Ofcom's Adults' Media Literacy research 2021 Technical Report

To accompany the Adults' Media Literacy data tables

Contents

Preface

The Adults' Media Literacy Research 2021 is run by Critical Research on behalf of Ofcom. The objective of the survey is to provide detailed evidence on media use, attitudes and understanding among adults aged 16+.

In 2021, Ofcom's media literacy research programme was refreshed to ensure that the study continued to provide rich and robust data in a constantly evolving digital media landscape.

For the adults' study this involved complementing the traditional 'core' in-home, face to face study with a series of online-only studies looking at adults' online behaviour and attitudes and their knowledge and understanding of the digital media they engage with.

Further information about each of these studies is summarised in the next section, followed by a more detailed overview for each of the three studies.

Summary of approach

- The **Adults' core study**: This survey covers questions on key media literacy measures such as internet access, ownership and use of devices, confidence online, awareness of funding and attitudes towards smartphone use. In 2021, as in 2020, it was not possible to conduct the research face-to-face, in home so an alternative approach was adopted. This consisted of a postal survey inviting respondents to complete the survey online or by requesting a paper questionnaire to return. This enables us to report on a UK nationally representative sample of adults aged 16+, by including the views of those who do not go online. Additional online interviews were conducted through a research panel to align the data to a more nationally representative profile. A total of 3,660 interviews were conducted (2,248 postal survey respondents completing online, 280 completing a paper questionnaire and 1,132 online panel interviews). All fieldwork was conducted between 16th October and the 13th December 2021.[1]

- The **Adults' online behaviours and attitudes study (AOBA)**: This survey addresses media use and attitudes among adults aged 16+ who go online. It covers watching/ uploading videos, watching/ sharing live stream videos, sending messages or making video/ voice calls, social media use and gaming. It consisted of two waves of research in June and July 2021 (3,552 interviews) and in September and October 2021 (3,014 interviews). All interviewing was conducted through an online panel. Three sets of data tables are published, one for Wave 1, one for Wave 2 and a combined set for Waves 1 and 2.

- The **Adults' online knowledge and understanding (AOKU) study:** This survey addresses adults' knowledge of and critical understanding about the online world they engage with and covers topics such as: trust and misinformation, validating online content and personal data, privacy and security. This particular survey also incorporates scenario testing to provide an improved measure of critical understanding regarding advertising within search engine results, exposure and reactions to scam advertising and fake social media profiles and the relative importance of ratings and reviews when purchasing online. It consisted of one wave of research in November and December 2021 (3,095 interviews). All interviewing was conducted through an online panel.

---

[1] Additional interviewing was also conducted through a CATI omnibus survey with a small subset of questions around internet access and reasons for non-use of the internet, to reach a UK-representative sample. Fieldwork was conducted from 12th November to 5th December 2021, with 3,143 interviews in total, across 3 waves. This data is published separately with its own Technical report.

Significance testing

Due to the mixed method approach adopted for the **Core** study, significance testing for these data tables is applied at the 99% level. For **AOBA** and **AOKU** (as single methodology studies), testing is applied at the 95% level.

Financial vulnerability

We have included in each set of data tables a measure for household financial vulnerability, ranging from most to least vulnerable This analysis is based on household income and household composition (i.e. size and number of children) and can only be run on the data where respondents have given a response at each of these questions. The following breakdown shows the detailed definitions for each group.

Most financially vulnerable	Potentially financially vulnerable	Least financially vulnerable
Household income under £10,399	**Earning between £10,400 - £25,599**	**Earning between £26,600 - £36,399**
All respondents	1 adult, 0-1 child	1 adult, 0 children
Earning between £10,400 - £25,599	2 adults, 0-1 child	**Earning between £36,400 - £51,999**
1 adult, 2+ children	3 adults, no children	1 adult, 0-1 child
2 adults, 2+ children	**Earning between £26,000 - £36,399**	2 adults, 0 children
3 adults, 1+ children	1 adult, 1 to 3 children	**Household income over £52,000**
4+ adults, 0+ children	2 adults, 0 to 3 children	All households
Earning between £26,000 - 36,399	3 adults, 0 to 1 child	
1 adult, 4+ children	4 adults, no children	
2 adults, >3 children	**Earning between £36,400 - 51,999**	
3 adults, 2+ children	1 adult, 2-3 children	
4 adults, 1+ children	2 adults, 1-2 children	
5+ adults, 0+ children	3 adults, 0-2 children	
Earning between £36,400 - 51,999	4 adults, 0-1 child	
1 adults, >3 children	5 adults, 0 children	
2 adults, 3+ children		
3 adults, 3+ children		
4 adults, 2+ children		
5 adults, 1+ children		
6+ adults, 0+ children		

Common questions across studies

As this was the first year of a revised approach to data collection, across each of the three studies a common set of questions was carried in order to draw comparisons across the studies. These questions have been removed from the **AOBA** and **AOKU** data set as the equivalents on the **Core** study are used for reporting.

The Core study

Critical Research interviewed a sample of 3,660 adults aged 16 and over. Interviews were carried out across the UK. All interviews were conducted between 16th October 2021 and the 13th December 2021.

Details of the sampling frame, research methodology, and weighting procedures for this this study are outlined in the following pages. A note on statistical reliability is also included.

Sample Design

In previous years this research has been conducted face to face, in-home using Computer Assisted Personal Interviewing (CAPI). In 2021, as in 2020, due to the Covid-19 pandemic and in common with other Ofcom tracking studies with an element of in-home interviewing, it was not possible to conduct the research in this way.

For this study, as in 2020, a combination of a postal sample – with respondents either completing the survey online or through being sent a paper questionnaire – and an online panel were used. The sampling for the postal study followed a broadly similar approach to that used in previous years: stratified by region, rural/ urban indicator and Small Area Deprivation (SAD) Index.

Results for the Adults' media literacy study and other studies in 2020 had shown that response rates were lower among certain groups within the UK adult population. The postal sample drawn, therefore, over-represented three groups, achieved by selecting a higher proportion of areas shown by the 2011 Census to have high proportions of:

- Adults aged 16-34
- Adults aged 65+ or in DE socio-economic groups, and with higher scores for the Small Area Deprivation Index
- Adults aged 75+

Sample for the online only part of the study was provided via online consumer panels. The sample was de-duplicated to ensure that respondents could not complete the survey more than once.

Fieldwork

The postal sample of households were contacted first, to allow quotas to be calculated for the final panel stage which would aim to correct for any skews in response from the postal stage. The invitation letter included the option to complete an online interview using logins and passwords supplied in the letter, or to request a paper questionnaire by contacting a freephone telephone number. Up to two respondents were able to complete the survey per household.

Approximately two weeks after the initial invitation to participate, those who had not responded were sent a reminder letter.

Before interviewing could start on the next phase of the study (using online panels), it was necessary to look at the data from the postal study by some key demographic variables. Quotas for the panel study were then put in place to align the combined sample (postal and panel) to that of a nationally

representative sample of adults aged 16+, in order to minimise as much as possible any corrective weighting.

- When the postal part of the study was nearly complete, interviewing started on the online only part of the study, with quotas for key demographics and internet use.

Reporting

The sample is drawn based on households, while quotas are set based on adult population profiles. The data is then weighted to the profile of UK adults and so the data is representative of adults aged 16+. Therefore, when reporting it is necessary to state that the data represents the percentage of adults rather than the percentage of households.

Weighting

In previous years (until 2019), the data were weighted to the national UK profile using target rim weights for key demographic variables.

The key amendments needed for 2020 and 2021 were to additionally weight the sample to the profile of internet use, and to check the profiles within nation delivered by the basic weighting.

In 2021, the sample was weighted at an overall level (users and non-users together).

The following table shows the initial unweighted sample and the final weighted sample profile. The percentages described as '% Weighted' are the targets used to weight the data. The figures for age and gender are taken from the 2011 Census. The socio-economic group profiles come from NRS published data and working status information from the ONS. The '% Unweighted' column shows the actual percentage of interviews achieved in the 2021 fieldwork.

Figures based on UK adults	% Weighted	% Unweighted
	Profile	Interviews achieved
Gender – Man 16+	48%	48%
Gender – Woman 16+	50%	50%
Age – 16-34	30%	28%
Age – 35-54	34%	33%
Age – 55-64	14%	16%
Age – 65+	21%	22%
SEG – ABC1	51%	59%
SEG – C2DE	49%	39%
Working Status – working	59%	56%
Working Status – not working	40%	43%

Guide to Statistical Reliability

The variation between the sample results and the "true" values (the findings that would have been obtained if everyone 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 calculated at the 99% limit for the 2021 data due to the change in methodology. This means that the chances are 99 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 & actual samples for some of the main analysis groups.

Figures based on UK adults	Actual	ESS
Total	3,660	2,359
Age – 16-24	436	338
Age – 25-34	603	410
Age – 35-44	652	501
Age – 45-54	566	414
Age – 55-64	572	361
Age – 65+	803	396
Man	1,750	1,161
Woman	1,832	1,148
SEG – ABC1	2,159	1,565
SEG – C2DE	1,424	891

The table below illustrates the required ranges for different sample sizes and percentage results at the "99% 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%
	±	±	±	±	±
2,359 (Total)	1.9%	2.6%	3.0%	3.2%	3.2%
1,161 (Gender: Man)	2.3%	3.0%	3.5%	3.7%	3.8%
891 (SEG: C2DE)	2.6%	3.5%	4.2%	4.2%	4.3%
396 (Age: 65+)	3.9%	5.2%	5.9%	6.3%	6.5%

For example, if 30% or 70% of a sample of 2359 give a particular answer, the chances are 99 in 100 that the 'true' value will fall within the range of +/- 3.0 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 everyone has been interviewed). To test if the difference is a real one – i.e. if it is 'statistically significant' – we again must know the size of the samples, the percentages giving a certain answer and the degree of confidence chosen. If we assume '99% 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 (Men vs. Women)	3.2%	4.3%	4.9%	5.3%	5.4%
1,565 vs. 891 (SEG ABC1 vs. C2DE)	3.2%	4.3%	5.0%	5.3%	5.4%

The Adults' online behaviours and attitudes study (AOBA)

Critical Research interviewed a sample of 6,556 adults aged 16 and over across two waves of research:

- Wave 1 fieldwork in June and July 2021 – 3,552 interviews

- Wave 2 fieldwork in September and October 2021– 3,014 interviews

All interviews were carried out across the UK through an online panel. Target quotas were set on nation/ English region, age and gender (interlocking), household socio-economic group, working status and internet use (hours spent online).

Weighting

For the panel only studies, we have no respondents who do not use the internet. Hence, we cannot weight the sample to the profile of all UK adults, instead we weight to the profile of internet users.

On the first wave of the AOBA study, the initial weights used the same key demographics as the main/ core study detailed earlier – but with the targets changed from all UK adults to all UK internet users, using results from Ofcom's 2019 Technology Tracker study.

An additional level of weighting was added, to correct the sample for volume of internet use as panel studies tend to be low on infrequent users. We considered additional weighting to adjust the profile of younger lighter internet users to be closer to previous studies, but this would have impacted the ESS too much and was not applied.

At the second wave, a similar approach to the weighting was issued, but with additional corrective weights within NI and Wales where the incidence of lighter users was lower than on earlier studies. The overall UK targets for the second wave were identical to the first wave, but the two stages were weighted separately. This means the combined tables produced are simply the sum of the two waves. As mentioned earlier, Wave 1 and Wave 2 data tables are published separately, together with a combined set of data tables.

The following table shows the initial unweighted sample and the final weighted sample profile across the two waves combined. The percentages described as '% Weighted' are the targets used to weight the data. The '% Unweighted' column shows the actual percentage of interviews achieved in the 2021 fieldwork.

Figures based on UK adults who go online	% Weighted	% Unweighted
	Profile	Interviews achieved
Gender – Man 16+	48%	47%
Gender – Woman 16+	51%	52%
Age – 16-34	33%	33%
Age – 35-54	36%	32%
Age – 55-64	15%	15%
Age – 65+	15%	19%
SEG – ABC1	56%	54%
SEG – C2DE	43%	45%
Working Status – working	65%	56%
Working Status – not working	35%	44%

Guide to Statistical Reliability

The variation between the sample results and the "true" values (the findings that would have been obtained if everyone 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 calculated at the 95% limit for the 2021 data. This means that 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 & actual samples for some of the main analysis groups.

Figures based on UK adults who go online	Actual	ESS
Total	6,566	3,898
Age – 16-24	1,279	692
Age – 25-34	905	581
Age – 35-44	1,112	705
Age – 45-54	993	629
Age – 55-64	997	617
Age – 65+	1,280	756
Man	3,082	1,857
Woman	3,421	2,004
SEG – ABC1	3,553	2,178
SEG – C2DE	2,953	1,694

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% ±
3,898 (Total)	0.9%	1.3%	1.4%	1.5%	1.6%
1,857 (Gender: Man)	1.4%	1.8%	2.1%	2.2%	2.3%
1,694 (SEG: C2DE)	1.4%	1.9%	2.2%	2.3%	2.4%
756 (Age: 65+)	2.1%	2.9%	3.3%	3.5%	3.6%

For example, if 30% or 70% of a sample of 3,898 give a particular answer, the chances are 95 in 100 that the 'true' value will fall within the range of +/- 1.4 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 everyone has been interviewed). To test if the difference is a real one – i.e. if it is 'statistically significant' – we again must 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% ±
1,857 vs. 2,004 (Men vs. Women)	1.9%	2.5%	2.9%	3.1%	3.2%
2,178 vs. 1,694 (SEG ABC1 vs. C2DE)	1.9%	2.5%	2.9%	3.1%	3.2%

The Adults' online knowledge and understanding study (AOKU)

Critical Research interviewed a sample of 3,095 adults aged 16 and over in one wave of research.

All interviews were carried out across the UK through an online panel. Target quotas were set on nation/ English region, age and gender (interlocking), household socio-economic group, working status and internet use (hours spent online). All fieldwork took place in November and December 2021.

Weighting

For the panel only studies, we have no respondents who do not use the internet. Hence, we cannot weight the sample to the profile of all UK adults, instead the target universe is all internet users.

The same weighting approach was used as for the AOBA study; the initial weights used key demographics with the targets changed from all UK adults to all UK internet users, using results from Ofcom's 2019 Technology Tracker study.

An additional level of weighting was added, to correct the sample for volume of internet use as panel studies tend to be low on infrequent users. We considered additional weighting to adjust the profile of younger lighter internet users to be closer to previous studies, but this would have impacted the ESS too much and was not applied.

To correct minor deviations within nation within the AOKU data, some pre-weights were also introduced by age, SEG, gender (in Scotland), urbanity (in Northern Ireland) and working status (in Wales).

The following table shows the initial unweighted sample and the final weighted sample profile. The percentages described as '% Weighted' are the targets used to weight the data. The '% Unweighted' column shows the actual percentage of interviews achieved in the 2021 fieldwork.

Figures based on UK adults who go online	% Weighted	% Unweighted
	Profile	Interviews achieved
Gender – Man 16+	48%	46%
Gender – Woman 16+	51%	53%
Age – 16-34	33%	33%
Age – 35-54	36%	36%
Age – 55-64	15%	13%
Age – 65+	15%	17%
SEG – ABC1	56%	54%
SEG – C2DE	43%	45%

Working Status – working	65%	58%
Working Status – not working	35%	41%

Guide to Statistical Reliability

The variation between the sample results and the "true" values (the findings that would have been obtained if everyone 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 calculated at the 95% limit for the 2021 data. This means that 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 & actual samples for some of the main analysis groups.

Figures based on UK adults who go online	Actual	ESS
Total	3,095	2,183
Age – 16-24	502	355
Age – 25-34	519	374
Age – 35-44	601	436
Age – 45-54	525	378
Age – 55-64	413	290
Age – 65+	535	368
Man	1,425	1,021
Woman	1,625	1,132
SEG – ABC1	1,667	1,214
SEG – C2DE	1,390	942

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% ±
2,183 (Total)	1.3%	1.7%	1.9%	2.1%	2.1%
1,021 (Gender: Man)	1.8%	2.5%	2.8%	3.0%	3.1%
942 (SEG: C2DE)	1.9%	2.6%	2.9%	3.1%	3.2%
368 (Age: 65+)	3.1%	4.1%	4.7%	5.0%	5.1%

For example, if 30% or 70% of a sample of 2,183 give 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 everyone has been interviewed). To test if the difference is a real one – i.e. if it is 'statistically significant' – we again must 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% ±
1,021 vs. 1,132 (Men vs. Women)	2.5	3.4	3.9	4.1	4.2
1,214 vs. 942 (SEG ABC1 vs. C2DE)	2.6	3.4	3.9	4.2	4.3