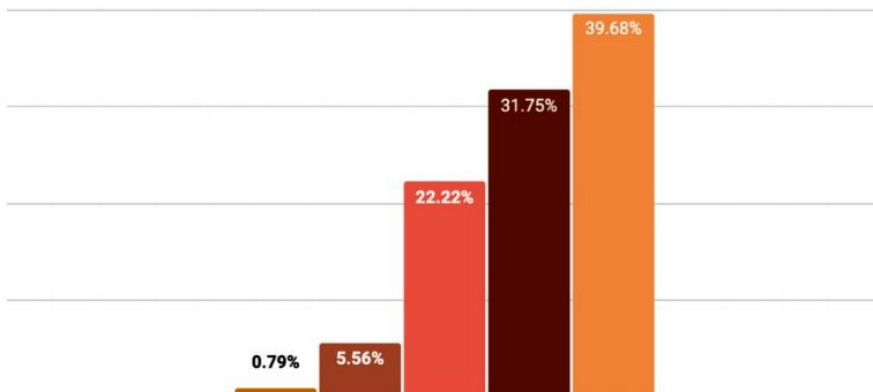
Before programme delivery:

48.16% Strongly Agreed and Agreed with the statement

22.65% Strongly Disagreed and Disagreed with the statement

'I know how to identify a conspiracy theory' Post-programme results

Strongly Disagree Disagree Neutral Agree Strongly Agree



After programme delivery:

71.43% Strongly Agreed and Agreed with the statement

6.35% Strongly Disagreed and Disagreed with the statement