A2. Consumer research sources

A2.1 This annex sets out the scope and methodologies for the main sources of consumer research Ofcom has drawn on for our analysis in the Comparing Customer Service report.

Impact of Covid-19 on research methodology

A2.2 In previous year's both the Reasons to Complain tracker (RTC) and Customer Satisfaction tracker (CST) collected data face to face in-home, and the Complaints Handling tracker (CHT) used an online methodology. In 2020, due to the Covid-19 pandemic, in accordance with MRS guidelines and our own internal assessment and as with other Ofcom tracking studies, it was decided it was not possible to conduct research with an element of in-home interviewing. As such, Ofcom explored alternative methods for both the RTC and CST. The CHT was unaffected as this was already an online panel methodology.

A2.3 Various alternative methods of conducting research have been trialed across different Ofcom tracking surveys in 2020; including online panels, outbound telephone interviews, and approaches based on initial mailings and reminders, with these postal approach studies completed online, by phone or on paper (either requested or unsolicited - i.e. received and completed by the respondent without a prior request).

A2.4 Both the RTC and CST were replaced with online versions of the surveys. We considered online to be a proportionate alternative for the 2020 wave, as it allows us to cost effectively achieve robust samples of low incidence groups (i.e. people who have a reason to complain about their service, as opposed to general customers, and customers of smaller communications providers closer to our 4% market share inclusion criteria). This approach means that 2020 data excludes standalone landline customers i.e. those who are not online (9% of landline customers) and potentially under-represents lower internet users. This also means that trend data is not available for these studies. We continue to review the ability to conduct face-to-face interviews with the potential to return to this methodology in the future.

Significance testing and error margin

A2.5 Only providers with a market share of 4% or more are included in the analysis from these surveys. This share is based on market data from Q4 2019. As outlined in the main report, there are a number of incidences where two (or more) providers have the same or a similar percentage to the sector average and/or other providers but are not noted as being statistically significant. This is due to a provider's unweighted base sizes (i.e. the number of interviews conducted) reflecting its share of the relevant market. Base sizes between providers, across markets, vary from 1188 customers for the provider with the largest market share to 85 with the smallest (over the threshold of 4% market share).

A2.6 The reason for the varying levels of statistical significance is that the size of the sample impacts the level of confidence we can have in the data. A lower base size means there is a wider confidence interval and where two intervals overlap the difference is not considered significant. Where you have a larger sample of interviews, you can be more confident that the behaviour displayed, more accurately represents the likely behaviour of the populations you are looking to understand, as the confidence intervals are much smaller.

An example of this is shown in the Mobile market, among those who said they had a reason to complain about their provider (Ofcom Reason to Complain Tracker 2020). The table below shows the difference the base size has on the lower and upper confidence interval around a particular result.

A2.7 BT Mobile (7%) appears to have the same percentage of customers who had a reason to complain about their provider as each of O2 and Tesco Mobile. However, unlike O2 and Tesco Mobile, BT Mobile is not showing as statistically significantly different from the total market average at a 95% level of confidence. This is due to the fact that BT Mobile has a lower base size (221) compared to Tesco Mobile (572) and O2 (1121). The lower base size of BT Mobile means that it has a wider confidence interval than that of the other providers e.g. BT Mobile has a range between 3% and 10% compared to O2 which has a range between 6% and 9%.

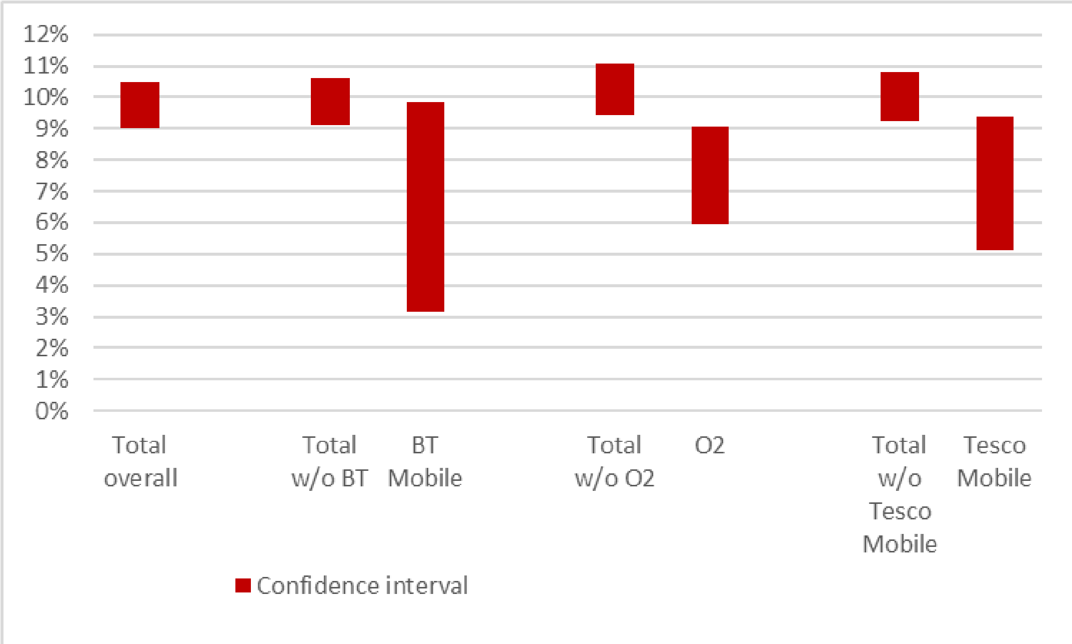
Figure 1: Proportion of BT Mobile, O2 and Tesco Mobile customers with a reason to complain

	Base	Mean	Upper	Lower	Confidence Interval (+/-)
Total	6246	10%	10%	9%	<1%
BT Mobile	221	7%	10%	3%	3%
O2	1121	7%	9%	6%	2%
Tesco Mobile	572	7%	9%	5%	2%

XX *Statistically significantly better than the sector average at the 95% confidence level for market research results / top performer for other data.*

Significance testing on the consumer research data included in this report is run by provider against the total market average, excluding that provider. As you can see in the chart below, larger providers such as O2 and Tesco Mobile have a proportionally larger impact on the market average than smaller providers, such as BT Mobile. Removing O2 from the average impacts the total more than removing BT Mobile. A significant result is indicated where there is no overlap between the provider result and the market average (excluding the result of that provider) when taking into account the respective error margins, therefore the result is significant for both O2 and Tesco Mobile at 95% significance.

Figure 2: Confidence intervals (at 95% significance) among BT Mobile, O2 and Tesco Mobile customers with a reason to complain



Q5. Which if any of the following services or suppliers have given you a reason to complain in the last 12 months? By mobile supplier
Unweighted base: BT Mobile (221), O2 (1,121), Tesco Mobile (572)

We also see this occur in both the landline and broadband markets in the other consumer research trackers, as outlined in the main report.

Comparing customer service research 2020: Complaints Handling

A2.8 Since 2017, Ofcom has monitored levels of customer satisfaction with complaints handling; and the methodology used for this research (online panel) has remained unchanged. As such, the data from this wave of the Complaints Handling Tracker (CHT) is comparable with that from the three previous waves of our complaints handling research (2017 to 2019 inclusive).

A2.9 The core aim of this study is to monitor satisfaction with customer service during complaints handling among customers who have made a complaint(s) to their provider in the six months prior to fieldwork. The research was conducted via an online panel sample among a representative sample of 6,052 UK adults, aged 16+. Fieldwork took place from 16 November to 31 December 2020. As such, the last six months refers prior to fieldwork covers a period between mid-May and end December 2020, (depending on when the interviews took place).

A2.10 This research includes UK communications providers with a market share of 4% or more (Q4 2019). The data is presented at both a total sector level and at a provider level. Total sector level data is weighted to be representative of the UK as a whole, and provider level data is unweighted.

A2.11 Significance testing has been applied at the 95% confidence level.

A2.12 In the Comparing customer service: mobile, home broadband and landline report, when we use the term "average" we are referring to the average of the providers included in the study (see report for providers included).

A2.13 Data tables can be found at: Total level data tables; and Provider level data tables.

Complaints handling tracker sample design

A2.14 As outlined in the Complaints Handling tracker's technical report, the research is conducted using an online panel approach as we consider it to be the most cost-effective and efficient means to reach the low incidence audiences (customers who have made a complaint about their communications provider). The initial sample was drawn from a UK representative sample and then screened by those who complained to their provider in the six months prior to fieldwork. Quotas were set on providers with a market share of 4% or more (based on Q4 2019) in each market. The following interviews were achieved in line with market share in the landline, fixed broadband, mobile and Pay TV markets.

Figure 3: Sample sizes by sector – 2020

Provider	Sample sizes by sector 2020			
	Landline	Fixed broadband	Mobile	Pay TV
BT	599	642		361
EE	238	293	753	
giffgaff			248	
O2			681	
Plusnet	89	241		
Sky	629	707		746
TalkTalk	373	567		366
Tesco Mobile			348	
Three			533	
Virgin Media	483	752	255	561
Vodafone			568	

This approach is consistent with previous waves, meaning direct comparisons are possible between waves. This approach was considered the most appropriate given the absence of other data sources on these low incidence groups to set quotas by or for re-weighting the dataset to after fieldwork was completed.

A2.15 Due to the Covid-19 pandemic, the Reasons to complain tracker (RTC) was moved from face-to-face interviewing to an online panel approach (now consistent with CHT), this enabled us to compare the sample of those who went on to make a complaint (within the RTC) with the sample in the complaints handling tracker. This comparison is indicative only due to differences in timeframe of experiences and relatively low sample sizes (e.g. landline n=310, mobile n=441 and broadband n=1150) particularly when analysing specific groups.

A2.16 We found, in the RTC,[1] that those with limiting/impacting conditions were significantly more likely to say they have had a reason to complain to their provider *and* to have gone on to make a complaint. It is possible that this behaviour may mean people in this group are more likely to take part in consumer research such as the complaints handling tracker. Our analysis found that the CHT sample has a higher than expected (compared to the RTC) representation of those with impacting/limiting conditions, particularly those with mental health and social/behavioural issues. The CHT sample also has a lower representation of older customers, in particular those over 65 years old. This sample make up is consistent with the 2019 CHT data. Our analysis found that no individual provider was more impacted by this issue than any other.

A2.17 We are conducting further analysis on the data to better understand the impact of this and reviewing the sampling approach.

Comparing customer service Research 2020: Reason to Complain

A2.18 Since 2009, Ofcom has been tracking the proportion of customers using a landline, broadband and mobile service who say they have had reason to complain about their provider in the previous 12 months.

A2.19 Given the Covid-19 lockdown measures during 2020, we were unable to conduct the Reason to Complain (RTC) research via a face-to-face omnibus (as formerly). Instead, it was conducted via an online omnibus among a representative sample of 6,340 UK adults, aged 16+. The fieldwork took place between 23 and 29 of November 2020. As such, the last 12 months refers to the 12 months prior to fieldwork.

A2.20 The specific objectives of the RTC are to explore whether consumers have had a reason to complain about their landline, fixed broadband, mobile and/or pay TV provider in the last 12 months, and if so, to ascertain the reason for the complaint. In addition, to explore whether customers with a reason to complain went on to make a complaint; and, if they did, to which organisation they complained, or if they did not go on to make a complaint, why not. And, where sample size allows, to split information within each sector by communications provider.

A2.21 Significance testing has been applied at the 95% confidence level and conducted using unrounded percentage values.

[1] Reasons to Complain 2020 research – Customers with a reason to complain about their provider: Broadband (29% vs 24% for customers without an impacting or limiting condition), mobile (12% vs 9%) and Pay TV (10% vs 8%) services.

A2.22 The data are weighted to the national UK profile using target rim weights for gender, age, social class and region.

A2.23 More information about the methodology and weighting can be found in the: RTC Technical Note

A2.24 In the report, when we use the term "average" we are referring to the average of all providers in the relevant sector.

A2.25 Data tables can be found at: Reason to Complain Data tables.

Customer Satisfaction Tracker November/December 2020

A2.26 The Customer Satisfaction Tracker (CST) is Ofcom's key data source on levels of satisfaction across the communications markets (landline, mobile, fixed broadband and pay TV). The aim of this study is to track and understand the attitudes of residential consumers (decision makers) to the quality of service they receive for each specific telecommunications service or product they purchase.

A2.27 The study is designed to report on satisfaction at an overall level per market and by provider within market.

A2.28 Between 2010 and 2016 customer satisfaction levels across these communications markets were monitored via questions on Ofcom's annual Switching Tracker (face to face methodology). In 2018, we moved the questions to a bespoke tracking study, the CST, and between 2018 and January/February 2020 the data was collected through a face-to-face study followed by a smaller online study. However, given the Covid-19 lockdown measures during 2020, we were unable to conduct the main face-to-face element of the CST during this most recent wave. Instead, this wave of the CST was conducted via a bespoke online panel among a representative sample of 2,681 UK adults, aged 16+.

A2.29 The online survey was undertaken by the decision maker for each telecommunication service. The fieldwork took place between 30th November to 11th December 2020. Quotas were set based on gender, age and socio-economic group. On completion of the study, weighting of the data was applied for each of the markets using profiles from Ofcom's Communications Tracking Survey.

A2.30 Significance testing was applied at the 95% confidence level and conducted using unrounded percentage values.

A2.31 More information about the methodology and weighting can be found in the CST Technical Note.

A2.32 In the Comparing customer service: mobile, home broadband and landline report, when we use the term "average" in relation to levels of customer satisfaction with the service provided we are referring to the average of all providers in the relevant sector.

A2.33 In the report we use the term 'Recommend to a friend' to show customer loyalty in the market. This measure is the Net Promoter Score™ (NPS™). The NPS™ is calculated by using the answer to a key question, using a 0-10 scale: Based on your overall experience of using (PROVIDER) for your (SECTOR) provider, how likely would you be to recommend them to a friend or family member as a (SECTOR) provider? Please give a rating on a scale of 0 to 10, where 0 is 'Extremely Unlikely' and 10 is 'Extremely Likely'? Respondents are grouped as follows: -Promoters (score 9-10) are loyal enthusiasts. -Passives (score 7-8) are satisfied but unenthusiastic customers. -Detractors (score 0-6) are unhappy customers. The NPS™ is calculated by subtracting the percentage of Detractors from the percentage of Promoters. The score can range from a low of -100 (if every customer is a Detractor) to a high of 100 (if every customer is a Promoter). Based on the global NPS standards, any score above 0 is considered “good”, 50 and above is considered excellent and 70 and above is considered “world class”.

A2.34 Data tables can be found at: Customer Satisfaction Tracker data tables.