Survey: Online and Personal Wellbeing Comparison (December 2024)
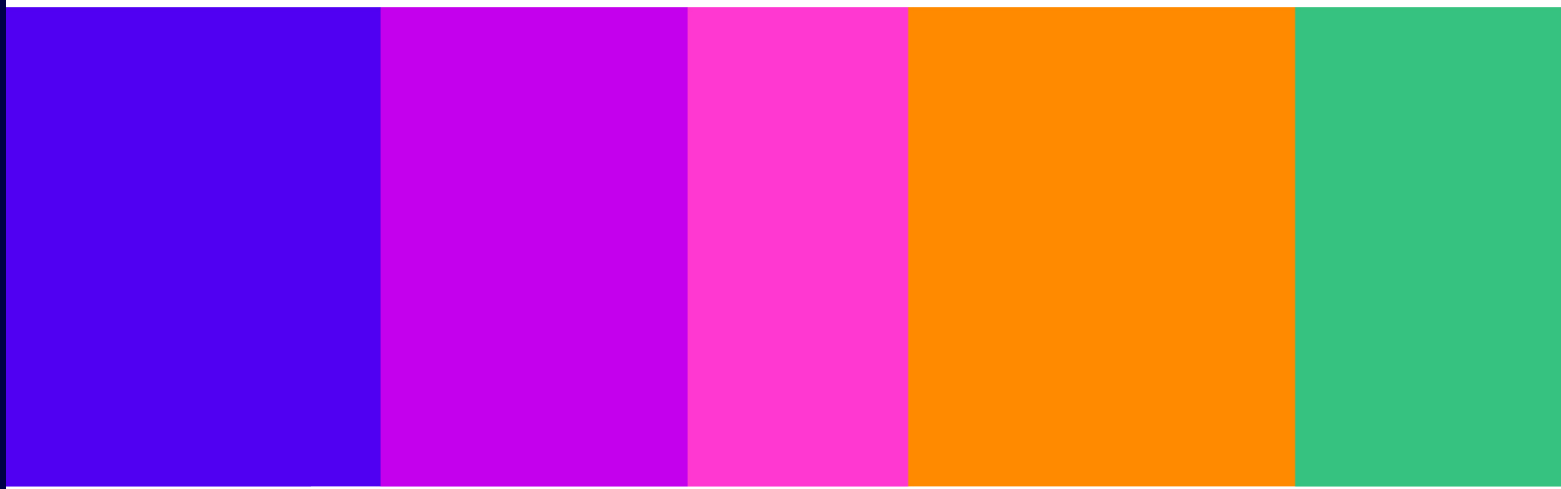
Technical Report and Summary

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Introduction

Preface

The Wellbeing Comparison survey was undertaken by YouGov on behalf of Ofcom. The core objective of this study was to assess how UK Adults perceive their general satisfaction, worthiness, happiness and anxiety both in their personal lives and when they go online.

Specifically, the key aims and objectives were:

- To understand perceived satisfaction and happiness amongst UK adults, both in their personal and online lives

- To explore if there are any notable differences between perceived satisfaction and happiness when comparing between personal and online perceptions

Summary of approach

YouGov is a professional research and consulting organisation, focused on collecting high quality, in-depth data for market research.

This research was conducted with a nationally representative sample (aged 16+) of adults in the UK, collecting 4,239 completes in total. The fieldwork was run over a 4-day period from Friday 6th December to Monday 9th December, with an even spread of nationally representative respondents completing the survey on each given day. The respondents were split between taking one of the two sets of questions (online wellbeing 2,122 or personal wellbeing 2,117). Among the online wellbeing sample, only respondents who were online the day before the survey were allowed to participate, as some questions asked specifically about people's online experiences from the previous day (2,014).

All research was carried out online, with respondents recruited from YouGov's online panel, containing around 3,113,610[1] panellists from all over the UK. As the methodology included online panellists only, please be noted of the potential underrepresentation of non-confident internet users.

Significance testing and data redaction

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

In the standard tables, low base sizes (between 10-49) are italicised. In the summary tables, lower base sizes (below 100) are indicated by a single asterisk. Data with a base size of below 10 has been redacted from all data tables.

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[1] The numbers are as of July 2024.

Sampling

Sample design

The sample was drawn from the YouGov online panel comprising around 3 million panellists across the UK. YouGov maintains engagement with communities of panellists who have specifically opted in to participate in online research activities and provide demographic details. As a result, the panel provides access to a responsive audience, who have already provided information on important demographic, attitudinal, and lifestyle attributes. Members of the panel consent to completing surveys for YouGov in return for a modest financial incentive.

The sample was designed to be representative of all UK adults aged 16+, recruiting online panellists only. The demographic information (e.g. age, gender, social grade/socio-economic group (SEG), working status, region) was information declared and collected by YouGov from its panellists as part of the initial signing up process. This information is updated regularly by panellists, where applicable.

YouGov carried out the following standard checks during and post-fieldwork:

- Quality trap questions
- Identifier checks
- Attention checks
- Inattentiveness checks
- Hyper activeness scanning
- Speed monitoring
- Open-ended responses are reviewed for clarity and accuracy by project managers

Quotas

Interview quotas were applied so that the final sample was nationally representative of all UK adults aged 16+ by age, gender and education level (interlocked), region, and social grade/socio-economic group (SEG), using an online sample.

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 (16-24, 25-39, 40-49, 50-65, Over 65)
- Gender
- Region
- Social grade/Socio-economic group (SEG)
- Education level

Fieldwork and Weighting

All interviews were conducted online over a 4-day period from Friday 6th December to Monday 9th December 2024 using the YouGov bespoke online survey platform and panel, with an even spread of nationally representative respondents completing the survey on each given day. The respondents were split between taking one of the two sets of questions (online or personal), and measures were put in place to ensure respondents would only complete one of the two sets of questions.

YouGov interviewed a sample of 4,239 adults aged 16+ in the UK in total (online wellbeing 2,122 of which 2,014 were online the previous day; personal wellbeing 2,117).

The data was weighted to be nationally representative of the UK 16+ population on age, gender and education level (interlocked), and overall, to the region and SEG profiles, using an online sample.

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

Demographic group	Unweighted counts	Unweighted %	Weighted counts	Weighted %
Male	2050	48.36%	2056	48.50%
Female	2189	51.64%	2183	51.50%
16-24	544	12.83%	572	13.49%
25-34	689	16.25%	691	16.30%
35-44	680	16.04%	706	16.65%
45-54	639	15.07%	666	15.71%
55+ (NET)	1687	39.80%	1604	37.84%
North East	151	3.56%	153	3.61%
North West	514	12.13%	509	12.01%
Yorkshire and the Humber	327	7.71%	326	7.69%
East Midlands	335	7.90%	333	7.86%
West Midlands	357	8.42%	349	8.23%
East of England	382	9.01%	387	9.13%
London	542	12.79%	555	13.09%
South East	584	13.78%	576	13.59%
South West	379	8.94%	376	8.87%
England (NET)	3571	84.24%	3565	84.10%
Wales	199	4.69%	203	4.79%
Scotland	354	8.35%	356	8.40%
Northern Ireland	115	2.71%	114	2.69%
ABC1 (NET)	2540	59.92%	2416	56.99%
C2DE (NET)	1699	40.08%	1823	43.01%

# NET definitions featured in published data tables and data comparison

Within the results, certain data points were grouped together to aid analysis and are featured alongside this report in the published data tables.

The definitions of these so-called NETs are in the table below and were applied to each of the questions asked. NETs exclude respondents who gave 'don't know' as a response, and for the 'online' questions 5% of the sample were categorised as 'N/A' as they had not been online the previous day and are also excluded from the NET calculation. This means that the samples for both the 'online' and 'personal' parts of the study remain nationally representative, but the percentages below will not sum to 100%.

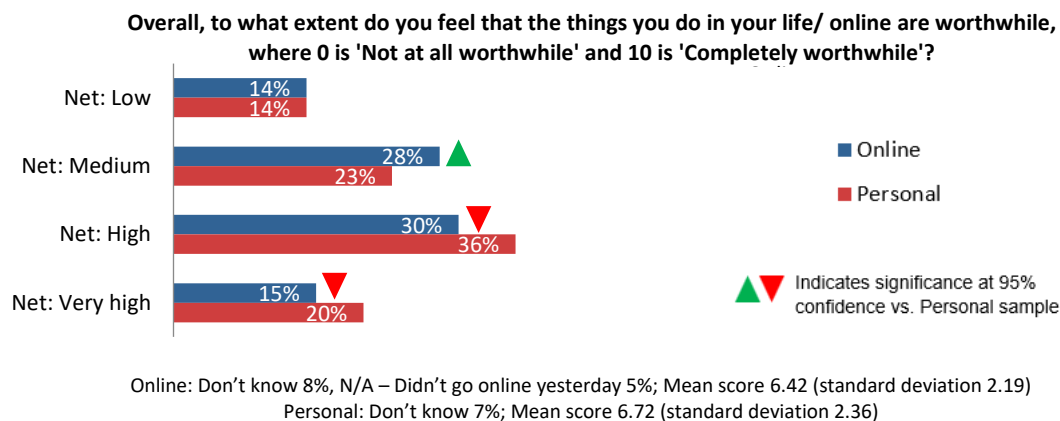| Life Satisfaction, Worthwhileness and Happiness	Low – 0,1,2,3,4 Medium – 5,6 High – 7,8 Very High – 9,10	Anxiety	Very low – 0,1 Low – 2,3 Medium – 4,5 High – 6,7,8,9,10

Life satisfaction

Overall, how satisfied are you with your life/ life online nowadays, where 0 is 'Not at all satisfied', and 10 is 'Completely satisfied'?
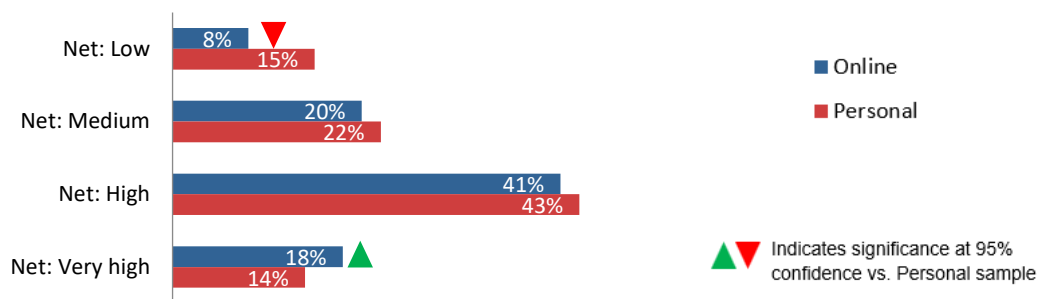
Online: Don't know 8%, N/A – Didn't go online yesterday 5%; Mean score 7.04 (standard deviation 2.04)
Personal: Don't know 7%; Mean score 6.53 (standard deviation 2.28)

Those asked about their life satisfaction in regards to their personal life, are significantly more likely to give a low satisfaction score in comparison to those who were surveyed about their online life (15% personal vs. 8% online). When compared amongst those who scored very high, this is reversed, with the online respondent group rating significantly higher than those asked about their personal life (18% online vs. 14% personal).

Worthwhileness

Overall, to what extent do you feel that the things you do in your life/ online are worthwhile, where 0 is 'Not at all worthwhile' and 10 is 'Completely worthwhile'?

	Online	Personal
Net: Low	14%	14%
Net: Medium	28% ▲	23%
Net: High	30% ▼	36%
Net: Very high	15% ▼	20%

▲▼ Indicates significance at 95% confidence vs. Personal sample

Online: Don't know 8%, N/A – Didn't go online yesterday 5%; Mean score 6.42 (standard deviation 2.19)
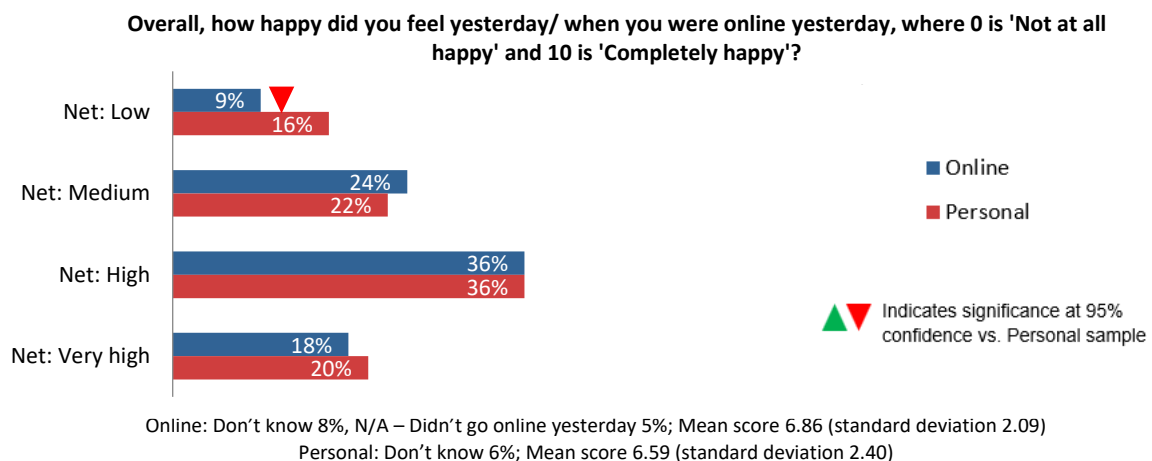Personal: Don't know 7%; Mean score 6.72 (standard deviation 2.36)

Those asked about the worthwhileness of the things they do online, are significantly more likely to give a medium score (28% online vs. 23% personal) and significantly less likely to give a high (30% online vs. 36% personal) or very high (15% online vs. 20% personal) score in comparison to those who were asked about the things they do in their personal life.

Happiness

Overall, how happy did you feel yesterday/ when you were online yesterday, where 0 is 'Not at all happy' and 10 is 'Completely happy'?

	Online	Personal
Net: Low	9% ▼	16%
Net: Medium	24%	22%
Net: High	36%	36%
Net: Very high	18%	20%

▲▼ Indicates significance at 95% confidence vs. Personal sample

Online: Don't know 8%, N/A – Didn't go online yesterday 5%; Mean score 6.86 (standard deviation 2.09)
Personal: Don't know 6%; Mean score 6.59 (standard deviation 2.40)

When asked about their happiness on the day prior to taking part in the survey, over 1 in 6 (16%) of respondents have given a low score, reflecting being less happy, when answering about their personal life, which is significantly more than those answering about their happiness when they were online yesterday (9%). There are no significant differences on medium, high or very high scores.

Anxiety

On a scale where 0 is "Not at all anxious" and 10 is "Completely anxious", overall, how anxious did you feel yesterday/ when you were online yesterday?
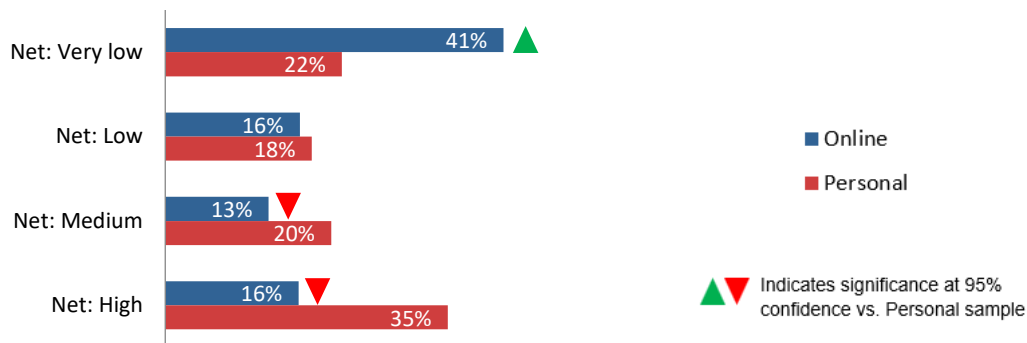
Online: Don't know 8%, N/A – Didn't go online yesterday 5%; Mean score 2.63 (standard deviation 2.91)
Personal: Don't know 6%; Mean score 4.29 (standard deviation 3.00)

When asked about their anxiety level on the previous day, those thinking about their time online are significantly more likely to give a very low score (41% online vs. 22% personal), and significantly less likely to give a medium (13% online vs. 20% personal) or high (16% online vs. 35% personal) score, than those thinking about their personal life generally.

Summary of key findings

Overall, there are some differences between feelings of life satisfaction, worthwhileness and anxiety amongst those asked about their general personal life, compared to those asked about their online life. Happiness is broadly the same between the two groups although those thinking about their time online are less likely to give a low happiness score, so more likely to be happier on the whole, than those thinking about their personal life. Fieldwork was recorded over a 4-day period and there does not appear to be any significant impact on the day of the week in the answers given to these sets of questions.

Life Satisfaction	Worthwhileness	Happiness	Anxiety
• People are **more likely to claim they are satisfied with their life online** than their personal life generally.	• The things that people do in their **life online are not perceived as worthwhile** as their personal life.	• **Broadly the same** but people are less likely to give a low score (so happier) when thinking about how they felt when they were online yesterday.	• People report feeling **less anxious when they were online yesterday** compared to their personal feeling yesterday.