

Preface

The Switching Tracker study has been run by Critical Research on behalf of Ofcom.

The Switching Tracker is Ofcom's key data source on switching levels, attitudes and experiences across the communications markets (fixed, mobile, fixed broadband and multi-channel/Pay TV). Since 2010 Ofcom has run this tracking study annually among UK adults (screening for decision makers in each market) to measure participation levels, switching incidence and ease of switching in each market.

Up to and including 2014, this study was conducted by telephone, using random digit dialling to mobile and landline numbers. In 2015 the fieldwork was shared between telephone interviewing and face-to-face interviewing. From 2016 to 2019 all of the fieldwork was conducted face-to-face in home using CAPI (Computer Assisted Personal Interviewing).

In 2020 Ofcom made the decision to suspend all face-to-face fieldwork due to the Covid-19 pandemic and a change in methodology was required. The interviewing was conducted through a mix of post-to-web, post-to-phone and online panels. A letter was sent to a sample of UK households inviting one member of the household who has responsibility for at least some communications services to complete the survey online or by telephone, depending on their preference. Those interviewed online following a postal invitation were asked for referrals to friends or family members without access to the internet. Once the post-to-online and post-to-phone interviewing was complete, some additional interviews were conducted using online panels in order to balance the overall sample and ensure that the sample was nationally representative of the UK population.

Some changes were made to the questionnaire from 2019 in order to improve the flow of the interview, to remove questions that were no longer useful and collect information related to developments in particular sectors. The questionnaire was trialled both online and via post in 2020 to ensure it was fit for purpose and to assess how the samples achieved through these methods might differ from the face-to-face sample previously used. The differences observed between these samples are discussed in the weighting section below.

Critical Research interviewed 3,128 adults aged 16+ in the UK across the different survey methods. Interviews were carried out through the initial online pilot using a panel in June 2020. The final post-to-online, post-to-phone and online panel interviews were completed in November 2020.

As in previous years, questions were asked up front to establish household ownership of landline, fixed broadband, TV service and mobile. For each service, it was established whether the respondent was the decision maker – with detailed questions asked for each market sector that the respondent was the decision maker for, covering both individual/ standalone services and services that are part of a package/ bundle.

The 2020 survey continued with the approach to defining bundles or packages of services that had been introduced in the 2018 survey. Under this approach the detailed questions for decision makers only referred to bundled services if this matched how the respondent regarded their services. The detailed questions otherwise referred to the individual services if this is how they were regarded by the respondent.

To achieve this, the survey first established which provider was used for each of the services (within landline, fixed broadband, TV service and mobile) that the respondent was the decision maker for. Those using the same provider for two or more of these four services were asked to say whether they regard these services to be a package of services or individual services. Those with

three or four services from the same provider could respond that they regarded some but not all services to be a package of services, in which case a further question then established which services were regarded as a package and which were regarded as individual services.

The data tables show both definitions for bundled services: 'Simple bundle' where the same provider is used for more than one of the services and 'Regard bundle' where the decision maker regards services from the same provider to be a package of services rather than individual services. More details are shown on an example on the following page.

The following example refers to weighted data shown in the data tables (please note that figures reported below may not add to 100% due to rounding).

Of the 986 decision makers for landline (see Q3), 838 use their landline provider for any other services (see Q7A/Q7B), so the remaining 148 landline decision makers do not use their landline provider for any other services. The cross-break labelled LANDLINE – SIMPLE shows 148 as STANDALONE and 838 as SIMPLE BUNDLE.

Those using their landline provider for any other services are asked Q8A or (if they have two pairs of bundles) Q8B to establish whether they regard these services to be a package of services or individual services. Of the 838 who use their landline for any other services, 732 regard these as a package of services (see Q9A/Q9B), with the remaining 106 decision makers consider landline to be a standalone service. Adding these 106 to the 148 who don't use their landline provider for any other services, the total number of decision makers who regard landline to be a standalone service is therefore 254. The cross-break labelled LANDLINE – REGARD shows 254 as STANDALONE and 732 as REGARD BUNDLE.

Please note – as in 2018 and 2019, the data tables have some gaps in the sequence of table numbers shown for the service-specific questions from Q11. No questions are missing. The gaps in the sequence are because the questions that don't apply for a particular service (e.g. apply to landline only) are skipped for other services and the table numbers also skip as a result.

Updates that were introduced to the survey since 2018 also accommodated two separate pairs of packages or bundles: where one provider was used for two of the four possible services and a second provider was used for the other two services. In previous surveys, decision makers with two pairs of bundled services would have been asked to respond about the main package / the one their household spends more on each month. With this updated approach since the 2019 survey, 27 of the 3,128 interviews conducted in 2020 were with decision makers with two pairs of services from two different providers.

Analysis was conducted by each total market i.e. fixed line, mobile, fixed broadband, digital TV, allowing comparisons to be made between those who consider the service to be standalone and those who consider the service to be part of a package or bundle. During analysis, weighting was applied for each market section (i.e. each of the above markets) of the survey using profiles from Ofcom's Technology Tracker Survey.

Details of the sample design, research methodology, and weighting procedures are outlined in this document. A note on statistical reliability is also included.

Sample Design

For the postal approach, samples were drawn using the Royal Mail Postcode Address File (PAF) containing a mix of a random sample of residential addresses across the UK, as well as a sample of addresses targeting areas with a higher incidence of older adults and households in the DE socio-economic group, in order to provide improved coverage of non-internet households.

A letter was sent to each selected address, inviting an adult in the household to take part in the survey. Reminder letters were sent to non-responders two weeks after the initial invitation.

Weighting

Historically, Switching Tracker data has been weighted to the profile for each market sector using target rim weights for age, gender and socio-economic group (SEG). Due to the change of method in 2020, we needed to consider whether additional changes to the weighting were needed.

A couple of issues arose on the initial pilot using an online panel, a high incidence of those moving home in the last 12 months (apparent from the number claiming to have changed supplier when moving, as moving per se was not covered), and low claimed incidence of having a TV service. The latter was believed to be at least partly due to underclaiming among those without a paid-for TV service. Two changes were made to the questionnaire, adding a question on moving, and reinforcing the need to include free TV as well as pay TV. A new question, Q37 had been included from the start, to ensure attitudes to technology suppliers were consistent across the two types of sample.

The demographic target weights were reviewed, and tweaked slightly, to bring these more in line with overall UK demographics – since the Switching Tracker started in 2010 increases in mobile ownership in particular has meant the audience is more universal. We next looked at responses to the attitudinal statements at Q37, to see whether these differed between the postal and panel samples. Weighting to correct for differences in responses to the statements was tried but not used, as it had no impact on the results and reduced the Effective Sample Size/ ESS¹.

Two further levels of weighting were included. The online panel interviews showed a level of moving house around twice that of the postal sample, which was more in line with the 10% we would expect. Therefore those moving in the last 12 months on the panel were down-weighted. For the first batch of interviews, we down-weighted based on those changing supplier and moving house as this was the only data available.

Finally, we compared the incidence in our sample of those responsible for Pay TV – 42% in the current year, 46% in 2019 and so this was also reweighted in the final weighting matrix.

¹ Effective Sample Size shown as Effective Weighted Sample in the data tables produced

The following table shows the initial unweighted sample across all respondents and the final weighted sample profile across all respondents.

Figures are based on UK adult decision makers	% Weighted	% Unweighted
	Profile	Interviews achieved
Gender – Male 16+	52%	51%
Gender – Female 16+	47%	49%
Age – 16-34	31%	32%
Age – 35-54	36%	35%
Age – 55+	33%	33%
SEG – AB	27%	27%
SEG – C1	28%	28%
SEG – C2	21%	20%
SEG – DE	23%	23%
Region – England	83%	84%
Region – Scotland	9%	9%
Region – Wales	5%	5%
Region – Northern Ireland	3%	3%

Guide to Statistical Reliability

The variation between the sample results and the “true” values (the findings that would have been obtained if all communications services decision makers in the UK had been interviewed) can be predicted from the sample sizes on which the results are based, and on the number of times that a particular answer is given. The confidence with which we can make this prediction is usually chosen to be 95%, that is, the chances are 95 in 100 that the “true” values will fall within a specified range. However, as the sample is weighted, we need to use the effective sample size (ESS) rather than actual sample size to judge the accuracy of results.

The following table compares ESS and actual samples for some of the main groups across all respondents.

	Actual	ESS
Total	3,128	2,323
GENDER: MALE	1,584	1,161
GENDER: FEMALE	1,520	1,148
AGE: 16-34	1,005	703
AGE: 35-54	1,086	875
AGE: 55+	1,026	739
SEG: AB	848	687
SEG: C1	878	650
SEG: C2	638	469
SEG: DE	724	495

The table below illustrates the required ranges for different sample sizes and percentage results at the “95% confidence interval”:

Approximate sampling tolerances applicable to percentages at or near these levels

Effective sample size	10% or 90%	20% or 80%	30% or 70%	40% or 60%	50%
	±	±	±	±	±
2,323 (Total)	1.2%	1.7%	1.9%	2.0%	2.1%
1,161 (GENDER: MALE)	1.8%	2.3%	2.7%	2.9%	2.9%
650 (SEG - C1)	2.4%	3.1%	3.6%	3.8%	3.9%

For example, if 30% or 70% of a sample of 2,323 gives a particular answer, the chances are 95 in 100 that the “true” value will fall within the range of ± 1.9 percentage points from the sample results.

When results are compared between separate groups within a sample, different results may be obtained. The difference may be “real”, or it may occur by chance (because not all communications services decision makers have been interviewed). To test if the difference is a real one – i.e. if it is “statistically significant” – we again have to know the size of the samples, the percentages giving a certain answer and the degree of confidence chosen. If we assume “95% confidence interval”, the difference between two sample results must be greater than the values given in the table below to be significant:

Differences required for significant at or near these percentages

Sample sizes being compared	10% or 90%	20% or 80%	30% or 70%	40% or 60%	50%
	±	±	±	±	±
1,161 vs. 1,148 (Male vs. Female)	2.4%	3.3%	3.7%	4.0%	4.1%
687 vs. 650 (SEG AB vs. C1)	3.2%	4.3%	4.9%	5.3%	5.4%