**Ofcom Residential Postal Tracker**

**Technical Report 2016**

**1. Preface**

Ofcom’s Residential Postal Tracker is a continuous tracking study that measures opinion, usage and attitudes to postal services among UK adults. In 2016, the study was run by Kubi Kalloo with fieldwork conducted by Facts International.

Since January 2016, data has been collected using a combined methodological approach: face-to-face interviews conducted using random probability sampling and online interviews using quota sampling. The data from both methodologies is then combined and weighted to nationally representative proportions in terms of age, gender, ethnicity, country and socio-economic group (SEG), and, where relevant, weighting to account for ‘positivity bias’ is also applied (explained below).

6,467 respondents participated in this fieldwork period. 48 respondents could not be included in the final dataset, as they did not provide an answer to demographic questions used in weighting and could therefore not be assigned a weighting factor. The final number of respondents included in the 2016 dataset is: 6,419, including 1,841 face-to-face respondents (29%) and 4,578 online respondents (71%).

This document provides details of the sampling frame, research methodology and weighting procedures.

**2.** **Fieldwork**

For the first time since the Residential Postal Tracker began, Ofcom decided to break from a pure face-to-face approach to include a representation from an online audience. Face-to-face respondents are approached to participate by door-to-door interviewers; they then self-complete the survey using a tablet (CAPI). Online respondents from Research Now’s online panel are invited to complete the same survey separately via email.

Methodological bias has been reduced as far as possible operationally, by designing both workstreams to be as similar as possible: both methods involve self-completion surveys, identical questions and continuous interviewing (with fieldwork being conducted for at least three weeks in every month). A one week pilot study was conducted to trial the combined methodologies and resolve any operational issues; this was followed by a three month observational fieldwork period to monitor the impact of methodological shift on trend data. Following this observation period, it became clear that face-to-face respondents consistently gave more positive responses than their online counterparts – an effect we have described as a ‘positivity bias’. In order to correct this effect, a short omnibus study was conducted to quantify the impact of ‘positivity bias’ on surveys conducted face-to-face versus online, and consequently, an ‘evaluative weighting’ factor was calculated to eliminate any methodological bias (*see ‘Weighting’ for more details*).

**3. Sample design**

Each workstream has its own sample design, appropriate for each respective methodology.

1. Random probability sampling is applied to face-to-face interviewing. As in previous waves, random sampling points are selected in each region to determine the ‘starting address’ for interviewing in a given month. From this point, interviewers invite individuals to participate in every third house, applying the ‘next birthday rule’ if more than one person at a given address is willing and able to participate. This approach ensures a random selection of respondents: that is, everyone in the population of potential respondents has an equal chance of being selected for participation
2. Quota sampling is applied to online interviewing. There is no way of replicating the offline sampling approach online, as the demographic spread of panellists in each region is not nationally representative (and is, by no means, universal). For this reason, a quota sampling approach was adopted to ensure nationally representative responses

The following annual geographic minimum quotas were applied for each methodology:

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
|  | **CAPI** | **Online** |
|  North East | 100 | 250 |
|  North West | 150 | 250 |
|  Yorkshire and Humber | 115 | 250 |
|  East Midlands | 115 | 250 |
|  West Midlands | 115 | 250 |
|  East of England/ East Anglia | 115 | 250 |
|  London/ Greater London | 175 | 250 |
|  South East | 175 | 250 |
|  South West | 115 | 250 |
|  **Additional CAPI quotas** |
|  Northern Ireland | 200 |  |
|  Wales | 200 |  |
|  Highlands and Islands of Scotland | 25 |  |
|  Rest of Scotland | 200 |  |
|  **Additional online quotas** |
|  Northern Ireland – Urban  |  | 250 |
|  Northern Ireland – Rural  |  | 250 |
|  Wales – Urban  |  | 250 |
|  Wales – Rural |  | 250 |
|  Scotland – Urban  |  | 250 |
|  Scotland – Rural |  | 250 |
|  **Total** | **1,800** | **3,750** |

**4.** **Weighting**

Following the three month observational fieldwork period (as detailed above), it became apparent that there was a need for two types of weighting:

1. **Demographic & Geographic Weighting** – for all questions, to ensure the data is nationally representative by gender, age, socio-economic group, location (England vs. Devolved Nations) and ethnicity
2. **Evaluative Weighting** – for questions that include an evaluative judgement, to redress the effect of positivity bias, i.e. behaviour, attitudes and experiences (excluding most demographic and screening criteria)

4.1 Demographic & Geographic Weighting

Data from all questions are weighted to be nationally representative of the UK population in terms of gender, age, socio-economic group, country and ethnicity; actual population figures and estimates have been taken from the 2011 Census and Annual Mid-Year Population Estimates 2014.

The initial unweighted sample and the final weighted sample profiles are illustrated below: the ‘Unweighted’ column indicates the actual proportion of interviews completed January – December 2016 (including the pilot); the ‘Weighted’ column indicates the weighted size of each sub-group, calculated by applying the individual weighting factors listed in the final, right-hand column.

|  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **Demographic or Geographic Weighting Category** | **Sub-Population** | **% Unweighted: Interviews achieved** | **% Weighted:****Profile** | **Individual (not RIM)Weighting Factor** |
| **Gender** | Male 16yrs+ | 49 % | 49% | 1.000 |
| Female 16yrs+ | 51 % | 51% | 1.000 |
| **Age** | 16-24yrs | 13% | 14% | 1.077 |
| 25-44yrs | 31% | 33% | 1.065 |
| 45-64yrs | 34% | 32% | 0.941 |
| 65-74yrs | 15% | 12% | 0.800 |
| 75yrs+ | 8% | 9% | 1.125 |
| **SEG** | ABC1 | 56% | 53% | 0.946 |
| C2DE | 44% | 47% | 1.068 |
| **Country** | England | 63% | 83% | 1.317 |
| Scotland, N.I. & Wales | 37% | 17% | 0.459 |
| **Ethnicity** | White | 92% | 87% | 0.946 |
| Non-white | 8% | 13% | 1.625 |

4.2 Evaluative weighting

The separately commissioned omnibus survey revealed that face-to-face respondents are more likely to give high scores to statements measuring positivity than their online counterparts, even when they score similarly on behavioural questions. An Evaluative adjustment weighting was developed using the average of the ratios between online and offline populations for the four statements below.

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| Top 2 box responses on 5 point Likert (agreement) scale | Online | Offline |
| “I am satisfied with my life” | 47% | 74% |
| “I feel very positive about my future” | 38% | 63% |
| “I don’t like people to think badly of me” | 54% | 66% |
| “White lies are acceptable to avoid hurting people” | 28% | 40% |

**Appendix: Guide to Statistical Reliability**

This section details the variation between the sample results and the “true” values, or the findings that would have been obtained with a census approach. 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 analysis groups.

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
|  | **Actual (n=6,419)** | **ESS (n=4,845)** |
| **Gender** | Male  | 3,143 | 2,372 |
| Female  | 3,276 | 2,473 |
| **Age** | 16-24yrs | 804 | 607 |
| 25-44yrs | 1,966 | 1,484 |
| 45-64yrs | 2,166 | 1,635 |
| 65-74yrs | 945 | 713 |
| 75yrs+ | 538 | 406 |
| **SEG** | AB | 1,155 | 872 |
| C1 | 1,579 | 1,192 |
| C2 | 997 | 753 |
| DE | 1,352 | 1,020 |
| **Rurality** | Urban | 3,809 | 2,875 |
| Rural | 2,251 | 1,699 |
| **Working** | Yes | 3,344 | 2,524 |
| No | 3,040 | 2,295 |

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%± |
| 4,845 (Total) | 0.8% | 1.1% | 1.3% | 1.4% | 1.4% |
| 2,372 (Male) | 1.2% | 1.6% | 1.8% | 2.0% | 2.0% |
| 1,192 (C1) | 1.7% | 2.3% | 2.6% | 2.8% | 2.8% |
| 1,699 (Rural) | 1.4% | 1.9% | 2.2% | 2.3% | 2.4% |

For example, if 30% or 70% of a sample of 4,845 gives a particular answer, the chances are 95 in 100 that the “true” value will fall within the range of + 1.3 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 “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% b ± |
|  2,372 vs. 2,473 (Male vs. Female) | 1.7% | 2.3% | 2.6% | 2.8% | 2.8% |
| 872 vs. 1,192 (AB vs. C1) | 2.6% | 3.5% | 4.0% | 4.3% | 4.4% |