

Preface

The Adults' Media Literacy Research 2020 has been 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+.

Critical Research interviewed a sample of 3,015 adults aged 16 and over. Interviews were carried out across the UK. All interviews were conducted between 6th October 2020 and the 23rd January 2021.

Details of the sampling frame, research methodology, and weighting procedures for 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 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. Various alternative methods of conducting research have been trialled across different tracking surveys in 2020; including online panels, outbound telephone interview, and approaches based on initial mailings and reminders, with these postal approach studies completed online, by phone or on paper (either requested or unsolicited).

On this particular study it was necessary to achieve a sample of non-users of the internet which informed our approach, as this audience would, by definition, be unable to complete the survey online.

For this study, in common with others usually conducted for Ofcom in-home, a combination of a postal sample – with respondents either completing the survey online or through being sent a paper questionnaire – and an online panel was used. This combined approach was necessary to achieve a similar Effective Sample Size (ESS) to previous years without a significant increase in budget, and also to allow minimum sample requirements to be met – for example, using the panel to boost the number of interviews with lighter users of the internet.

Moreover, using two rather than a single sampling approach offers a degree of robustness to the data which is beneficial when needing to change methodology from a face-to-face, in-home approach to a postal/ online panel survey. However, the sampling for the postal study followed a broadly similar approach to that used in 2019 to ensure as much consistency with previous years as possible. The postal sample was, therefore, stratified by region, rural/ urban indicator and Small Area Deprivation (SAD) Index.¹

¹ A score was calculated for each Sampling Output Area (SOA) area based on the SAD score, the proportion of adults aged 65+ and in DE socio-economic groups, and samples were drawn across areas with higher values on this score

Results from pilot studies on this and other surveys, had shown that response rates were low among adults aged 16-24, those aged 65 and over, those in lower socio-economic groups and in particular, among infrequent and non-users of the internet – for whom the most used response method (a web interview) was unavailable or less appealing.

The postal sample drawn over-represented two groups, achieved by selecting a higher proportion of areas shown by the 2011 census to have high proportions of the following:

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

The sample for the online only study was provided via online consumer panels through our research panel partners Savanta, Lucid and WALR. Sourcing sample from multiple panel providers and their affiliates tends to minimise potential panel-based bias from using a single panel. 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 responses from the postal stage. A total of 6,234 households were mailed across the pilot and main stage with respondents encouraged 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 (either online or through being sent two paper questionnaires). While this introduces a degree of clustering into the sample, this is to a smaller degree than the usual CAPI study (where one interview per household is conducted, across 8 households per sample point). A specific benefit of allowing more than one respondent per household to complete the survey is that it expands coverage away from the individual most likely to be the initial contact. Of the 14% of households who responded to the invitation letter, more than half (55%) completed two questionnaires.

Approximately two weeks after the initial invitation to participate, those who had not responded were sent a reminder letter. Then, after a further two weeks, those who had still not responded were sent two copies of the paper questionnaire. This sub-sample was selected from areas of higher deprivation that also had a higher penetration of adults aged 65+ in the DE socio-economic group, in an attempt to increase the number of non-users of the internet completing the survey.

The results from the postal sample mailing is summarised in the table below:

Postal sample	Total
Initial postal mail out	6,254
Reminder postal mail out	5810
Solicited (requested) questionnaires sent	178
Unsolicited questionnaires sent	2,300
Total responses	1,383
Completed the survey online	1,144
Returned a paper questionnaire	239
Single responses (one adult per household)	427
Multiple responses (two adults per household)	956

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:

- Gender within age;
- Nation – within England soft quotas were set to ensure a good mix by region;
- Household socio-economic group;
- Respondent working status;
- Hours per week using the internet – to ensure less frequent internet users were not under-represented.

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, the data was weighted to the national UK profile using target rim weights for age, gender, socio-economic group, household composition (number of adults/ children) and working status. As accurate quotas are set for each sampling point for the first three of these, this provides close control of these variables within nation as well as for the UK overall.

The key amendments needed for 2020 were to additionally weight the sample to the profile of internet use, and to check the profiles within nation delivered by the basic weighting. Although the postal samples were drawn to the correct nation/ urbanity profile, responses differed by these variables, so a greater degree of manipulating the weights within nation was necessary.

Ultimately, due to the difficulty in reaching sufficient numbers of non-users of the internet, and after studying the data, the decision was made to modify the approach to weighting as follows:

- The sample of internet users was weighted to the UK profile of these across the above variables and internet use, using profiles determined by looking Ofcom's Technology Tracker study.
- The sample of non-users was weighted to the correct proportion and profile by nation and SEG only.

The following table shows the initial unweighted sample and the final weighted sample profile:

Figures are based on UK adults aged 16+	% Weighted	% Unweighted
	Profile	Interviews achieved
Gender – Male 16+	50%	50%
Gender – Female 16+	50%	49%
Age – 16-34	30%	28%
Age – 35-54	34%	32%
Age – 55+	36%	39%
SEG – AB	26%	27%
SEG – C1	25%	27%
SEG – C2	21%	17%
SEG – DE	24%	25%
Working status – working	61%	56%
Working status – not working	39%	43%

The percentages described above 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 2020 fieldwork.

As mentioned earlier, the sample was also skewed by Small Area Deprivation Index, in order to get more households in these areas who are likely to be non-internet users. After the above weighting was applied, the profile by Small Area Deprivation Index compared as follows to the known population:

Small Area Deprivation Index	UK profile	Adults’ Media Literacy 2020
0 to 16.67	15%	10%
16.67 to 33.33	42%	29%
33.33 to 50	26%	24%
50 to 66.67	13%	22%
66.67 to 100	3%	6%
Missing		9%

The “missing” respondents are those panel members who were not comfortable providing their postcode which meant a SAD score could not be assigned. The profile achieved on the study was different enough to the UK profile to merit further investigation, which resulted in an additional level of weighting being applied to adjust the profile in line with the UK profile. Comparing results between the initial and revised weighting profile showed no results to be affected by more than 1%, and so the additional weighting was deemed unnecessary, given it reduced the ESS by around 7% to 10%, depending on the base.

Comparison of the two sampling methods

As we were using two new methods (post and online) to replace in-home interviewing in 2020, additional analysis was conducted to compare these two samples on a like-for-like basis. To do this, weights were calculated which gave the correct overall UK profile (not within nation) for the total sample, panel only and postal only. Comparisons were then carried out across some key variables between the two identically weighted subsamples. Where there were differences, the historic data was used to identify which, if either, were more accurate. The result of this comparison was the conclusion that, although there were some differences, there was nothing consistent or substantial enough in the impact on the overall 2020 data to necessitate any corrective weighting between the two samples.

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 2020 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 within the main sample.

	Actual	ESS
Total	3015	1647
AGE: 16-24	403	293
AGE: 25-34	444	328
AGE: 35-44	519	369
AGE: 45-54	446	296
AGE: 55-64	449	224
AGE: 65+	730	242
MALE	1508	762
FEMALE	1468	881
SEG – AB	824	519
SEG – C1	823	585
SEG – C2	525	300
SEG – DE	762	339

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%
	±	±	±	±	±
1,647 (Total aged 16+)	1.9	2.5	2.4	2.9	3.2
762 (Men)	2.8	3.7	4.3	4.6	4.7
339 (SEG DE)	4.2	5.6	6.4	6.9	7.0

For example, if 30% or 70% of a sample of 1,647 gives a particular answer, the chances are 99 in 100 that the “true” value will fall within the range of + 2.4 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 have to 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%
	±	±	±	±	±
519 vs. 339 (AB vs. DE)	5.4%	7.2%	8.2%	8.8%	9.0%
762 vs. 881 (Men vs. Women)	3.8%	5.1%	5.8%	6.2%	6.4%

Limitations in data comparability to previous waves

While the weighting and sampling approach has been rigorous and carefully built to ensure that the research remains demographically balanced and reflective of the UK population, we must appreciate that this survey has undergone a substantial methodology change for 2020. As such, direct comparisons between the current and previous waves are not possible.

It is also important to acknowledge any potential behavioural differences that a respondent might exhibit when completing a survey face-to-face versus completing a survey online.