Tappan Vickery, Senior Director of Programming Headcount in the USA.
"Youth engagement: Connecting culture to democracy". (See accompanying slides).

It is essential to identify the issues important to young people in order to connect them to democracy. Not understanding the decision-making process on an issue that they care about, or not knowing how they themselves can effect change, means they face an uphill battle. Cultural events offer young people entry points into the democratic process.

Headcount uses the power of music to register voters and to promote participation in democracy" (slide 2). It was founded by a musician and a fan in 2004. The Bush v Gore election in 2000 had been decided dubiously by a very small margin with antiquated technology. It was a huge cultural moment, similar to Brexit, when the entire country was astonished at the fragility of democracy. Headcount was born out of that moment. The 'fan' was Andy Bernstein, executive director of Headcount and the musician was his friend Mark Brownstein, bass player for a band called the 'Disco Biscuits.' They and their friends realised that, if everyone at their small club show had voted, the 2000 election could have had a different outcome. From this inspirational moment, others like Bob Weir from the 'Grateful Dead,' Dave Matthews and Eddie Vedder from 'Pearl Jam' became active. Other artists also agreed they had to talk to their fans and get them out to vote. Headcount is now almost 20 years old, during which time it has registered over a million voters and turned out many more millions to vote. Through reaching the fans of pop musicians like Ariana Grande, Harry Styles, Billy Eilish and some rock'n'roll legends, Headcount has become culturally relevant.

Headcount rests on three programmatic pillars (slide 3). It initially focused on volunteerism and voter registration but has since refined its approach. It registers voters and educates them on how and when to vote, what the processes are and then gets them out to vote. The second pillar is civic engagement. *The most fundamental premise of democracy is people talking to each other about their community and making decisions about policies and issues that matter to them.* This leads to informed voting. So, young volunteers are trained to strike up conversation in an informal way at cultural events, which engage with people's real interests. (For example, "What's your favourite album by this artist?") Then you can gradually move to voting issues. There is no point preaching to the converted. "Relational organizing," or spreading the message via friends and social media is also part of civic engagement. This is effective, can be fun, and sometimes can be incentivised by prizes (e.g. a guitar or concert tickets).

The third, and essential, pillar is *democracy protection* work. Those in power will make it harder for people to vote if they feel threatened. Headcount works at the intersection of culture and democracy (slide 4), starting at concerts, but also in sports, on Broadway, anywhere where people go for a cultural experience. Cultural and sporting events often lower our guard and make us open to conversations that we are not normally open to. Tactics are continuously evolving. When Headcount started, there was no Facebook, people were talking to each other face to face. The evolution of both social media and other influencer culture has changed the methods of working. Now people are brought into a digital ecosystem and reached via social media. One example was Headcount's

campaign to check registration status using the prize of a trip to stay at the special Beetlejuice suite, linked to the famous Broadway musical. It went viral with every 'theatre kid' in America, gave the musical massive exposure and helped the social media.

Headcount targets voters aged 18 to 29, who traditionally identify overwhelmingly as independent (slide 5). Young voters are turned off by the extreme partisanship in the US. While 9/11 is a defining moment for some generations, the present generation of young voters sees school shootings, feeling unsafe in class, and safety drills as their defining moments. Consequently, they sense dishonesty or hypocrisy in the political process when things do not change and they are unable to identify with parties that have not fulfilled their promises. The slow rate of change is overwhelmingly prohibiting young people from engaging in the democratic process. Local and state elections, where change is faster, are in some ways more significant. Headcount wants to accelerate change by working with artists, creators, brands, technology partners, non-profit organisations, grassroots community partners and volunteers (slide 5). One example of a brand partner is de Angelica guitars, which Bob Weir of the 'Grateful Dead' will play, sign a guitar at a huge concert, and then raffle it off. That kind of thing brings in a lot of funds in addition to registering voters.

Headcount has over 125 team leaders around the US, and 60,000 grassroots volunteers (Slides 6-8). Most volunteer because they care about democracy and want to make a difference, which makes them feel empowered. The team leaders get a small stipend to cover their expenses but are otherwise unpaid volunteers.

Headcount concentrates on 18- to 29-year-olds (slide 9) because they vote at a lower rate and drop off more quickly, so elections do not represent the diversity of America. Elected officials do not talk to young voters, who do not make donations, and whose turnout is low. The demographic make-up of the 2020 voters shows clearly how diverse young voters are (slide 10). Traditional determinants like family, race or class are shifting because the youth voting bloc is incredibly diverse compared to the past and has a very different outlook on what they want to see in the World.

Getting a young person's voter registration is not the end of the process. Headcount will talk to young people seven times before an Election Day, often using the voices of the artists that first attracted them (slide 11). Ariana Grande, Billy Eilish or Harry Styles are examples. Harry Styles famously said he "would vote with kindness," so a whole campaign and messaging kit is based on that. Even so, a lot of work still has to go into getting these voters out. Headcount receives support from the media because it works with really exciting rock stars, and the resulting press coverage helps to create a cultural movement (slide 12). Last year, Headcount registered just over 200,000 voters, had the second highest voter turnout of any organisation that is not just a tech tool organisation, and won several awards. So, it has added something essentially different to the sphere of voter engagement. On a wider scale (slide 13) it is worth stressing in the US the difference between general turnout (see pink dot) and voter registration (see orange dot). In the US, voters need to check registration and be aware that they are voters, but the act of registering makes a huge difference to voter turnout.

Headcount is paying a lot of attention to the global trend towards authoritarianism (slide 15). American democracy reflects this trend, especially as it is based on states with varying rules and many social, situational, and systemic barriers to voting (slide 16). In the US, nobody asks you to register to vote, which is a principal reason why the young do not vote. The lack of civic education in schools, the lack of childcare, the difficulty of getting to the polling station, the slowness of change – all lead to a lack of trust in the process and a reluctance to vote. Headcount tries to remedy this on a policy level through government outreach and voter education, making young people aware that the system can keep you down and out of power. By getting the young to vote, Headcount has given them a voice and sense of empowerment. It must be stressed, however, that Headcount is

non-partisan. It does not tell people *how* to vote, it teaches them about their power to influence change.

Matteo Bergamini – Founder and CEO of Shout Out UK - "U-Turning Apathy" (See accompanying slides)

Shout Out UK is a social enterprise aimed at engaging and involving young people in politics through a political and media literacy programme in secondary schools and colleges. Political literacy means an understanding of how our democracy works at a local, regional, devolved and national level. Sadly, it is not part of the National Curriculum. Media literacy is understanding how to analyse information critically and how to recognise misinformation, disinformation and mal-information. Brexit and Coronavirus were steeped in misinformation, making it difficult for people to know what was happening. A properly functioning democracy depends on people understanding how it works and how to analyse information critically and, thereby, make effective voting decisions.

Shout Out UK used a small amount of funding to work with Sheffield University to survey 3000 teachers and 2000 parents across England to analyse their perceptions around politics and the teaching of political literacy. The results and subsequent report are available (*matteo@shoutoutuk.org*). Strikingly, whilst over 50% of teachers felt they should have a role to play in educating young people about politics, less than 1% felt they had the knowledge, skills and tools to do so.

It is a myth that young people do not care about politics. Protests following the tuition fees hike, or the Greta Thunberg movement, amongst other examples, prove that young people do care about politics. But there is a disconnect between the structures that we call "politics" and which formulate our lives and the issues about which young people care deeply. Often this disconnect engenders direct action but does not encourage voting or writing to an MP. As there is no real political education in schools, young people rely on the media which generally only covers politics and politicians when something has gone wrong. It is the role of the media to hold powerful people to account but a concentration on this creates a negativity around the political process and discourages young people's participation. They do not want to be involved in something which they see as sleazy and corrupt. *But we do not have a choice about being involved in politics if we want to have control over our own lives.*

Media literacy is one of the main aims of Shout Out, as this is vital if we want to understand, for example, how Andrew Tate's methods work, or the rhetoric around migration or Brexit. When knowledge is limited, simplicity works by making people feel good because the blame is levelled at others, even when the simplistic argument is not true. Clearly this has an appeal to those who feel downtrodden by the system. Having delivered to over 1000 schools across all four British nations, Shout Out sees a clear rise in young people's understanding of the link between politics and the things they care deeply about.

Quoting Matteo, "Since 2020 we have, when possible, run a London Voter Registration Week, where we work along with about 150 coalition partners and other organisations. We have reached about 1.5 million individuals across the week, including online, in-person and educational institutions. Young people will register to vote, but it is only through education that we can keep them engaged. We also work with influencers from a variety of different demographics to find different ways of successfully spreading the message. This is primarily on Tik Tok, which tends to block posts which talk about democracy in general.

Since January we have co-designed and co-delivered a multi-pronged campaign for greater awareness of Voter ID and eventual changes to postal voting. In particular, we focused on EU communities which are uniquely impacted by the changes. So far, the campaign has drawn in over 200,00 coalition partners across London with the voter ID animation attracting about 16,000 views. Details of photo ID requirements have been translated into the top 10 community languages, with more planned. We now have an estimated 391,000 engagement on social media.

The gold standard for a successful campaign is co-design and co-delivery, using a variety of media. Participants who are having fun forget that they are talking about politics until they are reminded at the end of the session. Regular and sustained contact throughout school term time ensures growth and continued engagement. For young people, it is important to be impartial and non-election specific when dealing with those who are less engaged in society but who have the greatest needs. Social media companies can be both a barrier and a boost. Some block us every time whilst others really welcome our messaging and support our campaigns. Our ultimate message is *No Vote means No Voice.*"

Question & Answers

Question: How do you deal with the problem of a two-party state? We want to change to PR. Is there any chance of that in the US? Or is there another way of changing politics?

Answer: Tappan Vickery: There is an interesting book, called *How democracy dies*. It sets out that the two-party system should take care of the task of keeping out the political extremes. If it does not do so, then the system will fail. When smaller extreme parties are forming, it suggests that the democratic (two party) system is failing. The book focuses a lot on the Trump era, but is designed to be global in its outlook, as opposed to parochial to US politics. Headcount goes out of its way to present as a neutral, e.g. on encouraging young people to vote; whereby even the act of promoting popular participation in politics and democracy, through voting may be portrayed, as "progressive."

Question: How do you deal with the fact that there will be people that see a two-party system get disenfranchised with that, and that in and of itself, leads them towards more extremes?

Tappan Vickery: We find that to cut through the partisanship of bi-partite dogmas, local elections are the best shot. They provide an opportunity to focus young peoples' attentions on what they can practically do or support to see small incremental changes brought to their local communities.

Question: When it comes to big issues, like climate change, how do you deal not just with general negativity, but with the level beyond that which is despair with the system? And how do you get people to be interested in voting within the system that they do not feel part of?

Answer: Femi Oluwole: One of the sources of a sense of despair about the gravity of political challenges is the way they are often portrayed in the media and social media. How do we combat the large amount of misinformation disseminated, via social media, when that is their main source of "news?"

Answer: Tappan Vickery: The concept of despair is prevalent among young voters across the US. There is a lot of positive power, many public demonstrations, and concentration on finding pathways to use their voice, both in voting and to elevate their stories and have them be the leaders and the storytellers of the movement for change. These are the essential elements to overcoming those moments of despair. When the people in power do not represent you, they do not have your story. They do not look like you. They' are not in your age range. You feel really far away from them. Putting storytellers in the front of the movement that do connect with young voters, whether they are elected officials or not, can really make change. For example, a man was elected last year to the US House of Representatives. He was on the *March For Our Lives* youngster that came out of 2018, when there was a school shooting. He is the youngest person ever to be elected.

Environmental campaigning is really hard. We really like to talk about it through a social justice perspective, because there is incremental change that you can make to groundwater, and such like; poor communities get the worst of the environment; e.g. the bad groundwater, bad air, so public health is worse. You can make incremental changes that become visible in a shorter period of time.

Answer: Daphne Giachero (3million): One of the key principles to try to pass on to others is to challenge the idea that for individuals to take action, they first need to feel hopeful, and then they will take action. In community organisations, often hope comes from having acted and seeing the difference that you made. I worked with a lot of schools and colleges in my previous role as a community organiser at Citizens UK. One of the things we do with young people is to really get them to think about their local area and something they want to change. Thus, they will say things like, "Oh, our local park is really unsafe, it gets really dark at night and we've been mugged many times in our local park. So we want to install lighting in our local park" or "We are worried about affordable housing, our parents can't afford to stay in the place where we live" or whatever else it might be. It is not easy, even if you are just talking about mounting local, let alone national level campaigns.

Answer: Matteo Bergamini: The majority of young people in the UK also get most of their information from social media. We often forget that it is often legacy media articles and things that get shared on to socials, as well as influencers and disinformation actors. Some of that legacy media content does trickle through. One of the most important things that we can offer young people is critical thinking and media literacy. We need to look at what we consume in that same light as we need to keep up to date with how misinformation is being utilised to influence society. We need to know what to look out for, and we need to be critical about what we take in.

Answer: Femi Oluwule: Deep fakes are currently the most challenging and dangerous form of disinformation on social media; recent examples include videos posted on-line of Obama, Trump and Biden. Artificial intelligence is used to recreate the voices to make them sound like the person being imitated, with harmful messages.

Answer: Tappan Vickery: If you can curate YouTube channels, that are trusted sources, as a way to get media, maybe for your class, here are two things to follow on YouTube: (i) a three-minute snippet, can actually be really helpful for that media literacy point, because they cannot read an article; (ii) youngsters tend not to have the patience or inclination to read articles; even short two-page ones. You, finding and vetting a trusted source, then producing it in a way that your contemporaries can follow rather than expecting them to finding it themselves, has proved a really effective way of getting young people to engage.

Question: In terms of numbers, how have you done in the reach of your campaign? How many people have you registered to vote? What metrics have you in the success of getting or turning out? How do you know what you have achieved?

Answer: Tappan Vickery: In the US, every State maintains a 'voter file'. If you are a registered voter, that is public information. Within that 'voter file', you can find out if people have turned out to vote. We match everyone with whom we engage (however brought into our ambit) with the information on the 'voter file'.

- After the elections, we get the match. For example, in 2020, 78% of our community voted, we anticipate the number will be lower for the midterm elections and 2022. It always is because it was not presidential. We measure our effectiveness based on the actual voter turnout.
- Then we also take a subset of voter registrations; people that we registered and brought in. We will also look at what is 'role changing', for instance, if they were registering to vote for the first time, if, and when, they had previously voted or had not voted ever.
- Modelling to see what their voter propensity was. So, for example, if our voters turnout is at about 20% that scores an estimated (higher or lower) voter propensity. We then add a layer,

based on their demographic information. It tells us where we need to do more, to be more effective.

Answer: Matteo Bergamini: We use a number of methods for educational programmes. We use a 'distance travelled' method. This means surveys and tests prior to programmes and then surveys and tests afterwards. For voter registration, we obviously look at things like reach, using platforms like Brand 24, to track engagements of actual hard registration numbers. The Cabinet Office is less forthcoming with the statistics. We use methodologies for looking at the number of registrations in the week prior to activities, and if we know that there is no campaign going on the week after, look at the difference in terms of reach and engagement. Also, how many people registered between the week where there was not any activity in the week and calculate that. So, for example, for what was a one-week campaign in 2021, we managed to see a 23% increase in youth registrations from the week prior, which actually dropped in terms of young people registering around the country, aside from the areas that we were in, which actually saw a dramatic increase. There are a series of analyses that go into it. You can see the more detailed report that the 'local authorities impact evaluation team' did on our website.

Question: Based on your work do you have any thoughts on how best to reach and engage young people about Europe and Brexit?

Answer: Tappan Vickery: A lot of people do not realise that you can talk about things like economic security to young voters. From my perspective, and the short time that I have been in the UK recently, the economic insecurity is really astounding, and is changing the way people are living their lives. The more that you connect the dots about the impact of those changes and everyday experience, the better off you are going to be. The more you grandstand and use big talking points that make everybody sound smart, the farther away young voters are going to get. So that is my recommendation, given my understanding of the affairs.

Answer: Femi Oluwule: During the campaign years (2016-19), I would use the phrase 'Next Steps', as young people only really care about *their* next steps. If they are at GCSE, the next steps are A-Levels plus, at the same time, applying for university or jobs, and then jobs. The question posed is "how will this affect my ability to get to the next step" and so on? An example - right now, via Brexit, we have lost the ability to work (or study) in 31 countries across Europe. Linking the power of a vote to making your life easier, and especially with the cost of living crisis, is resonating with the over-21s on Tik Tok.

Answer: Matteo Bergamini: To sum up, it is about understanding and education. You do not care about something you do not ever understand. And we unfortunately, especially when it comes to Europe and the European Union, we have had over 30 years of specific media papers attacking and blaming everything on that organisation that they possibly could. There was no accurate, fact-based counter narrative. To remove that negativity, we must understand and explain the facts and what has been lost, what the opportunities there are, etc, and do it in a way that is simplistic and relates to them is key.

Question: How much funding has this taken in the US? Do we need a national campaign for the UK to engage young people with voting with large funding?

Answer: Tappan Vickery: Per campaign, we reckon on $10 for each in-person presence for voter registration and $5 for other engagement. A digital campaign should be $1 and engagement and $2 of it on registration. This is how we have scaled up over the past four years. When Headcount got started, we actually had the lowest cost per registration, but that was all grassroots campaigning based on volunteers, without a digital campaign. To achieve a digital infrastructure that supports

gamification and other components and a very robust targeted 'get-out-the-vote programme' that includes text messaging, not just email, we have had our budget increased fourfold. Today, we are looking at US$ 4.5 million to run a national campaign. Whereas up until that point, when we were very grassroots oriented, we were running for under US$ 2 million.

Answer: Matteo Bergamini: The way that we fund campaigns in the UK needs to change, because it does not promote collaboration, it promotes competition, and that is a heavy problem. Until that changes, we can keep funding massive national campaigns, and we do, but they have little impact because they speak too often to the choir. They are speaking to the priests. When it comes to politics, we are starting from an even lower baseline of education. We need to have a national campaign, which would be ideal in the future. But we need to sort out the issues within the sector first and look at what already exists. Avoid reinvention of the wheel. Which organisations can do what? Once a national campaign is done, that is not over. How can we strengthen and amplify our democracy? We need that long-term strategy. Not just dumping money in national campaign, because it just will not work.

Answer: Tappan Vickery: To cut down on duplication, in the US, an organisation was founded, that now goes under the name, "State Voices". They went out and they secured massive amounts of money. And then went out and organised all of the small state voices, using an interlinked IT network. It meant that different local groups were not calling on the same houses multiple times and enabled them all to be more effective and efficient, e.g. on voter registration.

Question: What can I do as an academic, but also, how can those of us who do want to work with young people? How can we? How can we help you guys? What can we do actively to support you? Do you have volunteering opportunities?

Answer: Matteo Bergamini: If anybody wants to get involved in volunteering, of course, Shout Out UK would love to hear from you.

Question: Do you have any arrangements with the British Youth Council and the UK Youth Parliament?

Answer: Matteo Bergamini: We did have some engagement with the British Youth Council until the end of March. We are running the 'youth policy development group' for the DCMS that was also funding the UK Youth Parliament. Hence, we were engaging with them in that respect. Although that funding has now ceased for the youth policy development group. The young people that get involved in the UK Youth Parliament tend to be self-selected and people who are hyper-engaged already. Our target demographic is those not currently engaged politically, so they are different audiences.

Participants

Femi Oluwole (Chair)

Matteo Bergamini (Speaker)

Tappan Vickery (Speaker)

Attendees

Alex Gunter - UKPEN

Art O'Mahony - YEM

Beth Linton – Open Britain Berkshire and Reading

Charlie Marsh - YEM

Daphne Giachero – the3million

Fiona Godfrey – British in Europe

Fiona Wishlade Glasgow Loves EU

Hector McGillivray

Helen Johnston - Bremain in Spain

Irina von Wiese

Jane Golding – British in Europe

John Gaskell – Grassroots for Europe

John R Moore – Pro Europa

Josh Thory-Rao – Bylines Network

Juliet Lodge – Women in Europe

Lisa Burton – Bremain in Spain

Magdalena Williams – European Movement

Mark Johnston -

Rosemary A Watt - GlasgowLovesEU

Ray Kirtley

Richard Morris – European Movement

Roger Wilson - Compass

Sharon Leclercq-Spooner – Pro Europa

Yvonne Wancke – European Movement

Team: Caroline Kuipers, Jo Pye, Colin Gordon, Lilian McCobb, Tony McCobb, Helen Grogan

Jonathan Harris

Next Meeting Round Table # 36 – May 9th, 2023

Time: May 9, 2023 17:00 London
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