Technical report – The Online Experiences Tracker (Wave 1) (2021)

Preface

Wave 1 of the Online Experiences Tracker (2021/22) was undertaken by Yonder Consulting on behalf of Ofcom. The objectives of the study were to gain a deeper understanding of internet users' attitudes towards and use of the internet, and their experiences of potential harms online.

The insights drawn from this data have informed Ofcom's preparations for The Online Safety Bill, which was introduced to Parliament earlier this year, granting Ofcom new responsibilities in helping to protect internet users online. The study has also informed the continuing implementation of Ofcom's video-sharing platform (VSP) regulation, by monitoring harms on regulated VSPs.

The tracker runs twice annually (in November and May), and this report refers to the first wave completed in November 2021.

The study provides data on a nationally representative sample of UK internet users, with boosts applied to younger respondents, specific UK nations, and certain minority ethnic groups to allow for robust analysis of demographic subgroups.

Further information about the study is summarised in the sections below.

Summary of Approach

- The **Online Experiences Tracker (Wave 1)** survey was conducted with a nationally representative sample of UK internet users and addresses internet users' attitudes towards and use of the internet, and their experiences of potential harms.
- All research was carried out online, with respondents recruited from Yonder's proprietary online panel 'YonderLive', containing around 150,000 panellists from all over the UK. Respondents were recruited to be nationally representative of the UK internet user population, with quotas set on gender, age, socio-economic group and region. Boosts were applied to low incidence groups such as younger respondents, those living in specific UK nations, and minority ethnic groups to allow for bases sizes robust enough for analysis.
- The **Online Experiences Tracker** is a multi-wave study that runs twice annually in November and May. It builds on previous work of similar focus ('Pilot Online Harms Survey'[1]) which was commissioned by Ofcom in 2020 to explore internet usage and behaviours, attitudes towards online safety regulation, and experiences of potential online harms. The pilot study informed preparations for the Online Safety regime.
- The study also contained a qualitative cognitive test element which tested respondents' understanding and experience of the questionnaire. The results of this study informed the final questionnaire structure, format and content.
- A total of 6,619 interviews were conducted for Wave 1. All fieldwork was conducted between 22nd October and 12th November 2021.

[1] https://www.ofcom.org.uk/__data/assets/pdf_file/0014/220622/online-harms-survey-waves-1-4-2021.pdf

Significance Testing

Significance testing for the **Online Experiences Tracker** has consistently been applied at 95%.

Financial vulnerability

We have included in each set of data tables a measure for household financial vulnerability, ranging from most to least vulnerable. This definition is based on household income and household composition (i.e. size and number of children) and can only be run on data where respondents have given a response at each of these questions.

The following breakdown shows the detailed definitions for each group.

Most financially vulnerable	Potentially financially vulnerable	Least financially vulnerable
Household income under £14,000	**Earning between £14,001 - £28,000**	**Earning between £28,001 - £41,000**
All respondents	1-2 adult, 0-1 child	1 adult, 0 children
	3 adults, no children	
Earning between £14,001 - £28,000	**Earning between £28,001 - £41,000**	**Earning between £41,001 - £55,000**
1-2 adults, 2+ children	1 adult, 1 to 3 children	1 adult, 0-1 child
3+ adults, 1+ children	2 adults, 0 to 3 children	2 adults, 0 children
4+ adults	3 adults, 0 to 1 child	
	4 adults, no children	
Earning between £28,001 - £41,000	**Earning between £41,001 - £55,000**	**Household income £55,001+**
1 adult, 4+ children	1 adult, 2-3 children	All households
2 adults,4+ children	2 adults, 1-2 children	
3 adults, 2+ children	3 adults, 0-2 children	
4 adults, 1+ children	4 adults, 0-1 child	
5+ adults	5 adults, 0 children	
Earning between £41,001 - £55,000		
1 adults, >3 children		
2 adults, 3+ children		
3 adults, 3+ children		
4 adults, 2+ children		

The Online Experiences Tracker (Wave 1), November 2021

Introduction

Yonder Consulting interviewed a sample of 6,619 UK internet users aged 13 to 84 years old in order to explore their internet usage, behaviours and attitudes, and experiences of real or potential online harms. Interviews were carried out online between 22nd October and 12th November 2021.

Details of the sample design, research methodology, and weighting procedures for this study are outlined in the following pages. A note on statistical reliability is also included.

Sample Design

A representative sample of UK internet users aged 13-84 was provided by Yonder's proprietary online panel, YonderLive. Boosts were also applied to UK nations (Wales, Northern Ireland), minority ethnic groups (Black, Pakistani, Bangladeshi and Chinese respondents) and religions (Hindu, Jewish, Sikh and Buddhist respondents) to ensure that achieved base sizes for these low-incidence demographic subgroups were large enough to allow for detailed and statistically robust analysis.

Duplication checks took place to ensure that respondents could not complete the survey more than once. As well as duplication checks, Yonder carried out the following checks during and post fieldwork as standard:

- IP geo-locator checks to ensure the respondents are all based in the UK.
- Front and back end quality control questions within the survey to ensure respondents are answering logically and consistently.
- 'Trap' questions within the survey to ensure respondents are paying attention and reading each code i.e. at a random question we would ask them to select a certain code, those who do not select this we will remove from the data.
- Manual speeder check post-fieldwork to remove anyone deemed to have proceeded through the questionnaire at an unreasonable pace.
- Manual flatlining checks post-fieldwork to check grid questions and ensure respondents aren't answering the same codes across an unreasonable range of grid / scale questions.
- Open end checks to ensure respondents are answering thoughtfully and not spamming answers.

Quotas

Interview quotas were applied so that the final sample was representative of UK internet users by age, gender, region and socio-economic group (SEG).

Targets for quotas were derived from Yonder's bi-weekly online omnibus, and moderated by data obtained from the Ofcom Online Research Panel recruitment and the Office of National Statistics (ONS).

Quotas were set on the following variables:

- Age (13-17, 18-24, 25-34, 35-44, 45-54, 55-64, 64-74, 75-84)
- Gender
- Region
- Socio-economic group (SEG)

The table below details the specific quotas that were used for this study:

Demographic group	Category	Quota
Gender	Male	49%
	Female	51%
Age	13-17	7%
	18-24	11%
	25-34	17%
	35-44	16%
	45-54	18%
	55-64	14%
	65-74	11%
	75-84	6%
Region	Scotland	8%
	North East	4%
	North West	11%
	Yorkshire & Humberside	8%
	West Midlands	9%
	East Midlands	7%
	Wales	5%
	Eastern	9%
	London	14%
	South East	14%
	South West	9%
	Northern Ireland	3%
Social Grade	AB	27%
	C1	30%
	C2	21%
	DE	22%

Cognitive Testing

The study was informed by qualitative cognitive testing. The aims of the cognitive test element were to understand how people perceived the structure, key questions and language of the questionnaire, how clear and sensitive these elements were and whether they were sufficiently streamlined and fit for purpose. The qualitative cognitive testing provided insight on how to improve the questionnaire (e.g. how best to ask about harms experienced and the impact of these experiences on the individual).

Twenty 45-minute qualitative interviews were carrired out online between 14th and 27th September 2021. Participants were recruited to represent a mix of the UK population in terms of gender, urban, suburban and rural locations[2], SEG, lifestage, ethnicity, internet and device usage, and a number did not speak English as their first language. The findings were used to infom questionnaire development.

Fieldwork

An online survey was conducted using Yonder's online panel (YonderLive) to reach adults aged 13-84. YonderLive is made up of 150,000 internet users across the UK. For the 'main sample', online interviews with interlocking quotas were set to be broadly representative of UK internet users based on age, gender, region and SEG. For the 'boost' interviews, minimum quotas were set on specific UK nations, ethnicities and religions. The criteria for inclusion for these 'boost' interviews was being a member of one of the subgroups of interest where fewer than 100 interviews had been conducted in the 'main sample' surveys. Boost interviews were conducted to ensure at least 100 interviews among all subgroups of interest.

All interviews were conducted over a three week period between 22nd October – 12th November 2021.

Due to the highly sensitive nature of some of the research topics (e.g. experences of potential online harms), respondents were given the option to end the survey at two points. They were also forewarned of the sensitive nature of the research topic and asked to give their consent to participate, in line with MRS guidelines. A total of 228 respondents opted to end the survey due to the sensitivity of the content.

The questionnaire also included questions designed to obtain consent to be contacted for participation in further qualtitative research into online habits, attitudes and behaviours, as well as experience of potential online harms. This data is managed and stored in line with GDPR commitments.

Weighting

The data have been weighted to be representative of the UK internet user population on age within gender, and overall to the region and SEG profiles. This approach counteracted any effect that boost oversampling would have had on the final data.

Weighting profiles were created using a combination of Yonder online omnibus data and CATI omnibus data[3] to produce the most accurate profile of UK internet users.

[2] Locations were selected in and around London and Manchester, and were chosen to be a mix of urban, suburban and rural.

[3] Certain biases may exist on online panels given the nature of the methodology (e.g. panelists may be higher internet users). In order to mitigate any bias, Yonder conducted an offline CATI calibration exercise to obtain the most up-to-date and accurate data for time spent online per day, device usage, and VSP usage. Weighting profiles were then moderated using a combination of this offline exercise and data on the known proportion of each age group that use the internet, taken from the ONS.

Sample Representativeness

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

Demographic group	Unweighted counts	Unweighted %	Weighted counts	Weighted %
Male 13-17	267	4%	236	4%
Male 18-34	800	12%	943	14%
Male 35-54	1121	17%	1108	17%
Male 55+	1056	16%	959	14%
Female 13-17	238	4%	224	3%
Female 18-34	1007	15%	935	14%
Female 35-54	1104	17%	1129	17%
Female 55+	1012	15%	1071	16%
Scotland	537	8%	550	8%
North East	257	4%	272	4%
North West	689	10%	722	11%
Yorkshire and the Humber	506	8%	537	8%
West Midlands	553	8%	563	9%
East Midlands	442	7%	477	7%
Wales	369	6%	318	5%
East of England	550	8%	590	9%
London	931	14%	901	14%
South East	881	13%	928	14%
South West	539	8%	570	9%
Northern Ireland	365	6%	192	3%
AB	1918	29%	1807	27%
C1	1928	29%	1959	30%
C2	1294	20%	1377	21%
DE	1479	22%	1476	22%

Guide to Statistical Reliability

The variation between the sample results and the "true" values (the findings that would have been obtained if everyone had been interviewed) can be predicted from the sample sizes on which the results are based, and on the number of times that a particular answer is given. The confidence with which we can make this prediction is calculated at the 95% that is, the chances are 95 in 100 that the "true" values will fall within a specified range. However, as the sample is weighted, we need to use the effective sample size (ESS) rather than actual sample size to judge the accuracy of results.

The following table compares ESS and actual samples for some of the main groups within the main sample.

	ACTUAL	ESS
TOTAL	6,619	6,396
GENDER: Male	3,246	3,110
GENDER: Female	3,359	3,273
AGE: 13-17	508	456
AGE: 18-24	703	663
AGE: 25-34	1,110	1,092
AGE: 35-44	1,077	1,056
AGE: 45-54	1,153	1,133
AGE: 55-64	941	914
AGE: 65-74	734	717
AGE: 75+	393	373
SEG: AB	1,918	1,835
SEG: C1	1,928	1,868
SEG: C2	1,294	1,265
SEG: DE	1,479	1,437

The table below illustrates the required ranges for different sample sizes and percentage results at the "95% confidence interval".

Approximate sampling tolerances applicable to percentages at or near these levels

Effective sample size		10% or 90%	20% or 80%	30% or 70%	40% or 60%	50%
		±	±	±	±	±
TOTAL	6,396	0.7%	1.0%	1.1%	1.2%	1.2%
GENDER: Male	3,110	1.1%	1.4%	1.6%	1.7%	1.8%
GENDER: Female	3,273	1.0%	1.4%	1.6%	1.7%	1.7%
AGE: 13-17	456	2.8%	3.7%	4.2%	4.5%	4.6%
AGE: 18-24	663	2.3%	3.0%	3.5%	3.7%	3.8%
AGE: 25-34	1,092	1.8%	2.4%	2.7%	2.9%	3.0%
AGE: 35-44	1,056	1.8%	2.4%	2.8%	3.0%	3.0%
AGE: 45-54	1,133	1.7%	2.3%	2.7%	2.9%	2.9%
AGE: 55-64	914	1.9%	2.6%	3.0%	3.2%	3.2%
AGE: 65-74	717	2.2%	2.9%	3.4%	3.6%	3.7%
AGE: 75+	373	3.0%	4.1%	4.7%	5.0%	5.1%
SEG: AB	1,835	1.4%	1.8%	2.1%	2.2%	2.3%
SEG: C1	1,868	1.4%	1.8%	2.1%	2.2%	2.3%
SEG: C2	1,265	1.7%	2.2%	2.5%	2.7%	2.8%
SEG: DE	1,437	1.6%	2.1%	2.4%	2.5%	2.6%

For example, if 30% or 70% of a sample of 6,396 gives a particular answer, the chances are 95 in 100 that the "true" value will fall within the range of +/- 1.1 percentage points from the sample results.

When results are compared between separate groups within a sample, different results may be obtained. The difference may be "real", or it may occur by chance (because not everyone has been interviewed). To test if the difference is a real one – i.e. if it is "statistically significant" – we again have to know the size of the samples, the percentages giving a certain answer and the degree of confidence chosen. If we assume "95% confidence interval", the difference between two sample results must be greater than the values given in the table below to be significant.[4]

Differences required for significant at or near these percentages

Sample sizes being compared	10% or 90%	20% or 80%	30% or 70%	40% or 60%	50%
	±	±	±	±	±
GENDER: Male v Female (3,110 v 3,361)	1.50%	1.90%	2.20%	2.40%	2.50%
AGE: Young (13-17) v Old (75+) (456 v 373)	4.30%	5.60%	6.40%	6.80%	6.80%
SEG: ABC1 v C2DE (3,699 v 2,699)	1.50%	2.00%	2.30%	2.40%	2.50%
ETHNICITY: Black v White (5,462 v 213)	4.50%	5.70%	6.50%	6.80%	6.80%

[4] It is important to note that these numbers are estimates. Further testing should be carried out on individual examples to understand whether differences are significant.

NET definitions featured in the 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 definitions of these so-called NETs are as follows:

Category	NET	Definition
Break Group 1: Demographics		
Ethnicity	White	English/ Welsh/ Scottish/ Northern Irish/ British
		Irish
		Gypsy, Traveller or Irish Traveller
		Any other white background
	Mixed/ Multiple ethnic groups	White and Black Caribbean
		White and Black African
		White and Asian
		Any other mixed/ multiple ethnic background
	Asian and British Asian	Indian
		Pakistani
		Bangladeshi
		Chinese
		Any other Asian background
	Black and black British	Caribbean
		African
		Any other black/ African/ Caribbean background
	Other ethnic group	Arab
		Any other ethnic background
Religion	Christian	Catholic
		Church of England / Scotland / Ireland
		Other Christian
	Other religions	Muslim
		Hindu
		Jewish
		Sikh
		Buddhist
		Other religion
	None	No religion
Disability	Any	Any reported disability
	Mental condition	Mental abilities? Such as learning, understanding, concentration, memory, communicating, cognitive loss or deterioration

Category		NET	Definition
			Social/ behavioural? Conditions associated with this such as autism, attention deficit disorder, Asperger's, etc.
			Your mental health? Anxiety, depression, or trauma-related conditions, for example
		Physical condition	Hearing? Poor hearing, partial hearing, or are deaf
			Eyesight? Poor vision, colour blindness, partial sight, or are blind
			Mobility? Cannot walk at all/ use a wheelchair or mobility scooter etc., or cannot walk very far or manage stairs or can only do so with difficulty
			Dexterity? Limited ability to reach/ difficulty opening things with your hands/ difficulty using a telephone handset/ television remote control/ computer keyboard etc.
			Breathing? Breathlessness or chest pains
Break Group 2: Internet Usage			
Internet usage	High / Medium / Low	Low usage	None
			Less than 5 hours
		Medium usage	6 to 11 hours
			12 to 22 hours
		High usage	23 to 30 hours
			Over 30 hours
Break Group 3: Attitudes			
Platform vs individual responsibility	It is the responsibility of the website or app to control what is posted on their site vs. It is the responsibility of the individual to ensure what they are posting is appropriate for other users	Platform dependents	If score -5 to -2
		Neutral	If score -1 to 1
		Self-regulators	If score 2 to 5
Confidence in staying safe online	I feel confident in my ability to stay safe online vs. I do not feel confident in my ability to stay safe online	Safety assured	If score -5 to -2
		Neutrals	If score -1 to 1
		Safety self-doubters	If score 2 to 5

Category		NET	Definition
Parent vs platform responsibility	Websites and apps have a particular responsibility to protect children vs. It is the responsibility of parents/ carers to monitor what their children do online	Platform dependents	If score -5 to -2
		Neutrals	If score -1 to 1
		Parental controllers	If score 2 to 5
Benefits vs risks of going online	The benefits of going online outweigh the risks vs. The risks of going online outweigh the benefits	Online optimists	If score -5 to -2
		Neutrals	If score -1 to 1
		Online pessimists	If score 2 to 5
Sufficiency of common sense to protect from exposure to potential harms	Using a bit of common sense when you're online usually prevents you from seeing harmful or offensive photos and videos vs. It is impossible to avoid seeing harmful or offensive photos and videos if you go online	Common sense supporters	If score -5 to -2
		Neutrals	If score -1 to 1
		Disempowered defeatists	If score 2 to 5
Free speech vs content monitoring	The Internet has an important role in supporting free speech, even when some users might find the content offensive vs. It is important for sites to monitor and delete offensive views to protect other users	Free speech advocates	If score -5 to -2
		Neutrals	If score -1 to 1
		Cautious protectors	If score 2 to 5
Support for more online safety measures	There are enough online safety measures in place vs there should be more online safety	Status quo supporters	If score -5 to -2
		Neutrals	If score -1 to 1
		Safety measure advocates	If score 2 to 5

Category		NET	Definition
	measures in place		
BREAK 4 - Experience of Harms			
Type of potential harm experienced		Contact harm	Unwelcome friend or follow requests, or messages
			Stalking, cyberstalking or intrusive behaviour
			People pretending to be another person, e.g. 'catfishing'
			Bullying, abusive behaviour or threats
			Trolling, i.e. a person who says something to cause intentional upset or provoke a negative reaction
			Pressure to send photos or personal information to someone
			People sending unwanted/unsolicited sexual or nude images or videos, e.g. 'cyber flashing'
			Private/intimate information made public, e.g. 'doxxing'
			Sharing of intimate images without consent
			Intentional harassment during gaming, e.g. 'griefing'
			Private conversations shared without consent
			Group shaming, boycotting, or excluding someone based on their views, opinions on actions, including online 'pile-ons'
			Generally offensive or 'bad' language, e.g. swearing, rudeness
			Unwanted sexual messages
		Content harm	Hateful, offensive or discriminatory content that targets a group or person based on specific characteristics like race, religion, disability, sexuality or gender identity; e.g. hate speech
			Sexual/ pornographic content inappropriate for the site/app
			Content or language which objectifies, demeans or otherwise negatively portrays women
			Content depicting the sexual abuse or exploitation of children
			Content encouraging extremism, radicalisation or terrorism
			Content depicting violence
			Content encouraging gambling, e.g. sports betting, or casino-style games

Category	NET	Definition
		Misinformation i.e. false or misleading stories, claims or assertions
		Content relating to self-harm or suicide
		Content relating to negative body image, excessive or unhealthy dieting/exercise and/or eating disorders
		Promotion of female genital mutilation (FGM)
		Fake or deceptive images/videos, e.g. 'deep fakes'
		Content glamourising unhealthy or abusive lifestyles, e.g. binge drinking, drug taking
		Content which impacted negatively on my self-esteem
		Content depicting animal cruelty
	Commercial harm	Codes 7, 21, 22, 28 and 30 @ Q8
		Sale or advertisement of illegal goods
		Collection or use of my data without my knowledge or permission
		Scams, fraud, or phishing
		Unintentionally spending money on in-app purchases or gifts
		Paid-for or sponsored content which was not clearly marked as such, e.g. 'astroturfing'