

Disabled consumers' access to and use of communication devices and services 2016

Research summary: Visually-impaired consumers



Introduction

Ofcom has a specific duty to have regard to the needs of people with disabilities. In order to meet these responsibilities and to respond to stakeholder requests for better information on the experiences of disabled consumers, we've worked with the British Population Survey to produce our third wave of research into this subject.

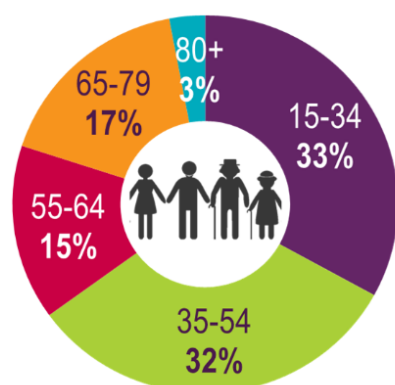
The 2016 research is our most robust analysis of disabled consumers' access to, use of and limitations of use of communications across Great Britain. Access to a device in the home may not necessarily mean ownership of that device - therefore our analysis also focuses on the proportions using that device, and the proportions who felt their disabilities limited or prevented their use. Access and use of the internet referred to both in the home and elsewhere.

We achieved a total sample of 16,792 non-disabled consumers and 4,706 disabled consumers. This summary highlights some of the key findings, focusing on those with a visual impairment and comparing their access and use to non-disabled consumers. A sample of 410 visually-impaired consumers was achieved, including 64 blind consumers, and 346 consumers with partial sight.

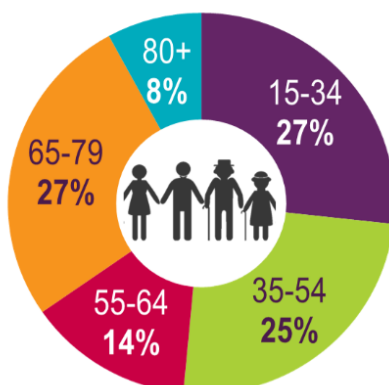
Further analysis can be found in the data tables published on Ofcom's 2017 Statistical Release Calendar (<https://www.ofcom.org.uk/research-and-data/statistics/stats17>).

Age profile

Non-disabled



Visually-impaired



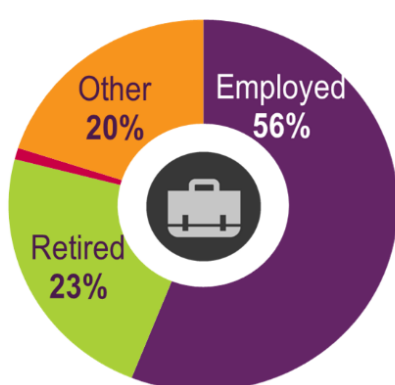
Consumers with a visual impairment had an older age profile than non-disabled consumers.

Just over a third (35%) of this disability group were aged 65 or over, compared to a fifth (20%) of non-disabled consumers.

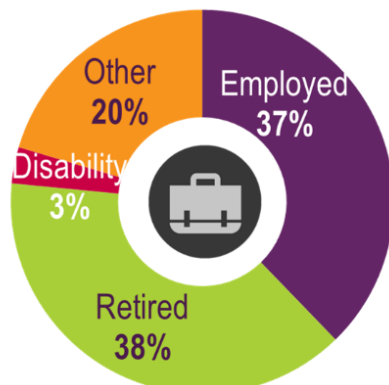
The proportions of consumers with partial or total blindness did not differ much by age. Around eight in ten of each age group claimed to have partial sight, and around two in ten stated they were blind.

Working status

Non-disabled



Visually-impaired



Consistent with their older age profile, almost four in ten (38%) consumers with a visual impairment were in retirement. This compared to just over two in ten (23%) non-disabled consumers.

Conversely, visually-impaired consumers were less likely than non-disabled consumers to be in employment (37% vs. 56%).

However, the same proportion (20%) of each group reported to be in 'other' forms of employment - such as full-time education, unemployment or home-makers. Three per cent of visually-impaired consumers said they did not work due to their disability or long term illness.

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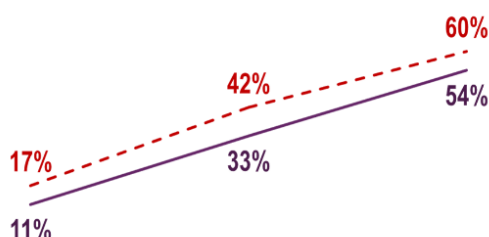
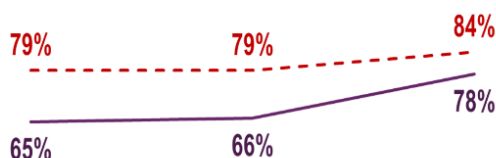
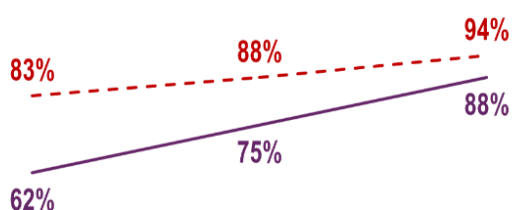
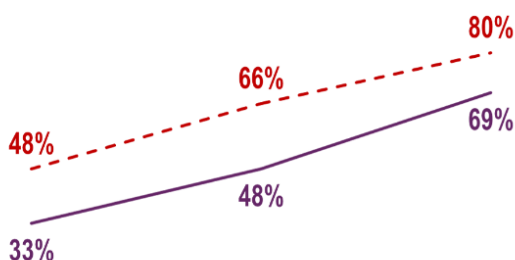
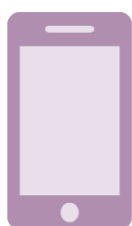
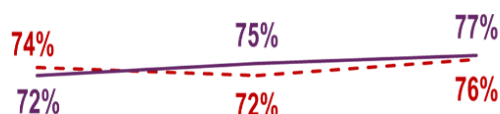
Access to devices and services

--- Non-disabled
— Visually-impaired

2012

2014

2016



Visually-impaired consumers' access to devices and services are catching up to that of non-disabled consumers.

This disability group had similar proportions with access to a landline phone in the home as non-disabled consumers - unchanged on previous years.

Although visually-impaired consumers are still less likely than non-disabled consumers to have access to a smartphone, the gap between their access is narrowing.

Access to the internet (anywhere) increased significantly for visually-impaired consumers, resulting in the gap to non-disabled consumers also narrowing.

As with internet access, the gap between visually-impaired and non-disabled consumers access to a PC/laptop is narrowing.

Although visually-impaired consumers are following the same rise in access to a tablet in the home as non-disabled consumers, they remain less likely to have access to this device.

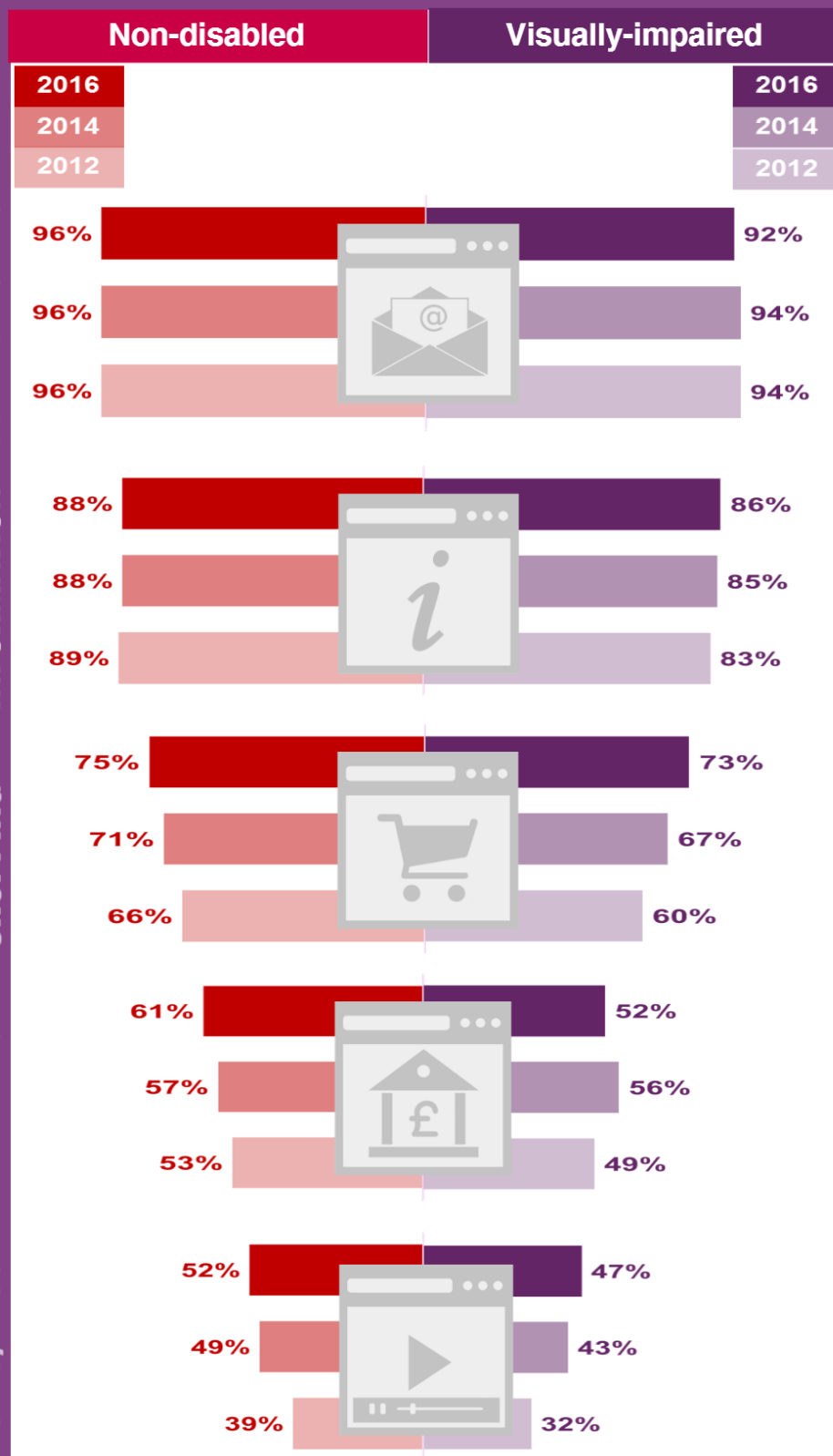
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Internet activities

COMMUNICATION
INFORMATION
SHOPPING
BANKING
AUDIO/VISUAL



Communications via the internet continues to be the most popular online activity for both non-disabled and visually-impaired internet users.

In 2016 communications included:

- Emailing (used by around nine in ten users in each group);
- Social networking (more likely to be used by non-disabled internet users than visually-impaired - 63% vs. 55%);
- Voice calls online, such as Skype (with visually-impaired users being less likely than non-disabled internet users to use these services - 26% vs. 21%).

Using the internet to shop online was previously an activity undertaken by more non-disabled consumers than visually-impaired.

However, over the years this disability group has seen a greater increase in activity levels which are now comparable to non-disabled internet users in 2016.

Going online for audio/visual content was the activity least cited by each group - although both have seen an increase in this activity since 2012.

Of the activities within audio/visual, the most popular in 2016 for both visually-impaired and non-disabled internet users was to stream or download music. This was followed by streaming/downloading TV, and then movies.

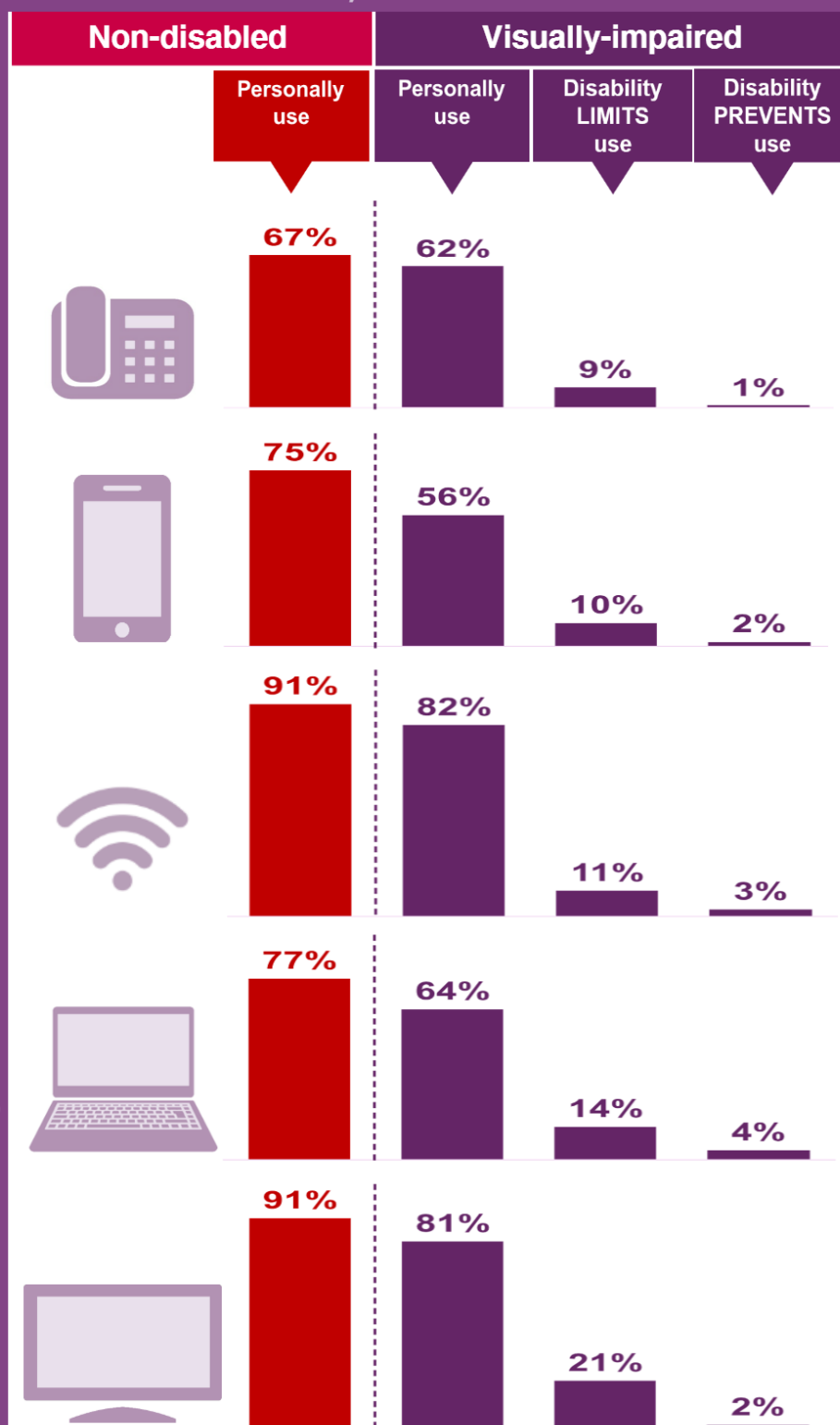
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Personal use, and limitations of use

LANDLINE PHONE
SMARTPHONE
INTERNET
PC/LAPTOP
TELEVISION



Visually-impaired consumers reported their disability limited their use of a TV more than the other devices/services.

Around six in ten visually-impaired consumers said they personally used a landline phone in the home - less than the proportion of non-disabled consumers.

One in ten felt their disability limited their use of this device, and a further 1% felt their disability prevented them using it altogether.

Personal use of a smartphone for this disability group has increased (from 38% in 2014), but remains lower than that of non-disabled consumers.

Similar proportions stated their use was limited or prevented by their disability, as did for a landline phone.

Personal use of the internet (anywhere) also increased (from 73% in 2014) among visually-impaired consumers - making it one of the most devices/ services.

Similar proportions of limitations/ prevention to that of a landline and smartphone were reported.

Use of a PC/laptop also increased (from 52%) for this disability group, but remains lower than that of non-disabled consumers.

However, a higher proportion of this group felt their use was limited (14%) or prevented (4%), compared to that of the devices above.

Despite a decrease in personal use (from 92% in 2014), the TV was the device/service most used by visually-impaired consumers in 2016, along with the internet.

However, it was also the device with the highest proportion saying their disability limited their use (21%).

For further information on this analysis and other vulnerable groups of consumers, see Ofcom's 'Access and Inclusion' report.