



NOVEMBER 2016 BULLETIN

New research published by the Panel and ACOD

As the Digital Economy bill passes through Parliament the challenge of how to bring everybody online is increasingly being debated. The Panel have long maintained that to achieve this it is not just a question of digital skills; people have to feel that there is a benefit and that being online is safe. Consumers' confidence and trust in the internet is key to bridging the digital divide. If we are to become a nation that is truly digital by default then surmounting this hurdle of consumer distrust, and encouraging online activity and engagement is paramount.

This month the Panel released its research report, [Digital Footprints: A question of trust](#) commenting on independent [new research](#) we commissioned from Ipsos Mori.

Key findings from the research include:

- One in five people are not confident using the internet. This represents a new digital divide.
- Approximately half of people aged 65-74 are not confident online and this rises to seven in ten in the 75+ age group
- Digital confidence divide is not just age-related - there are also lower levels of confidence among disabled people, compared to non-disabled people
- Consumers are more concerned about privacy than they were five years ago; but are taking less action to protect themselves
- 14% of people are not using security software
- Terms and Conditions and privacy policies are not widely read or fully understood and need to be clearer
- People want more information about how their personal information will be used; third party sharing is an area of particular concern

- Consumers do not fully recognise the link between providing personal information and the benefits of doing so.

This work follows up on our 2011 research, Online Personal Data - the Consumer Perspective. Much has changed in the last five years, but people's concerns about the security and privacy of their online data have increased, not decreased. Our latest report is intended to inform policymakers and the wider public about consumer perceptions of online security, and we make a series of recommendations which we believe are fundamental if consumers are to benefit from this fast-moving area of technological development.

Update on Communications Consumer Panel and ACOD activities

This month members of the Panel met with The Retail Ombudsman to learn about the ADR services they are offering in the non-regulated sector.

Chris Holland and Rick Hill attended Ofcom's Children's Media Literacy Stakeholder event. The Panel was particularly interested in the findings in relation to young people's understanding of data privacy and security.

Chris also attended the latest Voice of the Listener & Viewer Conference and Jenny Borritt attended Digital UK's "Toward a connected TV nation" event.

On the subject of accessibility, Jenny attended the Smart Cities event, co-hosted by AbilityNet. Pressure groups G3ict and World Enabled have launched a campaign to define smart city accessibility; planners of smart cities based on digital technologies are being urged to ensure they are as accessible to disabled people as possible. This holds the prospect that accessibility and assistive services could be embedded in technology, but the Panel view is that we should include rural populations, and perhaps be looking at smart communities rather than just cities. A smart cities/communities accessibility toolkit will be put together by March 2017, taking account of feedback from around the world.

Mairi MacLeod attended the Ofcom Advisory Committee for Scotland meeting. Representing the Panel, Mairi looked at the issues raised through the eyes of Scottish consumers, citizens and micro businesses, particularly focusing on the needs of people in vulnerable circumstances.

Rick and Mairi attended the Scottish Government Commission on Nuisance Calls. Nuisance calls are another priority issue for the Panel this year. Great progress has

been made on this issue over the past year, but the Panel is still calling for CLI (Caller Line Identification) to be offered free by communication providers.

Mairi also attended the [Scottish Parliament Cross Party Group On Digital Participation](#) meeting. This is an opportunity for MSPs to engage with a range of organisations on issues relating to digital participation and consider how best Scotland can maximise the social and economic benefits derived from the development of digital technologies.

And, please follow the Panel on [LinkedIn](#) and [Twitter](#) to stay up-to-date with our latest news and research, and we will be posting where we will be in the month ahead so you can catch up with us at events to discuss any issues we raise.

The Panel and ACOD's consultation responses

Response to the DCMS call for inputs in regard to the Digital Economy Bill

In our response we gave our support for a Universal Service Obligation (USO) for broadband. The Panel believes a USO should have a minimum speed that grows in line with future consumer needs, that is technology neutral and include factors of access, affordability and availability alongside quality of service, transparent information, redress and consumer representation. The broadband USO must include provision for micro businesses and we would like to see the Bill reflect this.

Reform of switching regulation has long been needed and we welcome the Bill's proposals on this. The Panel support the introduction of an automatic compensation scheme that covers the issues that matter most to consumers, but it is important that such a scheme does not become a surrogate for a good level of service.

Regarding mobile coverage, the Panel strongly believes that Government and mobile network operators (MNOs) should work to fulfil the public expectations that they have set. The proposed changes to the planning system form part of the bigger picture - and all available options should be considered, including expecting MNOs to develop contingency plans for the predictable areas where coverage is poor; Ofcom taking action in respect of licensed spectrum that is sitting unused by MNOs; and ensuring future spectrum allocations serve consumers by obliging MNOs to maximise coverage. We fully support the proposal to give Ofcom a new power to fine those who breach spectrum licence conditions.

The Panel also welcomed the proposed amendment for publicly-funded basic digital skills training being offered free of charge to adults in England who need it. However, we are concerned that there is no new funding for this initiative and that it is to come out of existing adult education budgets: we question whether this is sustainable.

We welcomed the proposal to require the Information Commissioner to produce a direct marketing code of practice which will make it easier for the Information Commissioner's Office to take more effective action and impose fines in regard to nuisance calls. But we also continued to urge the provision of free CLI by default for consumers.

We have welcomed the highlighting of VOD subtitling in the debate around the Bill and strongly support the new clause proposed by Action on Hearing Loss to provide for a statutory code to underpin the provision of essential access services (subtitles, audio-description and signing) for on-demand television. This would bring parity to the legislation governing linear broadcasts and on-demand content, and would ensure that the successful provision of access services on the former would extend to the growing amount of TV content that is watched on-demand.

Our [response is here](#)

Other news

AMC to introduce subtitles

The Panel welcomed the news that AMC, the US drama channel available in the UK, are to provide subtitles from next year. We believe that all consumers should be able to fully enjoy TV: subtitling helps deaf and hard of hearing people do this and we have been pushing for more broadcasters to provide it.

Ofcom rules only require major channels to offer subtitles - AMC's smaller audience figures mean it falls outside of these requirements, but it has responded to consumer demands.

More than 900,000 people in the UK are severely or profoundly deaf; and by 2035 one in five people in the UK will have some form of hearing loss. We hope other smaller broadcasters will follow this great example.

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