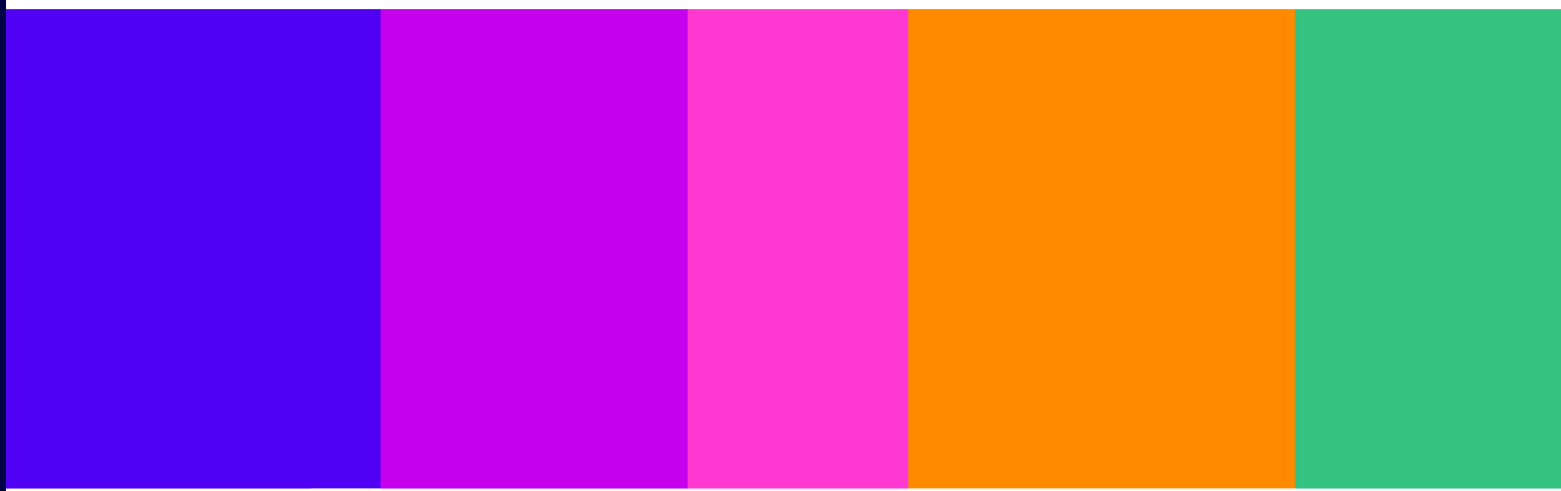


Online Paid-for Advertisements Research

Technical Report

Published 10 July 2026



Contents

Section

Introduction	3
Quantitative research	5
Qualitative research	14

Annex

A1	Appendix 1 – Online Paid-for Advertisement Examples	17
A2	Appendix 2 – Authenticity Perception Testing	20
A3	Appendix 3 – Quantitative Questionnaire	23
A4	Appendix 4 – Recruitment Screener	38
A5	Appendix 5 – Diary Pre-task	45
A6	Appendix 6 – Online Community	48

Introduction

Preface

The rise of fraudulent online paid-for advertisements poses a significant challenge to digital safety and public protection. In response, Ofcom, under its mandate from the Online Safety Act, is responsible for ensuring that online platforms implement effective and proportionate systems and processes to:

- Prevent individuals from encountering fraudulent online advertisements
- Minimise the duration such fraudulent content remains accessible
- Facilitate swift action by service providers upon identification of fraudulent content

Given the increasing sophistication of online fraud, it is crucial to gain a deeper understanding of user interactions with fraudulent advertisements to enhance regulatory frameworks and protective measures. This report presents findings from a targeted research initiative aimed at providing data-driven support for Ofcom's regulatory actions and policy development in this domain.

As part of this research, Ofcom provided respondents with a clear definition of online paid-for advertisements before the research began, to support more relevant responses¹:

Advertisements that appear on search services, social media platforms, and video-sharing platforms. Ads on other websites or in emails are excluded. Examples include sponsored search results, promoted social media posts, and video ads.

Please note, the opinions expressed by participants are their own and do not represent Ofcom's views or positions.

Research objectives

While Ofcom has previously conducted research on online fraud, there is a need for more focused insights specifically related to online paid-for advertisements. This research seeks to:

- Assess users' experiences and engagement with potentially fraudulent online paid-for advertisements
- Examine user interactions with potentially fraudulent online paid-for advertisements and the consequences of these interactions

¹ Section 236 of the Online Safety Act 2023 defines a "paid-for advertisement" in relation to an internet service as an advertisement where (i) the service provider receives some form of consideration for the advertisement (either financial or non-financial), whether directly from the advertiser or indirectly through another person; and (ii) the placement of the advertisement is determined by systems or processes agreed upon by the parties under the advertising contract. This legal definition was not used in the research.

- Identify the methods or strategies employed by users to detect fraudulent online paid-for advertisements
- Investigate how users evaluate and determine the trustworthiness of online content, particularly paid-for advertisements
- Determine the visual or contextual elements that users recognise as indicators or cues of potentially fraudulent advertisements
- Measure the financial losses and psychological impacts experienced by users due to engagement with fraudulent online paid-for advertisements

By addressing these objectives, the research aims to contribute to Ofcom's broader efforts to enhance online safety. The insights gained will inform regulatory policies and help guide the development of protective measures against fraudulent online paid-for advertising, ultimately supporting a safer digital environment for users.

Summary of approach

YouGov is a professional research and consulting organisation, focused on collecting high quality, in-depth data for market research and has extensive experience of youth, the television and radio broadcasting sectors as well as on-demand services policy research.

The quantitative phase of this research used a sample designed to be nationally representative of the UK population aged 18 and over. All research was carried out online, with respondents recruited from YouGov's online panel. A total of 4,285 interviews were conducted between 13th - 18th December 2024.

The qualitative phase consisted of two stages with 30 participants. Stage 1 was a 5-day diary task conducted between 2nd - 6th June 2025 and Stage 2 involved a 3-day online community that took place between 24th - 26th June 2025. The two-week break was designed to allow time for participants to pause and reflect on the topic.

Since December 2024 when the quantitative research was conducted, the online environment – including advertising – has continued to change, with AI-generated content becoming more prominent. Further qualitative research conducted in June 2025 highlighted concerns about AI-generated images and increasingly sophisticated fraudulent advertisements. This suggests that AI has made existing challenges more intense rather than introducing entirely new ones. Overall, the findings are still relevant, but this context and the increasing prevalence of AI on user experiences and perceptions should be kept in mind when interpreting the quantitative findings.

Quantitative research

Significance testing and data redaction

The data tables were run using Quantipy. Significance testing (using t-tests) has been applied at 95% confidence level for the purposes of analysis.

All base sizes below 10 have been redacted/removed from the data tables. Base sizes between 10-49 are marked with an * to indicate a low base.

Sampling

Sample design

The sample is designed to be nationally representative of the UK population aged 18 and over.

A sample frame was constructed using the demographic information available from the YouGov online panel, which consists of over 3.3 million adults in the UK. This frame includes individuals aged 18 and over, as well as relevant demographic and political attributes to ensure representativeness.

A total sample of 4,285 respondents was interviewed. This sample size was determined to provide a high level of statistical confidence and reliability for the survey results.

Selected individuals were invited to participate in the survey via email. Participants consented to complete the survey, understanding that their responses would be used for research purposes.

The survey was administered online using YouGov's survey platform. Participants were provided with a modest financial incentive upon completion.

Quotas

Interview quotas were applied so that the final sample was representative of the UK population aged 18 and over by age, gender, region, education level and socio-economic group (SEG).

Targets for quotas were derived from YouGov based on data from the Office of National Statistics (ONS).

Quotas were set using the following variables:

- Age (18-24, 25-39, 40-49, 50-65, Over 65)
- Gender
- Region
- Education level
- Socio-economic group (SEG)

Fieldwork and weighting

All interviews were conducted between 13th - 18th December 2024 using the YouGov bespoke online survey platform. YouGov interviewed a sample of 4,285 internet users aged 18+ in the UK.

The data was weighted to be representative of the UK population aged 18 and over, including those without internet access, on age, gender, education, region and SEG profiles. The following table shows the initial unweighted sample and the final weighted sample profiles:

Demographic group	Category	Weighted Counts	Weighted Percentages	Unweighted Counts	Unweighted Percentages
Gender	Male	2,078	49%	2053	48%
	Female	2,207	52%	2232	52%
Age	18-24	476	11%	453	11%
	25-34	700	16%	697	16%
	35-44	725	17%	715	17%
	45-54	683	16%	666	16%
	55-64	711	17%	683	16%
	65-74	672	16%	726	17%
	75+	317	7%	345	8%
	Region	North East	175	4%	172
North West		458	11%	453	11%
Yorkshire & Humberside		365	9%	359	8%
East Midlands		326	8%	331	8%
West Midlands		364	9%	375	9%
East of England		385	9%	387	9%
London		561	13%	554	13%
South East		584	14%	591	14%
South West		386	9%	397	9%
Wales		206	5%	200	5%
Scotland		360	8%	354	8%
Northern Ireland		116	3%	112	3%
Social Grade		ABC1	2442	57%	2513
	C2DE	1843	43%	1772	41%
Education Level	Low	576	13%	529	12%
	Medium	1519	35%	1468	34%
	High	2012	47%	2106	49%

Survey design

Questionnaire structure

The questionnaire was initially designed by Ofcom and later reviewed and finalised by YouGov to ensure that the questions worked effectively in an online format. The survey followed a structured approach covering several key areas:

1. **Definition of Online Paid-for Advertisements**
 - Respondents were first provided with a concise definition of paid-for advertisements and example images² to establish a common understanding.
2. **Confidence in Identifying Online Paid-for Advertisements**
 - After reviewing the definition, respondents were asked to rate their confidence in recognising paid-for advertisements.
3. **Identification of Online Paid-for Advertisements**
 - Respondents were shown examples of different advertisements and asked to determine whether each one was a paid-for advertisement.
4. **Experiences with Potentially Fraudulent Online Paid-for Advertisements**
 - Respondents were asked whether they had ever encountered an online paid-for advertisement that they believed to be fraudulent.
 - If they had, they were asked how frequently they encountered such ads.
 - Respondents who had interacted with fraudulent advertisements were further questioned about their experiences.
5. **Identification of Inauthentic Advertisements**
 - Each respondent was shown five advertisements featuring a mix of genuine and not genuine examples³ in a randomised order, including:
 - User-to-user service – social media – impersonated brand (not genuine)
 - User-to-user service – social media (genuine)
 - User-to-user service – social media – impersonated public figure (not genuine)
 - Search service – impersonated brand (not genuine)
 - User-to-user service – social media – use of deepfake (not genuine)
 - Respondents were then asked to judge whether each advertisement was genuine or not.

The full questionnaire can be found in **Appendix 3**.

This structured approach provided insights into the public's ability to recognise potentially fraudulent online paid-for advertisements and highlighted key areas where additional education or regulatory intervention may be required.

² Example images of online paid-for advertisements in the context of this research can be found in **Appendix 1**.

³ Images used to test authenticity perception of online paid-for advertisements can be found in **Appendix 2**.

User assessment of identifying online paid-for advertisements

Assessment

To assess understanding, respondents were first shown three example advertisements that aligned with the definition of online paid-for advertisements before being tested on their ability to identify them in practice.⁴ These examples were provided to illustrate how paid-for advertisements appear across different platforms and included:

1. A sponsored search result on a search engine (e.g., Google or Bing)
2. A promoted post on a social media platform (e.g., Facebook or Instagram)
3. A video ad displayed on a video-sharing platform (e.g., YouTube or TikTok)

Following this, respondents were presented with **six different images, only two of which contained online paid-for advertisements that met Ofcom's criteria.**⁵ This test aimed to evaluate respondents' comprehension of the definition and their ability to distinguish paid-for advertisements from other forms of online content. The results of this assessment provide insights into potential gaps in public awareness and digital literacy.

Scoring system for assessing user accuracy

To measure the effectiveness of user identification, a scoring system was applied, evaluating the accuracy of selections based on predefined criteria. Participants were required to identify only the paid-for advertisements and avoid selecting content that did not meet the definition.

Explanation of Correct Scoring (0 to 6 Correct):

The scoring system ranges from 0 to 6, where each score represents the number of correct selections made by a participant:

- **0 Correct:** No selections were correct. The participant failed to identify any paid-for advertisements and/or incorrectly selected non-paid-for content.
- **1-2 Correct:** One or two correct selections. This suggests a limited understanding of the definition or difficulty in distinguishing paid-for advertisements from organic content.
- **3 Correct:** Three correct selections, e.g., correctly avoiding non-paid-for content but still misidentifying at least one of the paid-for advertisements. This indicates moderate comprehension but room for improvement.
- **4 Correct:** Four correct selections, e.g., successfully excluding non-paid-for content while identifying one paid-for advertisement correctly. This suggests a strong understanding but minor misinterpretations.
- **5 Correct:** Five correct selections, e.g., accurately identifying almost all paid-for advertisements while mistakenly excluding one. This indicates a high level of accuracy with only minor errors.
- **6 Correct:** All selections were correct, perfectly matching the criteria. This demonstrates complete understanding and accurate application of Ofcom's definition of paid-for advertisements.

This scoring system provides insights into participants' ability to understand and apply Ofcom's definition of online paid-for advertisements.

⁴ Example images of online paid-for advertisements in the context of this research can be found in **Appendix 1**.

⁵ Images used to test understanding of online paid-for advertisements can be found in **Appendix 2**.

NET definitions featured in published tables

Certain subgroups within the sample were grouped together to aid analysis and are featured alongside this report in the published data tables.

The following table defines the NET categories used in the published data tables:

Category	NET	Definition
Demographic nets		
Age	Net: 55+	55 or more
	Net: 65+	65 or more
Region	England	North East
		North West
		Yorkshire and the Humber
		East Midlands
		West Midlands
		East of England
		London
		South East
		South West
Social Grade	ABC1	AB
		C1
	C2DE	C2
		DE
Education level	Low	No formal qualifications
		Youth training certificate/skillseekers
		Recognised trade apprenticeship completed
		Clerical and commercial
		City & Guilds certificate
	Medium	City & Guilds certificate - advanced
		ONC
		CSE grades 2-5
		CSE grade 1, GCE O level, GCSE, School Certificate
		Scottish Ordinary/ Lower Certificate
		GCE A level or Higher Certificate
		Scottish Higher Certificate
		Nursing qualification (e.g. SEN, SRN, SCM, RGN)
		Teaching qualification (not degree)

		University diploma
	High	University or CNAA first degree (e.g. BA, B.Sc, B.Ed)
		University or CNAA higher degree (e.g. M.Sc, Ph.D)
		Other technical, professional or higher qualification
Household Size	1	1
	2 to 3	2
		3
	4 to 5	4
		5
	6+	6
7		
		8 or more
Question Nets		
Q1	NET: Confident	Very confident
		Fairly confident
	NET: Not confident	Not very confident
		Not at all confident
Q2	Net Only 1	If only one code selected between code 1-6
	Net 2	If only two code selected between code 1-6
	Net 3	If only three code selected between code 1-6
	Net 4	If only four code selected between code 1-6
	Net 5	If only five code selected between code 1-6
	Net 6	If ALL codes selected between code 1-6
Q4	NET: Frequently	Very frequently – almost every time when I go online
		Frequently – more than half the time when I go online
	NET: Rarely	Rarely – less than half the time when I go online but more than a handful of occasions
		Very rarely – only a handful of occasions
Q5	Net: Yes	Yes, just once
		Yes, 2-3 times
		Yes, 4 times or more
		Yes, but I can't remember how many times
Q6	NET: A well-known individual	A celebrity or well-known figure
		A well-known influencer or social media personality
	NET: A well-known organisation	A well-known brand (e.g. a major retailer)
		A well-known public body (e.g. the Government, the NHS)
Q8	NET: Confident	Very confident
		Fairly confident
	NET: Not confident	Not very confident
		Not at all confident

Q13	Net: Less than a week	Straight away
		Hours
		A few days
	Net: between a week and a month	Exactly a week
		1-2 weeks
		2-4 weeks
	Net: a month or more	Exactly a month
		1-3 months
		Longer than 3 months
Q15	Net: online service excluding email	Social media (e.g. Facebook, Twitter/X, Instagram, Snapchat)
		Instant messenger (e.g. Facebook Messenger, WhatsApp, Skype, Discord)
		Shopping website or app (e.g. Amazon, eBay, Gumtree)
		Dating website or app (e.g. Match, Tinder, Bumble)
		Online forum (e.g. Reddit, Mumsnet, The Student Room forum)
		Gaming website or app (e.g. PlayStation Network, Nintendo Online, Xbox Live, Roblox)
	Net: 'Offline' communication	By phone
		Via SMS or text
		By post
Q16	Net: lost money (any amount)	£1 - £99
		£100 - £999
		£1,000 - £9,999
		£10,000 - £19,999
		£20,000 or above
Q17	Net: Reported	Reported it to the online platform or service where I encountered the ad
		Reported it to Action Fraud ⁶
		Reported it to the police
		Reported it to Citizens' Advice
		Reported it to my bank, credit card company, building society or pension provider
		Reported it to a regulator (e.g. Ofcom, Financial Conduct Authority, Advertising Standards Authority)
		Started to report it but failed to finish the process
	Net: Shared experience	Shared my experience with a friend or family member
		Shared my experience on social media
Shared my experience on a ratings site (e.g. Trustpilot)		

⁶ Action Fraud was renamed to Report Fraud from 4 December 2025 following this research.

	Net: used less or stopped using	Used the platform or service less
		Closed my account or left the service
	Net: Any action	[All the above]
		Searched for more information or other people's similar experiences
		Other (please specify)
Q18	Net: Perceived lack of harm or severity	I didn't consider it to be harmful to others
		I didn't consider it to be bad enough to do something about
		I didn't see the need to do anything
	Net: Lack of motivation or time to report	I thought somebody else would report it
		I asked somebody else to report it
		I wasn't directly impacted
		I couldn't be bothered
		I thought the platform or service would remove the content themselves or resolve the problem
		I didn't have time
	Net: Fear of reporting	I didn't want to get into trouble for reporting
		I didn't want to visit the platform or service again after experiencing it
		I was embarrassed
	Net: Perceived ineffectiveness of reporting	I didn't know what to do or who to inform
		I didn't think it would help, make a difference or be acted on
		I thought it might make it worse
Q19	Net: Disagreed	1
		2
		3
		4
	Net: Neutral	5
		6
	Net: Agreed	7
		8
		9
		10
Q20	Net: Disagreed	1
		2
		3
		4
	Net: Neutral	5
		6
	Net: Agreed	7
		8
		9
		10
Q22A	Net: Branding	The promoter is familiar

		The logo is familiar
	Net: Labelling	The content is labelled as 'Sponsored'
		There's a Trustpilot rating
Q22B	Net: Branding	The promoter is unfamiliar
		The logo is unfamiliar
	Net: Labelling	The content is labelled as 'Sponsored'
		There's a Trustpilot rating
Q23A	Net: Branding	The logo is familiar
		The promoter is familiar
	Net: Use of well-known sources	There's a well-known public figure
		The email address seems legitimate
Q23B	Net: Branding	The logo is unfamiliar
		The promoter is unfamiliar
	Net: Use of well-known sources	I think this public figure doesn't do ads
		The email address seems suspicious
Q25A	Net: Branding	The promoter is familiar
		The logo is familiar
		The promoter's name sounds legitimate
	Net: Labelling	The content is labelled as 'Promoted'
		The promoter's account is verified / has a blue tick
	Net: Design	The blurb and headline read legitimate
		It looks professionally put together
		The web link seems legitimate
	There's a well-known public figure	
Net: Data from other users	There's reaction from other users (91 're-share's and 120 'heart's)	
	It's seen by many other users (577K views)	
Q25B	Net: Branding	The promoter is unfamiliar
		The logo is unfamiliar
	Net: Design	Something wrong with the blurb or headline
		It doesn't look professionally put together
		The web link seems suspicious
		Something wrong with the photo
Net: Data from other users	There's limited reaction from other users (91 're-share's and 120 'heart's)	
	It isn't seen by many other users (577K views)	

Qualitative research

Methodology

Following the survey, YouGov Qualitative conducted a two-stage study with 30 participants to provide additional context and depth on how consumers identify potentially fraudulent advertisements online:

- Stage 1 involved a **5-day diary task** where participants were asked to upload up to 10 screenshots of online paid-for advertisements that they came across in their day-to-day online activities on social media, video sharing platforms or search services each day. They were asked a series of questions about each advertisement to understand their views on the legitimacy of the advertisement. Fieldwork took place between 2nd - 6th June 2025.
- Following a two-week break to allow time for participants to pause and reflect on the topic, Stage 2 took place as a **3-day online community** between 24th - 26th June 2025. Participants answered a series of deliberative questions:
 - **Day 1 – Perceptions of Paid-for Online Advertising:** Participants were asked about their thoughts and experiences with paid-for online advertising.
 - **Day 2 – Advertisements Testing:** Participants were shown five online advertisements and were asked for their views about their trustworthiness.
 - **Day 3 – Preventing Fraud:** Participants were asked what can be done to protect people from fraudulent online paid-for advertising. This involved a discussion where participants were able to interact and share ideas. Initial discussion board posts were posted blind to avoid participants being influenced by others' responses.

The analysis was undertaken by researchers who conducted the fieldwork in multiple analysis sessions. Data was analysed using thematic analysis and key recruitment criteria – demographics, level of digital confidence and experiences of fraud.

Sample

All participants were recruited from the YouGov panel. The final sample frame included:

- Adults aged 18+
- Mix of age, gender, social grade, regions, education levels and ethnicity
- 15 participants who have previously experienced fraud as a result of fraudulent online paid-for advertisements
- 15 participants who have not previously experienced fraud as a result of fraudulent online paid-for advertisements
- Mix of levels of digital confidence (low, medium and high)
- Mix of social media usage

The following pages show more details of the final sample.

	Gender	Age	Digital confidence	Ethnicity	Services used	Experience of fraud from online paid-for advertisements
1	Female	18	Medium	White British (1 of the 4 nations)	Reddit	No
2	Female	47	High	Irish	YouTube, Instagram, X, LinkedIn, TikTok, Snapchat, WhatsApp	No
3	Female	46	Medium	White British (1 of the 4 nations)	Facebook, YouTube, Instagram, WhatsApp, Telegram	No
4	Female	59	Low	White British (1 of the 4 nations)	Facebook, YouTube, Instagram, WhatsApp	No
5	Female	66	Medium	White British (1 of the 4 nations)	Facebook, Instagram, WhatsApp	No
6	Female	28	High	White British (1 of the 4 nations)	Facebook, Instagram, X, LinkedIn, TikTok, Snapchat, WhatsApp	No
7	Male	20	High	White British (1 of the 4 nations)	Instagram, Snapchat, WhatsApp	No
8	Male	29	High	Any other White background	YouTube, WhatsApp	No
9	Male	29	High	White and Black Caribbean	YouTube, Instagram, X, LinkedIn, TikTok, WhatsApp	No
10	Male	33	Medium	Indian	Facebook, Instagram, X, WhatsApp, Telegram	No
11	Male	33	Medium	White British (1 of the 4 nations)	Google	No
12	Male	27	Medium	African	YouTube	No
13	Male	59	Medium	White British (1 of the 4 nations)	Facebook, X, WhatsApp	No
14	Male	28	Medium	White British (1 of the 4 nations)	Facebook, YouTube, Instagram, X, Pinterest, LinkedIn, TikTok, Reddit, Discord, WhatsApp, Telegram	No
15	Male	36	Medium	White British (1 of the 4 nations)	YouTube, Reddit	No

	Gender	Age	Digital confidence	Ethnicity	Browsers used	Experience of fraud from online paid-for advertisements
16	Female	33	Medium	White British (1 of the 4 nations)	YouTube, Instagram, Pinterest, LinkedIn, WhatsApp, Telegram	Yes
17	Male	67	High	White British (1 of the 4 nations)	Facebook, YouTube, Instagram, LinkedIn, WhatsApp	Yes
18	Male	52	Medium	White British (1 of the 4 nations)	LinkedIn, WhatsApp	Yes
19	Female	19	Medium	White British (1 of the 4 nations)	Facebook, YouTube, Instagram, X, Pinterest, LinkedIn, TikTok, Snapchat, WhatsApp	Yes
20	Female	35	High	White British (1 of the 4 nations)	Facebook, TikTok	Yes
21	Female	60	Low	White British (1 of the 4 nations)	WhatsApp	Yes
22	Female	25	High	White British (1 of the 4 nations)	Facebook, YouTube, Instagram, X, TikTok, Reddit, Snapchat, WhatsApp	Yes
23	Female	58	Low	White British (1 of the 4 nations)	Facebook, WhatsApp	Yes
24	Female	24	High	White British (1 of the 4 nations)	Facebook, Instagram, Snapchat, WhatsApp	Yes
25	Female	50	Medium	White and Asian	YouTube, TikTok, Discord, Snapchat, WhatsApp	Yes
26	Female	51	Low	White British (1 of the 4 nations)	Instagram, TikTok, Snapchat, WhatsApp	Yes
27	Male	33	High	White British (1 of the 4 nations)	Facebook, YouTube, Instagram, X, LinkedIn, Twitch, TikTok, Snapchat, WhatsApp, Telegram	Yes
28	Male	51	Medium	White British (1 of the 4 nations)	Facebook, YouTube	Yes
29	Male	56	Low	White British (1 of the 4 nations)	Facebook, YouTube, Discord, WhatsApp	Yes
30	Male	56	Medium	White British (1 of the 4 nations)	Facebook, YouTube, Instagram	Yes

A1 Appendix 1 – Online Paid-for Advertisement Examples

Images provided as examples supporting Ofcom’s definition of online paid-for ads:

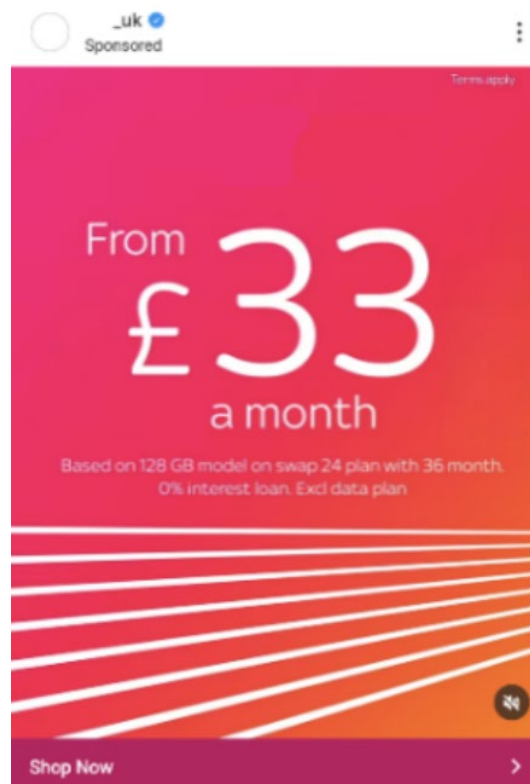
A display ad on a page of search results, labelled as ‘ad’, ‘sponsored’ or similar labels.

The image shows two screenshots of Google search results. The top screenshot is for the search term "clothes". It features a search bar with "clothes" entered, navigation tabs for "All", "Shopping", "Images", "News", "Videos", "Maps", "Web", and "More", and a "Tools" button. Below the search bar, a "Sponsored" section is visible, containing six product listings with images and titles such as "Summer Beach Plus Ribbed...", "Versatile Solid Color...", "Gorgeous Geo Jersey Dress -...", "Manon Clover Print Button-...", "Men's Sparkly Fringe Hem...", and "Lauren R Lauren - F".

The bottom screenshot is for the search term "holidays". It features a search bar with "holidays" entered, navigation tabs for "All", "Images", "News", "Maps", "Videos", "Web", "Books", and "More", and a "To" button. Below the search bar, there are filter buttons for "All inclusive", "2024", "2025", "Last minute", "UK", "School", "Cheap", and "American". A "Sponsored" section is visible, featuring a listing for "holidays" with a profile picture, a URL "https://www. holidays.com > holidays", a title "Holidays | Cheap Package Holidays", and a description: "The Nation's Most Loved **Holiday** Company Voted by The Awards. Book Online Now! Package **Holidays** At Your Fingertips With Deposits from £25pp. ATOL Protected. Book Now. 24/7 Customer Support. Monthly Payments. Low...". A small image of a beach is also visible.

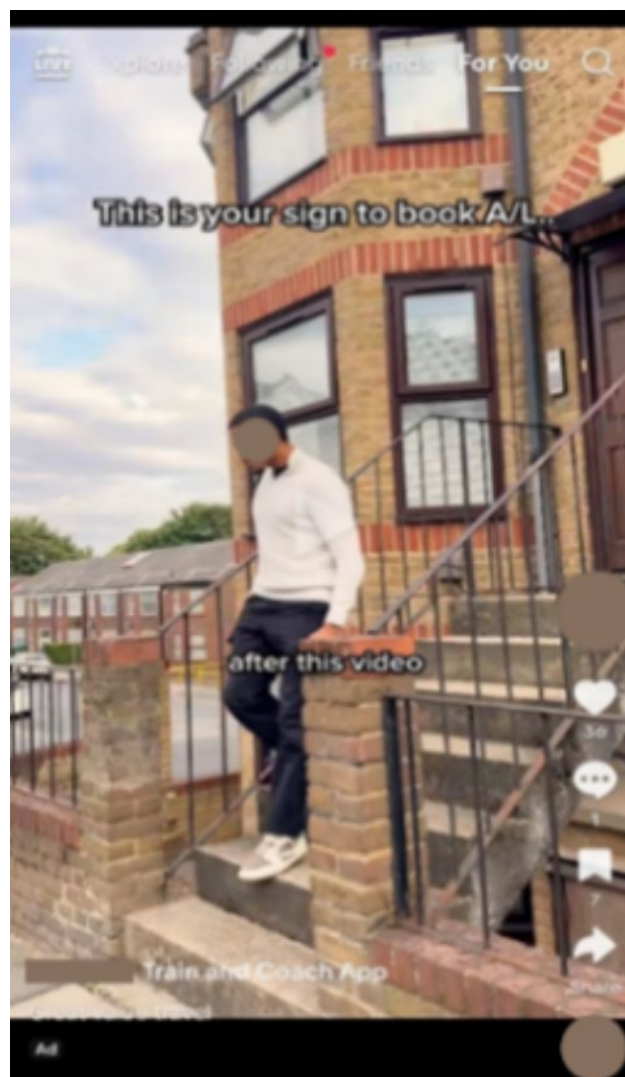
Source: Search ads: Search results for “clothes” (top) and “holidays” (bottom) from Google, accessed October 2024.

A post on your social media newsfeed that is not from accounts you follow, labelled as 'sponsored' or similar by the platform.



Source: ProCook ad from Instagram (top), accessed November 2024. Sky ad from Facebook (bottom), accessed October 2024.

An ad on a [video-sharing service](#) before your chosen video plays which is usually labelled 'sponsored' or 'ad'.



Source: Persil ad from YouTube (top), accessed November 2024. Trainline ad from TikTok (bottom), accessed October 2024.

A2 Appendix 2 – Authenticity Perception Testing

Images used to test perception of ad authenticity:

Advertisements that were not genuine



Advertisement type: Social media – impersonated brand

Source: Which?, accessed November 2024. <https://www.which.co.uk/news/article/how-our-fake-scam-ad-breezed-through-facebooks-approvals-process-a5zzC7j1n3BN>

Note: This advertisement is not genuine; Tesco has no association with or involvement in the scam.

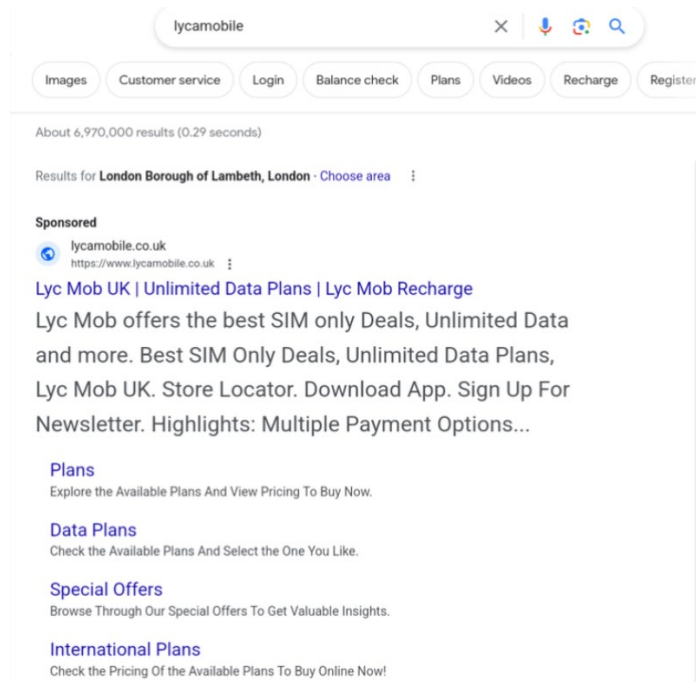


Advertisement type: Social media – impersonated public figure

Source: Money Saving Expert, accessed November 2024.

<https://www.moneysavingexpert.com/shopping/fake-martin-lewis-ads/>

Note: This advertisement is referred to as not genuine rather than a scam because there is a possibility that The UK Heating Trust could be a legitimate company, although its legitimacy could not be verified. This ad was "falsely trading off Martin Lewis's name" according to Money Saving Expert.



Type: Search service – impersonated brand

Source: Which?, accessed November 2024. <https://www.which.co.uk/news/article/scammer-bypasses-google-search-as-verified-advertiser-a1Cjw4y3pz7b>

Note: This advertisement is not genuine; Lycamobile has no association with or involvement in the scam.




Type: Social media – use of deepfake


Source: Mirror, accessed November 2024. <https://www.mirror.co.uk/news/uk-news/elon-must-act-stop-tide-30451315>

Note: This advertisement is referred to as not genuine rather than a scam because its legitimacy could not be verified. The deepfake image may have been used to attract attention. Lambros Law Office has no association with or involvement in the scam.

Advertisement that was genuine


 **TalkTalk**
Sponsored ...

Still looking for the ultimate in business connectivity? Get 15% off and speeds of up to 10Gb/s.



**UNCONTENDED
SPEEDS UP TO
10Gb/s**

Get 15% off a Dedicated Leased Line.

 **Trustpilot**
★★★★★
Rated 'Excellent'

10Gb and 10Gb beams only. T&Cs apply.
Offer ends 3rd December 2024.

**TalkTalk
Business**

TALKTALKBUSINESS.CO.UK
Hurry, sale ends 3 December
Nobody banks business like us

[Learn more](#)

Type: Social media – genuine

Source: TalkTalk ad from Facebook, accessed November 2024.

A3 Appendix 3 – Quantitative Questionnaire

Research objective: To measure internet users' past experiences in fraudulent online paid-for advertisements and to explore their literacy in identifying online paid-for advertisements.

[ASK ALL] [THIS IS A PDL, ONLY ASK THOSE WHO HAVE NEVER ANSWERED IT OR HAVEN'T ANSWERED IT IN THE PAST SIX MONTH]

[profile_gender] {single varlabel="Gender"} Are you...?

- <1> Male
- <2> Female

[ASK ALL] [THIS IS A PDL, ONLY ASK THOSE WHO HAVE NEVER ANSWERED IT OR HAVEN'T ANSWERED IT IN THE PAST SIX MONTH]

[age] {open-int varlabel="Age"} What is your age?

[ASK ALL] [THIS IS A PDL, THAT IS CALCULATED FROM A VARIETY OF OTHER PDLs]

[profile_socialgrade_cie] {single varlabel="Social Grade (Chief Income Earner) A / B / C1 / C2 / D / E"} Social Grade

- <1/"A"> A
- <2/"B"> B
- <3/"C1"> C1
- <4/"C2"> C2
- <5/"D"> D
- <6/"E"> E
- <7/"Refused"> Refused
- <8/"Unknown"> Unknown

[ASK ALL] [THIS IS A PDL, ONLY ASK THOSE WHO HAVE NEVER ANSWERED IT OR HAVEN'T ANSWERED IT IN THE PAST SIX MONTH]

[profile_GOR] {single varlabel="Region lived"} UK regions and countries lived in [calculated from postcode] [Single]

- <1> North East
- <2> North West
- <3> Yorkshire and the Humber
- <4> East Midlands
- <5> West Midlands
- <6> East of England
- <7> London

- <8> South East
- <9> South West
- <10> Wales
- <11> Scotland
- <12> Northern Ireland
- <13 if 0> Non UK & Invalid

[ASK ALL] [THIS IS A PDL, ONLY ASK THOSE WHO HAVE NEVER ANSWERED IT OR HAVEN'T ANSWERED IT IN THE PAST THREE MONTH]

[profile_household_size] {single varlabel="Household size"} How many people, including yourself, are there in your household? Please include both adults and children. [Single]

- <1> 1
- <2> 2
- <3> 3
- <4> 4
- <5> 5
- <6> 6
- <7> 7
- <8> 8 or more
- <9> Don't know
- <10> Prefer not to say

[ASK ALL] [THIS IS A PDL, ONLY ASK THOSE WHO HAVE NEVER ANSWERED IT OR HAVEN'T ANSWERED IT IN THE PAST SIX MONTH]

[profile_education_level] {single varlabel="Education qualification (highest attained)"} What is the highest educational or work-related qualification you have? [SINGLE]

- <1> No formal qualifications
- <2> Youth training certificate/skillseekers
- <3> Recognised trade apprenticeship completed
- <4> Clerical and commercial
- <5> City & Guilds certificate
- <6> City & Guilds certificate – advanced
- <7> ONC
- <8> CSE grades 2-5
- <9> CSE grade 1, GCE O level, GCSE, School Certificate
- <10> Scottish Ordinary/ Lower Certificate
- <11> GCE A level or Higher Certificate
- <12> Scottish Higher Certificate
- <13> Nursing qualification (e.g. SEN, SRN, SCM, RGN)
- <14> Teaching qualification (not degree)
- <15> University diploma
- <16> University or CNA first degree (e.g. BA, B.Sc, B.Ed)
- <17> University or CNA higher degree (e.g. M.Sc, Ph.D)
- <18> Other technical, professional or higher qualification

<19> Don't know

<20> Prefer not to say

[ASK ALL; SINGLE CODE]

CONSENT. Today, we would like to ask you some questions about your online experiences and your views on fraud and scams that originate from online advertisements.

A fraud or a scam involves someone deliberately deceiving you with the intention of taking your money or other valuable possessions. It may involve them lying to you with made-up, false information, or deliberately hiding certain facts from you. For example, they may promise to provide you with certain rewards, goods or services which they don't actually deliver.

Some questions in this survey may potentially be upsetting, for example, recalling an experience of losing money. Your participation is voluntary and you have the right to withdraw at any point should you wish to. Your honest answers will help us better understand people's experiences and their online life in the UK.

The survey should take approximately 15 minutes to complete, depending on your internet connection. As a thank you for your time, you will be credited 50 points upon completing the survey.

Are you happy to take part?

1. Yes
2. No [SCREEN OUT]
3. Don't know [SCREEN OUT]
4. Prefer not to say [SCREEN OUT]

[SHOW ALL; INTRO SCREEN]

Thank you for agreeing to take part. Before we dive into the topic of fraud and scams, we would firstly like you to think about one specific type of online advertising called 'paid-for ads'.

Please note, for the purpose of this survey, 'paid-for ads' refers to ads that appear on search services (e.g. Google, Bing), social media (e.g. Facebook, Instagram, Twitter/X) and video-sharing platforms (e.g. YouTube, TikTok). Ads you see in other websites and emails do not count.

In the following pages, there are some examples of online paid-for ads under this survey's definition (please note parts of the images or logos may be blurred or redacted):

Please click on the image to zoom in.

[NOTE TO THE SCRIPTER: DISPLAY EACH IMAGE AND ITS CORRESPONDING TEXT ABOVE ON SEPARATE PAGES]

[SHOW IMAGES IN APPENDIX 1]

[ASK ALL; SINGLE CODE]

Q1. You have just read the definition of 'paid-for ads' and have been shown some examples of 'paid-for ads' used for the purpose of this survey. How confident or not confident are you in recognising an 'online paid-for ad' within this definition?

1. Very confident
2. Fairly confident
3. Not very confident
4. Not at all confident
5. Don't know

[ASK ALL; MULTICODE; DO NOT RANDOMISE ADS; SHOW ON A SEPARATE SCREEN EACH AD]

Q2. Out of the six examples below, please select all that you think would be considered an 'online paid-for ad'. Please note, in some of the examples, parts of the images or logos may be blurred or redacted.

For the purpose of this survey, 'paid-for ads' refers to ads that appear on search services (e.g. Google, Bing), social media (e.g. Facebook, Instagram, Twitter/X) and video-sharing platforms (e.g. YouTube, TikTok). Ads you see in other websites and emails do not count.

PLEASE NOTE: There are no right or wrong answers—we're just after your initial reactions. Take your time, but there's no need to spend too long on each image.

Please click on the image to zoom in.

[SHOW IMAGES IN APPENDIX 2]

1. Example 1
2. Example 2
3. Example 3
4. Example 4
5. Example 5
6. Example 6
7. None of these [FIXED, EXCLUSIVE]
8. Don't know [FIXED, EXCLUSIVE]

[ASK ALL; SINGLE CODE]

Q3. Now let's turn to your experiences and views on fraud and scams that originate from 'online paid-for ads'. Please keep in mind the definition used in this survey. This means ads that appear on search, social media and video-sharing platforms. Ads you see in other websites and emails do not count.

A fraud or a scam involves someone deliberately deceiving you with the intention of taking your money or other valuable possessions. It may involve them lying to you with made-up, false information, or deliberately hiding certain facts from you. For example, they may promise to provide you with certain rewards, goods or services which they don't actually deliver.

Have you ever encountered or seen any online paid-for ads that you thought might be a fraud or scam?

1. Yes
2. No
3. Don't know
4. Prefer not to say

[Base: All who have encountered fraud online ads]

[ASK IF 'Yes', code 1 at Q3; SINGLE CODE]

Q4. In general, how often do you find yourself encountering or seeing online paid-for ads that you suspect to be a fraud or scam?

1. Very frequently – almost every time when I go online
2. Frequently – more than half the time when I go online
3. Sometimes – about half the time when I go online
4. Rarely – less than half the time when I go online but more than a handful of occasions
5. Very rarely – only a handful of occasions
6. Don't know
7. Prefer not to say

[ASK ALL: SINGLE CODE]

Q5. Have you ever personally been drawn into engaging with fraudulent online paid-for ads? You may not have lost money in the end but you may have, for example, clicked on the ad or followed specific instructions.

1. Yes, just once
2. Yes, 2-3 times
3. Yes, 4 times or more
4. Yes, but I can't remember how many times
5. Never
6. Don't know
7. Prefer not to say

[Base: All who have experienced fraud ads]

[ASK IF codes 1,2,3,4 (ANY 'Yes') AT Q5; MULTICODE, RANDOMISE]

Q6. When you last interacted with a fraudulent online paid-for ad, did the ad feature any of the following? Please select all that apply.

1. A celebrity or well-known figure
2. A well-known brand (e.g. a major retailer)
3. A well-known public body (e.g. the Government, the NHS)
4. A well-known influencer or social media personality
5. An unfamiliar brand or business
6. Other (please specify) [FIXED]
7. None of the above [EXCLUSIVE][FIXED]
8. Don't know [EXCLUSIVE][FIXED]
9. Prefer not to say [EXCLUSIVE][FIXED]

[Base: All who saw a trusted person in fraud ad]

[ASK IF codes 1,2,3,4 (ANYTHING WELL-KNOWN FEATURED) AT Q6; OPEN END]

Q7. Who or what was featured in the last fraudulent online paid-for ad you came across? (e.g., a celebrity, well-known brand, public body, influencer, etc. If it was an unfamiliar brand or business, please describe what you saw.)

[TEXT BOX]

1. Prefer not to say/Can't remember

[Base: All who have experienced fraud ads]

[ASK IF codes 1,2,3,4 (ANY 'Yes') AT Q5; SINGLE CODE]

Q8. When you last interacted with a fraudulent online paid-for ad, how attention-catching did you find the ad?

1. Extremely attention-catching
2. Moderately attention-catching
3. Somewhat attention-catching
4. Slightly attention-catching
5. Not at all attention-catching
6. Don't know
7. Prefer not to say

[Base: All who have experienced fraud ads]

[ASK IF codes 1,2,3,4 (ANY 'Yes') AT Q5; SINGLE CODE]

Q9. When you last interacted with a fraudulent online paid-for ad, did you click on the ad?

1. Yes
2. No
3. Don't know
4. Prefer not to say

[Base: All who clicked on fraud ad]

[ASK IF code 1 ('Yes') AT Q9; SINGLE CODE]

Q10. When you last interacted with a fraudulent online paid-for ad, and you clicked on the ad, did you notice an unexpected file being downloaded on your device?

1. Yes
2. No
3. Don't know
4. Prefer not to say

[Base: All who noticed unexpected file download]

[ASK IF code 1 ('Yes') AT Q10; SINGLE CODE]

Q11. You said that when you last interacted with a fraudulent online paid-for ad, you clicked on the ad and you then noticed an unexpected file being downloaded on your device. Did you subsequently find a virus on your device?

1. Yes
2. No
3. Don't know
4. Prefer not to say

[Base: All who clicked on fraud ad]

[ASK IF code 1 ('Yes') AT Q9; SINGLE CODE]

Q12. When you last interacted with a fraudulent online paid-for ad, and you clicked on the ad, did the ad take you to a linked webpage that contained a different product, service or content to what you were expecting?

1. Yes
2. No
3. Don't know
4. Prefer not to say

[Base: All who have experienced fraud ads]

[ASK IF codes 1,2,3,4 (ANY 'Yes') AT Q5; SINGLE CODE]

Q13. Last time you engaged with an online paid-for ad (for example, clicked on it or followed specific instructions), how long did it take you to realise that it was fraudulent?

1. Straight away
2. Hours
3. A few days
4. Exactly a week
5. 1-2 weeks
6. 2-4 weeks
7. Exactly a month
8. 1-3 months
9. Longer than 3 months
10. Don't know
11. Prefer not to say

[Base: All who have experienced fraud ads]

[ASK IF codes 1,2,3,4 (ANY 'Yes') AT Q5; SINGLE CODE]

Q14. Last time you engaged with the fraudulent online paid-for ad, were you contacted in any way by a scammer afterwards? This might include contact on private messaging, over the phone or by email, for example.

1. Yes
2. No
3. Don't know
4. Prefer not to say

[Base: All who were contacted by scammer]

[ASK IF code 1 ('Yes') AT Q14; MULTICODE; RANDOMISE]

Q15. What communication channels did the fraudster use to contact you after you last engaged with the fraudulent online paid-for ad? Please select all that apply.

1. Email
2. Social media (e.g. Facebook, Twitter/X, Instagram, Snapchat)
3. Instant messenger (e.g. Facebook Messenger, WhatsApp, Skype, Discord)
4. Shopping website or app (e.g. Amazon, eBay, Gumtree)
5. Dating website or app (e.g. Match, Tinder, Bumble)
6. By phone
7. Via SMS or text
8. Online forum (e.g. Reddit, Mumsnet, The Student Room forum)
9. Gaming website or app (e.g. PlayStation Network, Nintendo Online, Xbox Live, Roblox)
10. By post
11. Other (please specify) [FIXED]
12. Don't know [EXCLUSIVE; FIXED]
13. Prefer not to say [EXCLUSIVE; FIXED]

[Base: All who have experienced fraud ads]

[ASK IF codes 1,2,3,4 (ANY 'Yes') AT Q5; SINGLE CODE]

Q16. How much money, if any, did you lose as a result of your last experience engaging with a fraudulent online paid-for ad?

1. No money was lost
2. £1 - £99
3. £100 - £999
4. £1,000 - £9,999
5. £10,000 - £19,999
6. £20,000 or above
7. Don't know
8. Prefer not to say

[Base: All who have experienced fraud ads]

[ASK IF codes 1,2,3,4 (ANY 'Yes') AT Q5; MULTICODE; RANDOMISE IN GROUPS]

Q17. When you realised you had experienced a scam or fraud as a result of an online paid-for ad last time, which, if any, of the following actions did you take? Please select all that apply.

1. [GROUP 1] Reported it to the online platform or service where I encountered the ad
2. [GROUP 1] Reported it to Action Fraud⁷
3. [GROUP 1] Reported it to the police
4. [GROUP 1] Reported it to Citizens' Advice
5. [GROUP 1] Reported it to my bank, credit card company, building society or pension provider
6. [GROUP 1] Reported it to a regulator (e.g. Ofcom, Financial Conduct Authority, Advertising Standards Authority)

⁷ Action Fraud was renamed to Report Fraud from 4 December 2025 following this research.

- 7.[GROUP 1] Started to report it but failed to finish the process
8. [GROUP 2] Shared my experience with a friend or family member
9. [GROUP 2] Shared my experience on social media
10. [GROUP 2] Shared my experience on a ratings site (e.g. Trustpilot)
11. [GROUP 3] Searched for more information or other people's similar experiences
12. [GROUP 4] Used the platform or service less
13. [GROUP 4] Closed my account or left the service
14. Other (please specify) [FIXED]
15. I didn't take any action [FIXED; EXCLUSIVE]
16. Don't know [FIXED; EXCLUSIVE]
17. Prefer not to say [FIXED; EXCLUSIVE]

[Base: All who took action]

[GROUP 1. Reporting – codes 1-7 in Q17]

[GROUP 2. Sharing – codes 8-10 in Q17]

[GROUP 3. Searched for information – code 11 in Q17]

[GROUP 4. Used less / stopped using – codes 12,13 in Q17]

[Base: All who did not take action]

[ASK IF code 15 ('I didn't take any action') AT Q17; MULTICODE; RANDOMISE]

Q18. You said you did not take any action, why not? Please select all that apply.

1. I didn't consider it to be harmful to others
2. I didn't consider it to be bad enough to do something about
3. I didn't see the need to do anything
4. I didn't know what to do or who to inform
5. I didn't want to get into trouble for reporting
6. I didn't want to visit the platform or service again after experiencing it
7. I thought somebody else would report it
8. I asked somebody else to report it
9. I didn't think it would help, make a difference or be acted on
10. I wasn't directly impacted
11. I couldn't be bothered
12. I thought the platform or service would remove the content themselves or resolve the problem
13. I thought it might make it worse
14. I didn't have time
15. I was embarrassed
16. Other (please specify) [FIXED]
17. Don't know [FIXED; EXCLUSIVE]
18. Prefer not to say [FIXED; EXCLUSIVE]

[Base: All who lost money]

[ASK IF Codes 2-6 (LOST ANY MONEY) AT Q16; SINGLE CODE]

Q19. After the fraud or scam you last experienced because of an online paid-for ad, on a scale of 1 to 10 (where 1 means 'strongly disagree' and 10 means 'strongly agree') to what extent do you agree with the following statement?

It had an immediate negative impact on my mental wellbeing

[SCALE FROM 1 Strongly disagree TO 10 Strongly agree]

11. Don't know
12. Prefer not to say

[Base: All who lost money]

[ASK IF Codes 2-6 (LOST ANY MONEY) AT Q16; SINGLE CODE]

Q20. After the fraud or scam you last experienced because of an online paid-for ad, on a scale of 1 to 10 (where 1 means 'strongly disagree' and 10 means 'strongly agree'), to what extent do you agree with the following statement?

It had a long-term negative impact on my mental wellbeing

[SCALE FROM 1 Strongly disagree TO 10 Strongly agree]

11. Don't know
12. Prefer not to say

[SHOW ALL; INFO SCREEN]

You will now see a few different online ad examples and we would like you to tell us if you think it is genuine or not, and the reasons why you think that.

- Continue

[RANDOMISE ORDER OF Q21-Q25]

[ASK ALL; SINGLE CODE]

Q21. Do you think this is a genuine ad or a scam?

Sources will be shown at the end of this survey.

Please click on the image to zoom in.

[SHOW 'Social media – impersonated brand' ADVERT IN APPENDIX 3]

1. Genuine
2. Scam
3. Don't know

[Base: All who say 'Social media – impersonated brand' Ad Genuine]

[ASK IF code 1 ('Genuine') AT Q21; MULTICODE; RANDOMISE]

[SHOW STIM USED IN Q21]

21A) You said the ad is genuine, why do you think that? Please select all that apply.

1. The promoter's name sounds legitimate
2. There's a QR code
3. There's a barcode
4. It's a well-known brand
5. The logo is familiar

6. The offer seems reasonable
7. There're terms and conditions and small prints
8. It looks professionally put together
9. Other (please specify) [FIXED]
10. Don't know [FIXED; EXCLUSIVE]

[Base: All who say 'Social media – impersonated brand' Ad Scam]

[ASK IF code 2 ('Scam') AT Q21; MULTICODE; RANDOMISE]

[SHOW STIM USED IN Q21]

21B) You said the ad is a scam, why do you think that? Please select all that apply.

1. There's a QR code
2. Something wrong with the barcode
3. Something wrong with the logo
4. The promoter's name is unfamiliar
5. The promoter's account isn't verified
6. The offer doesn't seem reasonable
7. Something wrong with the terms and conditions or small prints
8. It doesn't look professionally put together
9. Other (please specify) [FIXED]
10. Don't know [FIXED; EXCLUSIVE]

[ASK ALL; SINGLE CODE]

Q22. Do you think this is a genuine ad or a scam?

Sources will be shown at the end of this survey.

Please click on the image to zoom in.

[SHOW 'Social media – genuine' ADVERT IN APPENDIX 3]

1. Genuine
2. Scam
3. Don't know

[Base: All who say 'Social media – genuine' Ad Genuine]

[ASK IF CODE 1 'Genuine' AT Q22; MULTICODE; RANDOMISE]

[SHOW STIM USED IN Q22]

22A) You said the ad is genuine, why do you think that? Please select all that apply.

1. The content is labelled as 'Sponsored'
2. The promoter is familiar
3. The logo is familiar
4. The offer seems reasonable
5. It looks professionally put together
6. There's a Trustpilot rating
7. Other (please specify) [FIXED]
8. Don't know [FIXED; EXCLUSIVE]

[Base: All who say 'Social media – genuine' Ad Scam]
[ASK IF CODE 2 'Scam' AT Q22; MULTICODE; RANDOMISE]
[SHOW STIM USED IN Q22]

22B) You said the ad is a scam, why do you think that? Please select all that apply.

1. The content is labelled as 'Sponsored'
2. The promoter is unfamiliar
3. The logo is unfamiliar
4. The offer doesn't seem reasonable
5. It doesn't look professionally put together
6. There's a Trustpilot rating
7. There's language that expresses urgency
8. Other (please specify) [FIXED]
9. Don't know [FIXED; EXCLUSIVE]

[ASK ALL; SINGLE CODE]

Q23. Do you think this is a genuine ad or not?

Sources will be shown at the end of this survey.

Please click on the image to zoom in.

[SHOW 'Social media – impersonated public figure' ADVERT IN APPENDIX 3]

1. Genuine
2. Not genuine
3. Don't know

[Base: All who say 'Social media – impersonated public figure' Ad Genuine]
[ASK IF code 1 ('Genuine') AT Q23; MULTICODE; RANDOMISE]
[SHOW STIM USED IN Q23]

23A) You said the ad is genuine, why do you think that? Please select all that apply.

1. The content is labelled as 'Sponsored'
2. There's a well-known public figure
3. The logo is familiar
4. The offer seems reasonable
5. The web links seem legitimate
6. It looks professionally put together
7. The email address seems legitimate
8. The promoter is familiar
9. Other (please specify) [FIXED]
10. Don't know [FIXED; EXCLUSIVE]

[Base: All who say 'Social media – impersonated public figure' Ad Scam]
[ASK IF code 2 ('Scam') AT Q23; MULTICODE; RANDOMISE]
[SHOW STIM USED IN Q23]

23B) You said the ad is not genuine, why do you think that? Please select all that apply.

1. The content is labelled as 'Sponsored'
2. I think this public figure doesn't do ads
3. The logo is unfamiliar
4. The offer doesn't seem reasonable
5. The web links seem suspicious
6. It doesn't look professionally put together
7. The email address seems suspicious
8. The promoter is unfamiliar
9. The promoter's account isn't verified
10. Other (please specify) [FIXED]
11. Don't know [FIXED; EXCLUSIVE]

[ASK ALL; SINGLE CODE]

Q24. Do you think this is a genuine ad or a scam?

Sources will be shown at the end of this survey.

Please click on the image to zoom in.

[SHOW 'Search service – impersonated brand' ADVERT IN APPENDIX 3]

1. Genuine
2. Scam
3. Don't know

[Base: All who say 'Search service – impersonated brand' Ad Genuine]

[ASK IF code 1 ('Genuine') AT Q24; MULTICODE; RANDOMISE]

[SHOW STIM USED IN Q24]

24A) You said the ad was genuine, why do you think that? Please select all that apply.

1. The content is labelled as 'Sponsored'
2. The blurb reads legitimate
3. The web links seem legitimate
4. The suggested web pages (e.g. Plans, Data Plans) seem legitimate
5. Other (please specify) [FIXED]
6. Don't know [FIXED; EXCLUSIVE]

[Base: All who say 'Search service – impersonated brand' Ad Scam]

[ASK IF code 2 ('Scam') AT Q24; MULTICODE; RANDOMISE]

[SHOW STIM USED IN Q24]

24B) You said the ad was a scam, why do you think that? Please select all that apply.

1. The content is labelled as 'Sponsored'
2. Something wrong with the blurb
3. The web links seem suspicious
4. Something wrong with the suggested web pages (e.g. Plans, Data Plans)
5. Something wrong with the brand name
6. Other (please specify) [FIXED]
7. Don't know [FIXED; EXCLUSIVE]

[ASK ALL; SINGLE CODE]

Q25. Do you think this is a genuine ad or a scam?

Sources will be shown at the end of this survey.

Please click on the image to zoom in.

[SHOW 'Social media – use of deepfake' ADVERT IN APPENDIX 3]

1. Genuine
2. Scam
3. Don't know

[Base: All who say 'Social media – use of deepfake' Ad Genuine]

[ASK IF code 1 ('Genuine') AT Q25; MULTICODE; RANDOMISE]

[SHOW STIM USED IN Q25]

25A) You said the ad is genuine, why do you think that? Please select all that apply.

1. The promoter is familiar
2. The logo is familiar
3. The content is labelled as 'Promoted'
4. The blurb and headline read legitimate
5. It looks professionally put together
6. The web link seems legitimate
7. There's reaction from other users (91 're-share's and 120 'heart's)
8. It's seen by many other users (577K views)
9. There's a well-known public figure
10. The promoter's account is verified / has a blue tick
11. The promoter's name sounds legitimate
12. Other (please specify) [FIXED]
13. Don't know [FIXED; EXCLUSIVE]

[Base: All who say 'Social media – use of deepfake' Ad Scam]

[ASK IF code 2 ('Scam') AT Q25; MULTICODE; RANDOMISE]

[SHOW STIM USED IN Q25]

25B) You said the ad is a scam, why do you think that? Please select all that apply.

1. The promoter is unfamiliar
2. The logo is unfamiliar
3. The content is labelled as 'Promoted'
4. Something wrong with the blurb or headline
5. It doesn't look professionally put together
6. The web link seems suspicious
7. There's limited reaction from other users (91 're-share's and 120 'heart's)
8. It isn't seen by many other users (577K views)
9. Something wrong with the photo
10. The promoter's account is verified / has a blue tick
11. The promoter's name doesn't sound legitimate

12. Other (please specify) [FIXED]
13. Don't know [FIXED; EXCLUSIVE]

[Base: All who say something wrong with the photo]
[ASK IF code 9 (THOUGHT SOMETHING WRONG WITH PHOTO) AT Q25B; OPEN END]
Q26. What do you think is wrong with the photo in the ad?
[TEXT BOX]

[SHOW ALL; INFO SCREEN]

END. You have reached the end of the survey. Thank you so much for your time and comments, we greatly appreciate it.

Out of the last ads you saw, the TalkTalk ad was genuine.

We understand some of the questions asked today may have raised concerns for some people. If you would like to speak to anyone about what you might be feeling or have experienced, below are some organisations that can offer help and advice:

Keeping yourself safe online

Action Fraud⁸ <https://www.actionfraud.police.uk/contact-us>

Financial Conduct Authority <https://www.fca.org.uk/consumers/report-scam-us>

UK Council for Internet Safety <https://www.gov.uk/government/organisations/uk-council-for-internet-safety>

Which? <https://www.which.co.uk/consumer-rights/scams>

Support and advice

Samaritans <https://www.samaritans.org/>

Citizens Advice <https://www.citizensadvice.org.uk/>

Mind <https://www.mind.org.uk/information-support/helplines/>

Thanks again, your contribution today will help to promote safer, more positive online experiences.

Sources of the last five ads shown, accessed November 2024:

[PRESENT SOURCES AS SHOWN IN APPENDIX 2]

⁸ Action Fraud was renamed to Report Fraud from 4 December 2025 following this research.

A4 Appendix 4 – Recruitment Screener

YouGov x Ofcom – Online paid-for advertisements
Recruitment screener – May 2025

Sample frame:

- C.30 participants equally split by those who had been victims of fraudulent adverts and those who have not
- Mix of gender
- Mix of education level, social grade, ages (18+) and region - across the total sample
- Inclusion of ethnic minorities
- Mix of social media usage (daily, weekly, monthly)
- Mix of social media, video sharing platforms used
- Mix of digital confidence

Screening questions:

[age_pdl] *(Data already held and updated on the YouGov panel. Potential participants will not be re-asked this question.)*

#Recruit 18+

#Screenout <18

[profile_gender_pdl] *(Data already held and updated on the YouGov panel. Potential participants will not be re-asked this question.)*

#Recruit a mix

[ethnicity_new_pdl] *(Data already held and updated on the YouGov panel. Potential participants will not be re-asked this question.)*

#Recruit a mix

[profile_socialgrade_cie_pdl] *(Data already held and updated on the YouGov panel. Potential participants will not be re-asked this question.)*

#Recruit a mix

[profile_GOR_pdl] *(Data already held and updated on the YouGov panel. Potential participants will not be re-asked this question.)* Which area of the UK do you live in?

<1> North East

<2> North West

<3> Yorkshire and the Humber

<4> East Midlands

<5> West Midlands

<6> East of England

<7> London

<8> South East

<9> South West

<10> Wales
<11> Scotland
<12> Northern Ireland
<13> Non UK & Invalid
#Recruit a mix
#Screenout if coded <13>

[profile_education_level_pdl] (Data already held and updated on the YouGov panel but it will be asked if a panel member has not answered it in the last 6 months) What is the highest educational or work-related qualification you have?

<1> No formal qualifications
<2> Youth training certificate/skill seekers
<3> Recognised trade apprenticeship completed
<4> Clerical and commercial
<5> City & Guilds certificate
<6> City & Guilds certificate – advanced
<7> ONC
<8> CSE grades 2-5
<9> CSE grade 1, GCE O level, GCSE, School Certificate
<10> Scottish Ordinary/ Lower Certificate
<11> GCE A level or Higher Certificate
<12> Scottish Higher Certificate
<13> Nursing qualification (e.g. SEN, SRN, SCM, RGN)
<14> Teaching qualification (not degree)
<15> University diploma
<16> University or CNAAs first degree (e.g. BA, B.Sc, B.Ed)
<17> University or CNAAs higher degree (e.g. M.Sc, Ph.D)
<18> Other technical, professional or higher qualification
<19> Don't know
<20> Prefer not to say
#Recruit a mix

[cp_social_network_used_UK_pdl] {multiple order=randomize} (Data already held and updated on the YouGov panel but it will be asked if a panel member has not answered it in the last 3 months) Which of the following online websites and apps do you currently use? Please select all that apply.

<1> Facebook
<2> YouTube
<3> Instagram
<4> X
<5> Pinterest
<6> LinkedIn
<7> Twitch
<8> TikTok
<9> Reddit
<10> Discord
<11> Snapchat
<12> WhatsApp
<14> Telegram
<17> Tumblr
<18> Google
<996 fixed xor> None of these

#Recruit a mix
#Screenout if coded <996>

[social_media_freq] {single} How often do you access social media?

- <1> Multiple times a day
- <2> Once a day
- <3> A few times a week
- <4> Once a week
- <5> A few times a month
- <6> Once a month or less

#Recruit a mix of those who code <1,2> for daily use; those who code <3,4> for weekly use; and those who code <5,6> for monthly use

[tech_literacy_pdl] {single} (*Data already held and updated on the YouGov panel but it will be asked if a panel member has not answered it in the last 3 months*) How capable would you say you are in navigating new technology products and services?

- <1> I am typically quick at learning how to use new technology
- <2> I am ok at learning how to use new technology
- <3> I find it hard to learn how to use new technology

#Record code <1> as high digital confidence, code <2> as medium digital confidence and code <3> as low digital confidence

#Recruit a mix

[digital_confidence] {grid} When it comes to technology, please rate yourself against the following statements:

- [stat1] Technology helps keep me organised and gain control over my life
- [stat2] I do all my shopping online
- [stat3] I am confident doing my financial admin online e.g., online banking, switching providers
- [stat4] I do everything on my computer / tablet / smartphone
- [stat5] I'm usually one of the first amongst my friends / colleagues to try new technologies that enter the market
- [stat6] I am active on social media and use it every day

- <1> Strongly disagree
- <2>
- <3>
- <4>
- <5> Neither agree or disagree
- <6>
- <7>
- <8>
- <9>
- <10> Strongly agree

#Aim to recruit an equal mix for varying levels of confidence:

#Low digital confidence – if selected codes <1>, <2> and <3> in 5-6 statements

#Medium digital confidence – if selected codes <4>, <5>, <6> and <7> in 3-6 statements

#High digital confidence – if selected codes <8>, <9> and <10> in 3-6 statements

[online_shopping] In general, please indicate whether you tend to make most of your purchases online (i.e. via the internet) or offline (i.e. in store, over the phone etc).

- <1> All online
 - <2> Mostly online
 - <3> Evenly split
 - <4> Mostly offline
 - <5> All offline
 - <98 fixed xor> Don't know
 - <99 fixed xor> Not applicable - I do not purchase these types of products
- #Screenout if coded <98>, <99>
#Recruit a mix

[fraud_advert_intro] We would now like you to think about one specific type of online advertising called 'paid-for ads'.

For the purpose of this survey, 'paid-for ads' refer to ads that appear on search services (e.g. Google, Bing), social media (e.g. Facebook, Instagram, Twitter) and video-sharing platforms (e.g. YouTube, TikTok). Ads you see on other websites and emails do not count.

Here are some examples of online paid-for ads (please note parts of the images or logos may be blurred or redacted):

[SHOW IMAGES IN APPENDIX 1]

[Q5] {single} Have you ever personally been drawn into engaging with fraudulent online paid-for ads? You may not have lost money in the end but you may have, for example, clicked on the ad or followed specific instructions.

- <1> Yes, just once
 - <2> Yes, 2-3 times
 - <3> Yes, 4 times or more
 - <4> Yes, but I can't remember how many times
 - <5> Never
 - <6> Don't know
 - <7> Prefer not to say
- #Recruit an equal mix of codes <1,2,3,4> and code <5>
#Screenout <6>, <7>

[Q14 if 1, 2, 3, 4 in Q5] {single} Last time you engaged with the fraudulent online paid-for ad, were you contacted in any way by a scammer afterwards? This might include contact on private messaging, over the phone or by email, for example.

- <1> Yes
 - <2> No
 - <3> Don't know / can't remember
 - <4> Prefer not to say
- #Screenout <4>

[Q15 if 1 in Q14] {single} What communication channels did the fraudster use to contact you after you last engaged with the fraudulent online paid-for ad? Please select all that apply.

- <1> Email
- <2> Social media (e.g. Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, Snapchat)

- <3> Instant messenger (e.g. Facebook Messenger, WhatsApp, Skype, Discord)
 - <4> Shopping website or app (e.g. Amazon, eBay, Gumtree)
 - <5> Dating website or app (e.g. Match, Tinder, Bumble)
 - <6> By phone
 - <7> Via SMS or text
 - <8> Online forum (e.g. Reddit, Mumsnet, The Student Room forum)
 - <9> Gaming website or app (e.g. PlayStation Network, Nintendo Online, Xbox, Live, Roblox)
 - <10> By post
 - <11> Other (please specify) [ANCHOR]
 - <12> Don't know [EXCLUSIVE; ANCHOR]
 - <13> Prefer not to say [EXCLUSIVE; ANCHOR]
- #Recruit a mix
#Screenout <12>, <13>

[Q16 if 1, 2, 3, 4 in Q5] {single} How much money, if at all, did you lose as a result of your last experience engaging with a fraudulent online paid-for ad?

- <1> No money was lost
 - <2> £1 - £99
 - <3> £100 - £999
 - <4> £1,000 - £9,999
 - <5> £10,000 - £19,999
 - <6> £20,000 or above
 - <7> Don't know
 - <8> Prefer not to say
- #Recruit a mix
#Screenout <8>

Expression of Interest

YouGov is running research on the topic of **online paid-for adverts**. This research is being conducted **on behalf of a communications regulator**.

The study consists of two stages with a two-week break between the two stages. Please note that to be eligible for the study, we require that you are available to take part in both stages.

The first stage will require you to download and log onto a mobile app. You will be required to upload screenshots of online paid-for adverts that you come across online to the app over a 5-day period.

The second stage will involve a 3-day online community that will simply involve you logging into an online platform (on your desktop, laptop), at a time most convenient for you, to discuss the topic and complete various activities.

Both stages should take you no longer than 20 minutes per day.

Stage one will take place: 2nd - 6th June 2025

Stage two will take place: 24 - 26th June 2025

Both stages will be closed, meaning that you won't be able to see the responses from other research participants taking part and they **won't be able to see your answers. Except on the final day of the research where there will be online text discussion with other research participants.**

If you agree to take part, your contact details will be used by YouGov researchers to contact you. The information you share during the research that may contain personal data will be collected and analysed by the YouGov research team. On completion of the research, YouGov will share **anonymous insights and**

quotes with the client. All data collected during the research process will be for internal use within YouGov, but an anonymised summary of findings may be published.

If selected to take part in the research, we would be delighted to offer you a [£] voucher as a thank you for your participation in both stages.

Do not worry if you have not done research with us before – we will send you all the details on how to take part, if you are selected.

If you are selected to take part and change your mind about participating, you can withdraw your consent by emailing the YouGov research team at [email address]

[Available_1] Are you interested / available and give your consent to take part in both stages of the research during the dates specified?

Please be aware the [£] voucher will only be issued to those who complete both stages of the research.

<1> Yes, I'm interested, available and give my consent to take part in both stages of the research [consent received]

<2> No, I'm not interested and/or available and/or give my consent to take part [exclude]

#Screenout those who code <2>

[stage_1_consent] This research involves **two stages with a two-week break between the stages.**

In order to complete the first stage of this research, you will be required to download an app on your phone/tablet and enable push notifications on the dates specified.

Do you consent to **downloading an app onto your personal device should you be selected to take part in the research and to enable push notifications?**

<1> Yes, I consent and understand that I will need to download an app on my phone/tablet to complete the first stage of this research

<2> No I do not consent to this

#Screenout those who code <2>

[Stage_1_understanding] For the first stage of the research, **you will also be required to take screenshots of adverts from your personal device and upload them onto the app.** Do you feel comfortable doing this?

<1> Yes, I understand/feel comfortable/consent to taking screenshots of my personal device and uploading them onto an app

<2> No, I do not consent to this

#Screenout those who code <2>

[stage_2_consent] To complete the **second stage of this research, you will be required to use an internet browser on a phone/tablet/ laptop to answer the questions.**

Do you consent to using an internet browser on a phone/tablet/ laptop should you be selected to take part in the research?

<1> Yes, I consent / understand that I will need to complete the second stage of this research using an internet browser on a phone/tablet/ laptop

<2> No, I do not want to do the research on my laptop

#Screenout those who code <2>

We will now ask you one final question about your eligibility to take part in this research.

Please note that completion of this survey will not guarantee your selection, however it will ensure you are shortlisted as a possible participant.

Your YouGov Account will be credited with 25 points for completing the survey.

We have tested the survey and found that, on average it takes around 2-4 minutes to complete. This time may vary depending on factors such as your Internet connection speed and the answers you give.

Please click the forward button below to continue.

[open_1] How, if at all, do you determine trustworthiness of an advertisement that you see online (e.g., when using search services or on social media and video-sharing platforms)? Please respond by giving as much detail as possible.

Thank you for taking the time to fill out these questions. If you are selected to participate in the research, you will be contacted via email with further information.

If you don't hear from us then this will mean you haven't been selected, however, we will be sure to contact you again in the future for upcoming research projects.

In order to continue on to another survey, please click on the next button below.

END OF SCREENER

A5 Appendix 5 – Diary Pre-task

YouGov x Ofcom – Online paid-for advertisements

Stage 1 Discussion Guide

Welcome page

Thank you for your participation. Over the next 5 days, we would like you to log on each day and keep a diary of the adverts that you come across online. Each day, a new tab will open up for you to input your diary entries for the day. You will not be able to access new tasks until the activities for the previous days are completed.

We are only interested in **specific types of paid-for online ads**. Please only share ads you see on **search services** (e.g. Google, Bing), **social media** (e.g. Facebook, Instagram, X, formerly Twitter) or **video-sharing platforms** (e.g. YouTube, TikTok).

We expect you to take screenshots of 5-10 adverts that you come across, whether video or images. Please do not do this in one browsing session, we are really interested to see the adverts you come across at different points during the day. Don't worry about forgetting, we will be there to remind you.

After uploading each ad, we will ask some short follow-up questions, as we would like to hear your thoughts about these ads. Please note that you do not have to upload all screenshots at once, you can do so throughout the day or as and when you come across the ads.

On Day 5, we will ask you some additional questions to better understand your experience and thoughts about the online ads that you captured. You will also be asked to upload screenshots of paid-for online ads – please look out for new instructions on the day.

Important: Please ensure that you have push notifications enabled on the Indeemo app so you don't miss any updates or reminders.

Our moderators will be available to support you if you need help or if you have any questions. We might ask further questions based on your responses; please look out for any notifications that will flag comments from the moderators.

We look forward to seeing your responses.

Days 1 – 4

Hello and welcome! Throughout the day, we would like you to **upload screenshots of paid-for online video or image ads** that you come across **on search services** (e.g. Google, Bing), **social media** (e.g. Facebook, Instagram, X) and **video-sharing platforms** (e.g. YouTube, TikTok). Please **do not** include ads shown on other types of websites, like news sites or forums/blogs.

Please upload between 5-10 ads and answer follow-up questions about each ad. Remember that you do not have to upload the screenshots at once, you can do so as and when you come across them.

- Please upload the screenshot of the paid-for online ad.
- Please answer the following questions about the paid-for online ad screenshot that you uploaded:

1. Where on the service did you see the advert (e.g., presented in the middle of a video you were watching, next to other pieces of content, or filling the whole of your view)? If it was a video ad, please describe in a few words what the video was showing.
2. Are you familiar with the advertiser? If you are, please be explicit about what factors of the advert help you identify the advert as originating from that brand/organization/individual?
3. How trustworthy / untrustworthy did you find the ad? Please be explicit about what factors of the advert made it trustworthy or untrustworthy to you.
4. Did the subject matter of the advert appeal to you? Please explain what factors about the advert made it appealing or unappealing to you.

Day 5

Hello! Today, we would like you to focus solely on **uploading ads that you consider suspicious / not trustworthy**.

Please upload a screenshot of a paid-for online ad that you consider suspicious / not trustworthy.

Please remember to **only** upload an ad that you come across on **search services** (e.g. Google, Bing), **social media** (e.g. Facebook, Instagram, X) and **video-sharing platforms** (e.g. YouTube, TikTok).

Please **do not** include ads shown on other types of websites, like news sites or forums/blogs.

- Please answer the following questions about the paid-for online ad screenshot that you uploaded:
 1. Where on the service did you see the advert (e.g., presented in the middle of a video you were watching, next to other pieces of content, or filling the whole of your view)? If it was a video ad, please describe in a few words what the video was showing.
 2. Why do you consider this ad to be suspicious / not trustworthy? Please explain in as much detail as you can.
 3. What did you do after seeing this ad (e.g., click on it, search for more information about it, comment on it) and why?

Final task - Reflections

We would now like you to answer some final questions about your overall thoughts and experiences with **paid-for online ads that you have come across throughout the week on search services, social media and video-sharing platforms**.

1. Did you engage with any of the ads that you came across (e.g. click on it, find out more information about it)? If so, please tell us what ads you engaged with and what prompted you to engage with them. If not, please tell us why.

2. Looking back, did any of the ads appear to be potentially suspicious / not genuine? If so, where did you come across them and what made them appear suspicious / not genuine, in your view?
3. Were there any differences in how you felt about ads that you noticed in different formats (e.g. images, videos or text) or in different parts of a service (e.g. presented in the middle of a video you were watching, next to other pieces of content, or filling the whole of your view)? If so, what was different and why?

Thank you for your detailed feedback! Your insights are extremely valuable.

A6 Appendix 6 – Online Community

YouGov x Ofcom – Online paid-for advertisements

Stage 2 Discussion Guide – Online Community

Welcome and Instructions

Hello and welcome to the online community! We are happy that you have joined us for the final stage of this research project.

This project will be live from **9:00 AM on Tuesday, 24th June until midnight (11:59 PM) on Wednesday, 26th June**, and you can access the website 24/7.

Over the course of the three days, **you'll need to log in each day to respond to a set of discussion questions** that will take around **25-30 minutes** per day. You can complete them at any point during the day.

The focus of this stage of the project will be on paid-for **fraudulent online advertising (i.e. advertising that looks to deceive or scam you)** that appears **on search services** (e.g. Google, Bing), **social media** (e.g. Facebook, Instagram, X – formerly Twitter) or **video-sharing platforms** (e.g. YouTube, TikTok).

Each day's activities can be found **in the 'Activities' tab**. New activities will be published each day at 6:00 AM, and you will have time **before midnight** to complete them. **They must be completed in order, so you won't be able to move to the next day until you have completed the questions from the previous day.**

Keep an eye out for follow-up questions from the moderators, and please remember that the community is closed for the most part, so you and other participants will not be able to see each other's posts. **Only on Day 3, there will be a task where you will interact with one another**; this will be the only part of the project where your responses will be public to other participants.

On the completion of the community, we will share anonymised transcripts with our client, a public organisation.

Please note that there are no right or wrong answers. We are looking for you to be as open and honest as possible with your entries. The more you tell us, the more you will be helping us understand your experience.

You can contact us (the moderators) by clicking the inbox icon in the upper right-hand corner of this website, or email [email address].

Do feel free to also reach out to us with any wider questions or for technical assistance.

We really look forward to speaking with you!

Day 1 – Perceptions of Paid-for-Advertisements

Probes for moderator – Investigate how viewpoints differ when –

- *The type(s) of product or service it is promoting*

- *The content and messaging (e.g. sale/promotion, new product/service)*
- *Different placement (e.g. within newsfeed/listing results, banner, full paid or on the side)*
- *Different content and features (e.g. informational, button to encouraging to click)*
- *Different formats (e.g. a static image, a moving image, a video)*

[Prompt: Welcome to the first day]

Hello and welcome! Today, we'd like to find out more about your thoughts and experiences with paid-for **online advertising** that appear **on search services** (e.g. Google, Bing), **social media** (e.g. Facebook, Instagram, X – formerly Twitter) or **video-sharing platforms** (e.g. YouTube, TikTok).

Please keep an eye out for follow-up questions from the moderators.

Click "Continue" below when you're ready to get started!

[Text – Paid for advertising] We would like to understand how you interact with paid-for adverts online.

When visiting search services, social media or video sharing platforms, what kind of adverts, if any, do you typically interact with (e.g. click)?

In your answer, please think about the following:

- The type(s) of product or service it is promoting
- The content and messaging (e.g. sale/promotion, new product/service)
- Different placement (e.g. within newsfeed/listing results, banner, full paid or on the side)
- Different content and features (e.g. informational, button encouraging to click)
- Different formats (e.g. a static image, a moving image, a video)

Please explain your reasoning.

[Text – Trust in online advertising] Thinking about paid-for adverts that you see on search services, social media or video sharing platforms, do you generally trust or distrust these adverts?

In your answer, please think about the following:

- The type(s) of product or service it is promoting
- The content and messaging (e.g. sale/promotion, new product/service)
- Different placement (e.g. within newsfeed/listing results, banner, full paid or on the side)
- Different content and features (e.g. informational, button encouraging to click)
- Different formats (e.g. a static image, a moving image, a video)

Please explain your reasoning.

[Poll + Text – Celebrity adverts] Thinking about the paid-for online adverts featuring celebrities, influencers or public figures, on a scale of 1 to 10 (where 1 is 'do not trust at all' and 10 is 'totally trustworthy'), how much do you trust these ads? In the text box below, please tell us why.

[Add scale: 1-10]

[Text – Genuine endorsements] When you see a celebrity, influencer or public figure endorsing a product or service in an advertisement on search services, social media or on a video-sharing

platform, how can you tell if it is legitimate (e.g., that they have given permission for their image to be used, or that it is them speaking or promoting the brand)?

[Poll + Text – Brand adverts] Thinking about the paid-for online adverts featuring brands, on a scale of 1 to 10 (where 1 is ‘do not trust at all’ and 10 is ‘totally trustworthy’), how much do you trust these ads? In the text box below, please tell us why.

[Add scale: 1-10]

[Text – Brand adverts types] Are there some types of paid-for online adverts featuring brands that you trust more than others? What about those adverts that make you trust them more? Please explain your reasoning.

[Fill in the blanks – Multiple] Please answer the following questions...

In general, to what extent, if at all, does your trust in adverts depend on where you see them online (e.g., Instagram, Facebook, X – formerly Twitter, TikTok, YouTube, Google search, Bing, etc.)? Why / why not?

[Fill in the blanks – Multiple – Fraudulent advertising] We would now like to explore your views on fraudulent online paid-for advertising (e.g. those making illegitimate claims or looking to scam you).

What types of fraudulent paid-for advertising, if any, are you aware of in any of the following places? Please specify the format (images, videos), the content, the promotion, and the platforms they typically appear on.

Search services (e.g. Google, Bing)

That you have heard of (i.e. in the media, from friends or family)....

That you have personally encountered....

Social media (e.g. Facebook, Instagram, X – formerly Twitter)

That you have heard of (i.e. in the media, from friends or family)....

That you have personally encountered....

Video-sharing platforms (e.g. YouTube, TikTok)

That you have heard of (i.e. in the media, from friends or family)....

That you have personally encountered....

[Fill in the blanks – Multiple – Fraudulent advertising] Still thinking about fraudulent paid-for online advertising (e.g. those making illegitimate claims or looking to scam you) that appear **on search services** (e.g. Google, Bing), **social media** (e.g. Facebook, Instagram, X – formerly Twitter) or **video-sharing platforms** (e.g. YouTube, TikTok)...

In general, what types of fraudulent paid-for online advertising, if any, are you most concerned by? And why?

Are there certain products/services which you feel are more susceptible to scams? If so, which ones and why?

Has fraudulent paid-for online advertising changed over time, in your opinion? Are there types of paid-for online advertising that you are more concerned about now than you used to be?

Are there any actions you take to help you identify a fraudulent advert? Please be as specific as possible in your response.

There are some instances when legitimate advertiser accounts are taken over by criminals. Are you aware of any time this has happened? If so, how would you identify when this happens? Please explain.

[Prompt: Thank you!] That's it for today! Thank you for your responses so far. Please remember to log back in tomorrow and look out for any follow-up questions from the moderators.

Click "Continue" below to make sure your responses are saved.

Day 2 – Advert Testing

[Prompt: Welcome back] Hello, and welcome back! Today, we'd like to show you five online advertisements, and we would like you to identify whether they are genuine or not.

Please keep an eye out for follow-up questions from the moderators.

Click "Continue" below when you're ready to get started!

[RANDOMISE TASKS] [REPEAT TASK FOR 5 ADVERTS]

[Image review + Text] Please look carefully at the advert below and place the markers on areas of the image that you feel are helping you to judge whether the ad is trustworthy or suspicious. You can place as many markers as you wish. It would be okay if you find some elements trustworthy and some elements suspicious in the same advert.

Marker options:

- Trustworthy
- Suspicious

[SHOW 'Social media – impersonated brand' ADVERT IN APPENDIX 3]

[Text] Thinking about the same advert, how reasonable, if at all, was the offer? Why / why not?

[SHOW 'Social media – impersonated public figure' ADVERT IN APPENDIX 3]

[Text] Thinking about the same advert, how reasonable, if at all, was the offer? Why / why not?

[SHOW 'Search service – impersonated brand' ADVERT IN APPENDIX 3]

[Text] Thinking about the same advert, please answer the following questions:

1. The advert is labelled as “sponsored”, did this make the advert more or less trustworthy, or the same as without it? Why is that?
2. How legitimate, if at all, were the web links? Why / why not?
3. How legitimate, if at all, was the blurb? Why / why not?

[SHOW 'Social media – use of deepfake' ADVERT IN APPENDIX 3]

[Text] Thinking about the same advert, please answer the following questions:

1. How legitimate, if at all, is the web link? Why / why not?
2. The advert is labelled as “promoted”, did this make the advert more or less trustworthy, or the same as without it? Why is that?

[SHOW 'Social media – genuine' ADVERT IN APPENDIX 3]

[Text] Thinking about the same advert, please answer the following questions:

1. Looking at the statement that says “Hurry, sale ends 3 December” (approx. 5 months from the current date), what are your thoughts about this statement (e.g., language used)? Please explain your reasoning.
2. Did the Trustpilot rating make this advert more or less trustworthy, or the same as without it? Why is that?

[Prompt: Thank you!] That’s it for today! Thank you for your responses so far. Please remember to log back in tomorrow and look out for any follow-up questions from the moderators.

For you reference the adverts you saw today were sourced from:

[PRESENT SOURCES AS SHOWN IN APPENDIX 3]

Click “Continue” below to make sure your responses are saved.

Day 3 – Preventing Fraud

[Prompt: Welcome back] Hello, and welcome back! Today, we'd like to focus on what can be done to protect people from fraudulent paid-for online advertising.

Please keep an eye out for follow-up questions from the moderators.

Click "Continue" below when you're ready to get started!

[Fill in the blanks – Multiple – Coming across fraudulent advertising]

For the next set of questions, we are exploring your experiences with fraudulent paid-for online advertising. As a reminder, we are only interested in the fraudulent advertising you have experienced, or others have experienced, in the following places...

Search services (e.g. Google, Bing),

Social media (e.g. Facebook, Instagram, X – formerly Twitter)

Video-sharing platforms (e.g. YouTube, TikTok).

Have you personally or someone you know been a victim of fraudulent paid-for advertising? If so, please tell us what type of fraudulent advertising you/someone you know has been a victim of and what actions, if any, did you/they take after experiencing this.

What, if anything, do you do when you come across an advert online that you think may be fraudulent and why? Please tell us if you tend to report it and why / why not? Do you respond differently to different types of online services or different formats of adverts?

[Fill in the blanks – Multiple – Current measures] Please answer the questions below:

What steps do you expect that search services, social media and video sharing platforms take to protect their users from fraudulent paid-for advertising?

What steps would you feel are **most** effective to keep people safe from fraudulent online adverts? Why?

What steps would you feel are **least** effective to keep people safe from fraudulent online adverts? Why?

To what extent, if at all, do you feel online platform providers are doing enough to keep people safe from fraudulent activity? Please explain your reasoning.

ROUTE TO DISCUSSION BOARD

[Discussion board]

It's idea time!

In this activity, we would like you to share ideas with one another on ways that the following services could help people identify fraudulent paid-for adverts online or prevent them:

Search services (e.g. Google, Bing)

Social media (e.g. Facebook, Instagram, X – formerly Twitter)

Video-sharing platforms (e.g. YouTube, TikTok)

When responding, be sure to discuss what the measures/functionality would help you and others, for **each kind** of provider. Don't just list the measures, make sure to justify why they would help identify or prevent fraudulent advertising!

- Think about what exists already and could be improved
- If it does not exist yet, what would it look like and how would it work?

You will not be able to see others' responses until your first post. Please be respectful of each other's ideas, feel free to discuss and remember there are no right or wrong answers.

The discussion board will remain open for the rest of today, please check back even when you have completed the final questions to let other community members know what you think about their **ideas** by voting commenting on their posts - constructively of course!

[MODERATOR QUESTION TO POST ON DISCUSSION BOARD] Some online services label some advertisers as 'verified'. What do you understand it to mean when a profile is labelled as 'verified'? To what extent, if at all, would a profile label suggesting the advertiser is 'verified' make you more likely to trust an advert? Why?

[Fill the blanks – Multiple lines – Idea testing] Below are potential measures and policies ideas that aim to target the issue of fraudulent adverts on:

- Search services (e.g. Google, Bing)
- Social media (e.g. Facebook, Instagram, X – formerly Twitter)
- Video-sharing platforms (e.g. YouTube, TikTok)

For each, we would like you to give honest feedback on whether you think it would be effective or not, and what concerns you would have, if any. Please be as detailed as possible in your responses.

1) When applying to upload an advert, the advertiser would have to verify their identity and would be prevented from having their ad posted if they failed the verification process.

2) Stronger security measures to prevent advertisers' accounts from being hacked and having fraudsters take over their accounts/adverts.

3) Services using their technology to detect and remove fraudulent adverts from their platforms before they are posted and seen by users.

[Prompt] That's it. Thank you so much for taking the time to take part in this study. Your contribution is greatly appreciated.

We understand some of the questions asked today may have raised concerns for some people, if you would like to speak to anyone about what you might be feeling or have experienced, below are some organisations that can offer help and advice:

Keeping yourself safe online

Action Fraud⁹ <https://www.actionfraud.police.uk/contact-us>

Financial Conduct Authority <https://www.fca.org.uk/consumers/report-scam-us>

UK Council for Internet Safety <https://www.gov.uk/government/organisations/uk-council-for-internet-safety>

Which? <https://www.which.co.uk/consumer-rights/scams>

Support and advice

Samaritans <https://www.samaritans.org/>

Citizens Advice <https://www.citizensadvice.org.uk/>

Mind <https://www.mind.org.uk/information-support/helplines/>

Thanks again, your contribution today will help to promote safer, more positive online experiences.

⁹ Action Fraud was renamed to Report Fraud from 4 December 2025 following this research.