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Be Media Smart: A national media literacy campaign for Ireland

Philip Russell, Deputy Librarian, Technological University of Dublin
Email: philip.russell@tudublin.ie

Keywords

information literacy; Ireland; media literacy

1 Introduction

'Be Media Smart' is an Irish public awareness campaign calling on people of all ages to 'Be Media Smart' and 'Stop, Think, and Check' that information they see, read or hear across any media platform is accurate and reliable. This national media literacy campaign was aimed at enhancing people's understanding of, and engagement with, media, while also empowering them with the skills to evaluate content across all platforms.

'Be Media Smart' is an initiative from Media Literacy Ireland (MLI), a network of volunteer members, facilitated by the Broadcasting Authority of Ireland, working together to promote media literacy in Ireland. There are currently around 120 members of MLI, representing a broad range of sectors and organisations including media (broadcast, news publishers), digital organisations, online providers, libraries, academia, and the community and voluntary sector. The formation of the network was facilitated by the Broadcasting Authority of Ireland (BAI).

The aim of MLI is to facilitate the sharing of media literacy resources, expertise and research, and to foster new partnership opportunities between a range of stakeholders. MLI was set up in response to a commitment made by the BAI (2016) in its Media Literacy Policy.

In December 2018, the Library Association of Ireland (LAI) was approached by MLI, with a view to exploring how the Association could partner and collaborate in terms of the development of media and information literacy skills. The LAI has been to the forefront in terms of advocating for the development of these key competencies in Ireland and the Association felt that becoming a member of MLI would be a great opportunity for library and information professionals to contribute to the work of MLI, particularly in terms of working together to promote critical thinking and combat the spread of fake news and misinformation / disinformation.

In January 2019, the LAI became an official member of MLI and is now represented on the Steering Group by Philip Cohen, former President of the LAI and on the Engagement and Participation Group of the MLI by Philip Russell, Convenor of the LAI Literacies Committee.

2 The Campaign

'Be Media Smart' was developed over a short period of time in early 2019 in response to a call from the European Union for MLI members to contribute to two European media literacy weeks in March 2019 – the European Media Literacy Week organised by the European Commission (2019) and the All-Digital Week organised by the All-Digital Network (2019).

After a brief planning period and to coincide with these events, MLI launched the national media literacy campaign for Ireland: 'Be Media Smart' which ran from 18 March until 7 April. The campaign concept is based on the idea that in the same way that there are ways to check the

provenance of our food, there are ways to check the provenance of our information. The campaign was to be delivered via TV, radio, social media and press – all signposting the consumer to a dedicated website (Media Literacy Ireland, 2019) which provided advice in the form of top tips and resources from partners in Ireland and abroad.

RTE, Ireland's national television and radio broadcaster, took responsibility for the creative brief and oversaw the production of all of TV, radio and social media assets and the press advertisement. On the 17th March, a national TV and radio advertising campaign was launched at a major Irish sporting event on St Patrick's Day, organised by TG4 (Ireland's Irish language television channel). The TV advertising campaign continued until 7th April with TV adverts broadcast on RTE, TG4, Sky, Virgin Media Television and Community Television – all for free (Media Literacy Ireland, 2019). The advert was also reversioned in the Irish language by TG4. RTE also created two different radio adverts, which TG4 also reversioned. All four of these radio adverts were made freely available to MLI members and distributed across almost every national, local and community radio station in the country.

Supporting this was a nationwide PR and media campaign coordinated by RTE and NewsBrands Ireland which consisted of a campaign newspaper advert made available to all national and local newspapers. There was also an extensive social media campaign involving a wide range of MLI members – social and digital assets created by RTE were used and further support was offered by free advert credit from Facebook, Google and Twitter for all non-profit members of MLI.

The campaign was further promoted through a lot of editorial coverage on TV, radio and press – with several opinion pieces, longer reads and reports in major national daily newspapers and online as well as MLI member blogs. 'Be Media Smart' was also referenced or promoted across a range of national and international events during and since the campaign.

A simple campaign website was available on desktop computers and mobile devices and provided easy-to-understand information for the consumer about how to 'Stop, Think and Check' the veracity of their information. The website had good traffic with over 15,000 page views of the 'Be Media Smart' website in the first month or so of the initiative.

All library sectors (public, schools, academic and special, government, health) throughout Ireland supported the initiative through a 'Be Media Smart' poster (distributed via the Library Association of Ireland network) in addition to consumer advice, social media channels and various library websites. Professional networks and other distribution lists were also leveraged to promote details of this countrywide campaign.

3 Lessons learned / future plans

At an overall level the 'Be Media Smart' campaign was a huge success, raising awareness of media and information literacy extensively at national level, with the campaign demonstrating collaboration at its finest. Every MLI organisation supported the campaign in kind or by funding specific elements. The campaign aired on all major networks in Ireland in both languages on TV, radio and in print press. The estimated reach of the radio adverts was over 2 million people with approximately 500,000 people viewing the TV adverts at least once. The campaign also had a significant social media presence (although difficult to quantify due to the challenge of getting comparable statistical information from so many partners). About 30–40 libraries across multiple sectors supported the campaign which highlighted the fundamental role that libraries have to play in the development of these multi-literacy skills and competencies.

Many lessons were learned during this campaign which will help to inform any future initiatives. These include the need for more planning time for any subsequent campaign – the time frame

of 8–10 weeks for 'Be Media Smart' was particularly tight (general consensus is that 6–9 months is required for a campaign of this magnitude); this would include earlier coordination with some of the key partners including print publications and libraries. The social media campaign was very much done on an ad hoc basis, with the need for more coordination around social media activity highlighted. In addition, feedback from the campaign emphasised the need to make available a 'Be Media Smart app' which could be downloaded for use on iOS/Android devices. Considerations for any future campaign also included the fundamental need to have in place an evaluation framework and data capture mechanism to capture key outputs and to measure success and impact. The development of a 'campaign toolkit' to include resources, content and pre-recorded interviews has also been cited as a future requirement, as was the need to identify more spokespeople to represent the campaign from a wider range of sectors and locations.

The campaign has attracted significant attention at national and international level, particularly in terms of using the concept and resources; members of MLI will continue to promote 'Be Media Smart', with the assets and content available to be shared at a wider level.

The joined-up, cross-sector approach has been crucial to the success of 'Be Media Smart', and MLI will continue to focus on building capacity, networking and engagement. So much has been achieved by working together and connected efforts will help to expand awareness and put media and information literacy firmly on the Irish Government policy agenda.

'Be Media Smart' was a significant national campaign and so important at a time when fake news and disinformation provide disruption nationally and globally; media and information literacy skills are now fundamental attributes for every Irish citizen. Planning has already commenced for the next iteration of 'Be Media Smart' which is scheduled to launch in Spring 2020.



Figure 1: Philip Russell, Deputy Librarian, Technological University of Dublin (Tallaght campus) spoke to UNESCO at their Global Media and Information Literacy Feature Conference in Gothenburg on 25 September about Ireland's 'Be Media Smart' campaign. copyright © Philip Russell Licenced under CC BY-ND 4.0.

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