



# Data Broking:

Understanding the public's perceptions of the sharing of their personal details

*Market Research Report*



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# Background

Data brokers claim to have amassed detailed information and profiles about the lives of the large majority of UK households.

Complaints have been raised against data brokers under the General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR). It is claimed that their collection and use of personal details is not transparent, fair, lawful and accurate.

As part of its investigation into data brokers, the ICO has commissioned market research to understand the public's expectations of the use of personal data.

## Research objective



“To understand the public’s awareness and perceptions of how their personal data is shared within the data broking industry.”

## Methodology



Online survey with 2,342 UK adults.



Face to face survey with 261 GB adults who do not access the Internet.



Fieldwork conducted:

**Online:** 5<sup>th</sup>-7<sup>th</sup> Feb 2019.

**Face to Face:** 14<sup>th</sup>-20<sup>th</sup> Mar 2019.

Interviews lasted up to 10 minutes.



Results are weighted to be nationally representative by age and gender.

If a chart or table of a single response question does not add up to 100%, then this is because of rounding used on the data.

## Executive Summary

- Many people are unclear what happens to their personal details when they share them with organisations.
- Few believe the trade of information is solely in their own favour.
- People expect their details will be used for other purposes, including being sold.
- Onward sharing, typical data sources and the ways in which personal details are used are largely seen as unacceptable.
- Given full information, many would ask for their details to be deleted.



**Perceptions before description of data  
brokers is shown**

The majority of the public share their personal details via channels seen to be used by data brokers. However, one in five online and nine in ten offline respondents claim to not share their details in these ways.

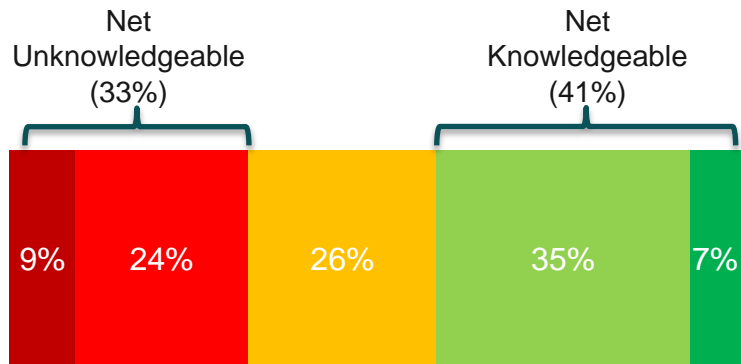
**MQ1. In which of the following ways do you give your personal details (such as name, address, email address, telephone number and date of birth) to organisations or websites you interact with?**

	Online Audience	Offline Audience
Through telephone or online surveys	54%	5%
Signing up to a website (for example for free magazines or newsletters concerning gardening, lifestyle, motoring, travel, money or wine)	43%	2%
To obtain offers or money off vouchers (for example, for shopping or dining), either guaranteed or through prize draws	43%	2%
Signing up for catalogues	24%	5%
None of these	20%	89%
Other	1%	3%

# A third of online and over half of offline respondents are unclear what happens to their personal details when they share them with organisations.

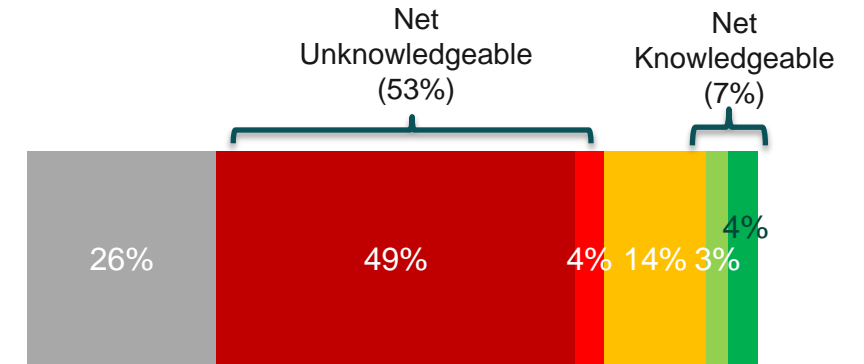
**MQ3. When you/if you were to give your personal details to organisations or websites, how much do you feel you know about what these organisations do with your personal details?**

## Online Audience



- 1 - I do not know what organisations do with my personal details
- 2
- 3
- 4
- 5 - I am fully knowledgeable with what organisations do with my personal details

## Offline Audience

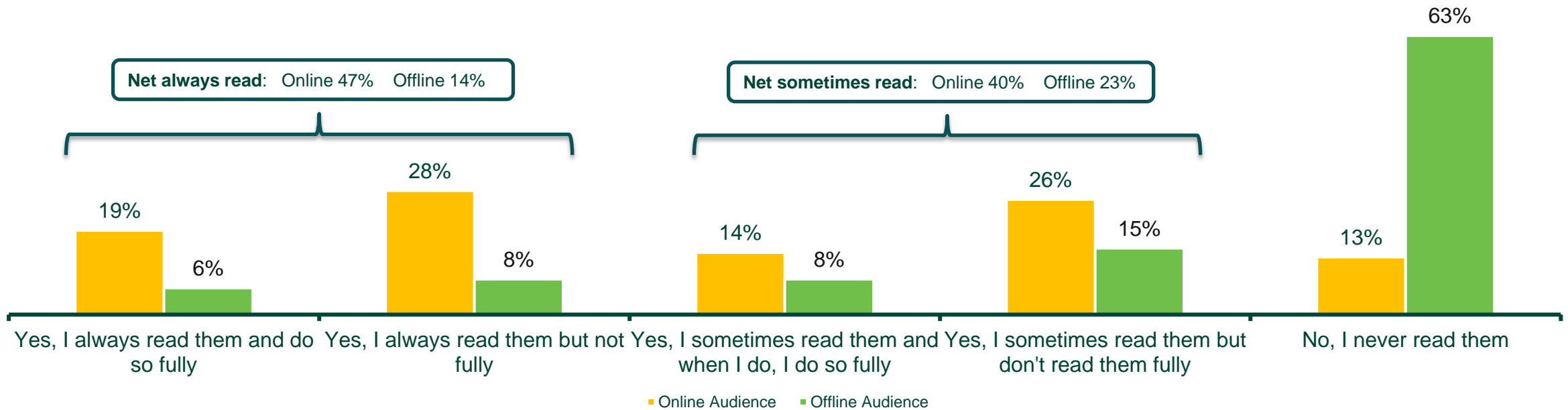


- Unsure
- 1 - I do not know what organisations do with my personal details
- 2
- 3
- 4
- 5 - I am fully knowledgeable with what organisations do with my personal details



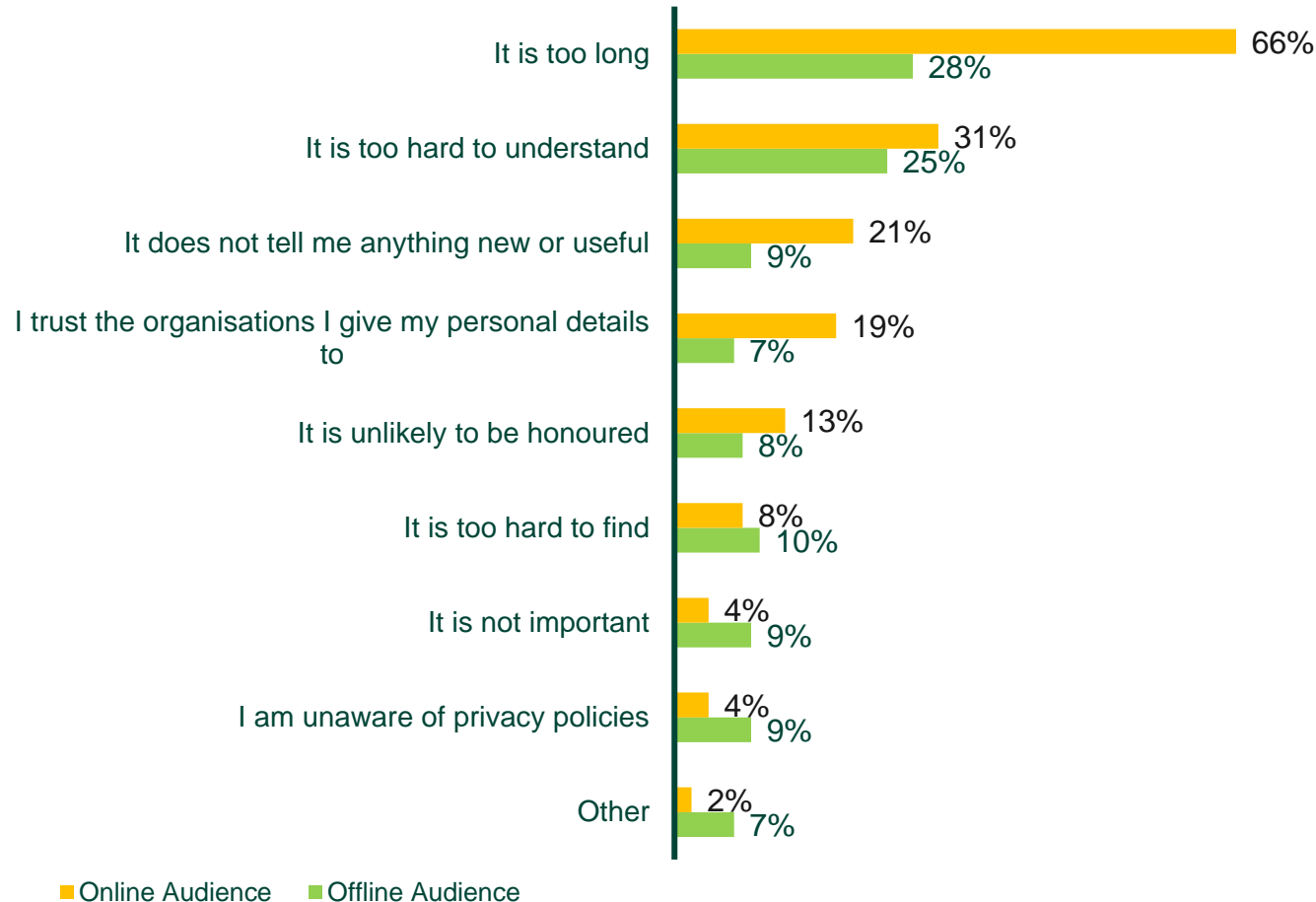
Nearly half of online respondents always read privacy policies to help them understand how their personal details will be used. Nearly two in three offline respondents never review them.

MQ4. Do you read the privacy policy of organisations, to find out how your personal details will be used, when you provide/ are asked to provide your personal details?



Length is the main reason for not always reading privacy policies, followed by complexity. Brand trust and distrust are also factors.

MQ5. Why do you not always fully read the privacy policy of organisations when you give your personal details to them?

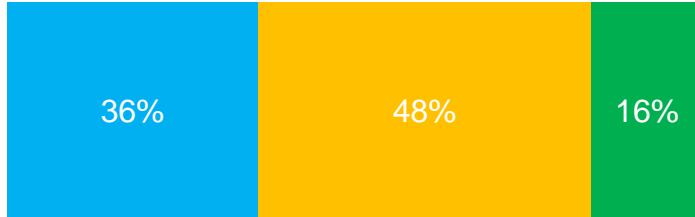


There is a role for a regulator to ensure policies are accessible, concise, easy to understand and to take action against those who do not adhere to their policies.

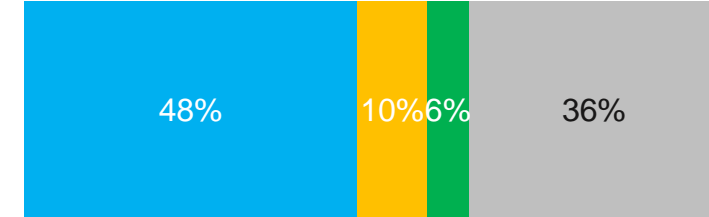
Almost half of online respondents feel the trade of information is balanced between the individual and the organisation, compared with the same proportion of offline audience feeling the trade is in favour of the organisation.

MQ2. In general, when you/if you were to give your personal details to organisations to sign up for free magazines or newsletters, obtain offers or money off vouchers or through telephone or online surveys, whose favour do you think this trade is in?

### Online Audience



### Offline Audience



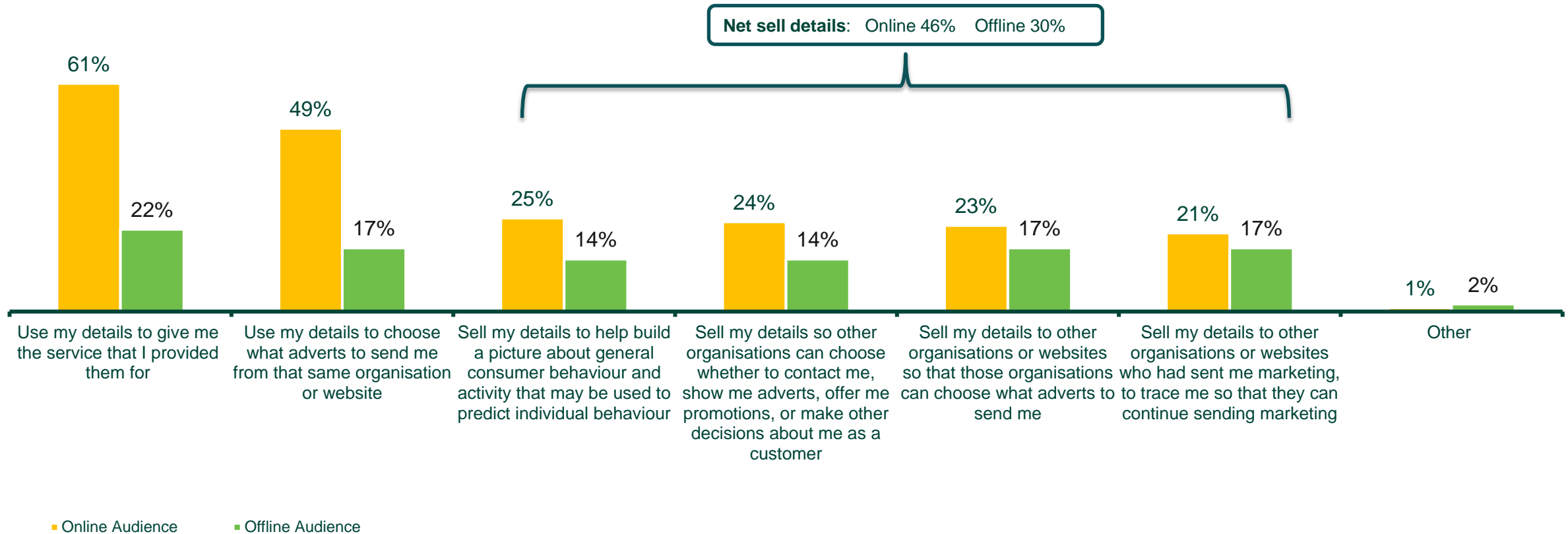
- The trade is in favour of the organisations
- The trade is balanced between the organisations and myself
- The trade is in my favour

- The trade is in favour of the organisations
- The trade is balanced between the organisations and myself
- The trade is in my favour
- Unsure

Online respondents who always read privacy policies are 3x more likely to believe the trade is in favour of themselves than those who never read them. Removing perceived barriers to accessing policies is key.

# Almost half of online and a third of offline respondents expect organisations to sell their details on in some way.

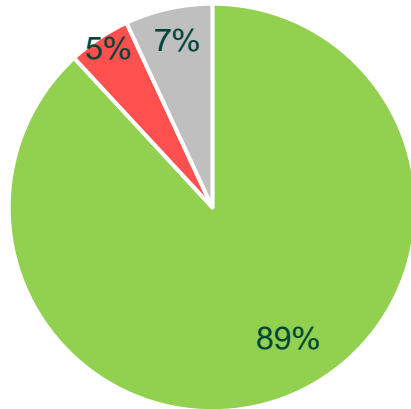
MQ6. When you/if you were to give your personal details to these organisations or websites, what do you expect the organisation to do with them?



Nearly nine in ten online respondents expect to be notified by a company they do not have a direct relationship with about the data they hold and how they use it.  
Over half of offline respondents think they should be notified.

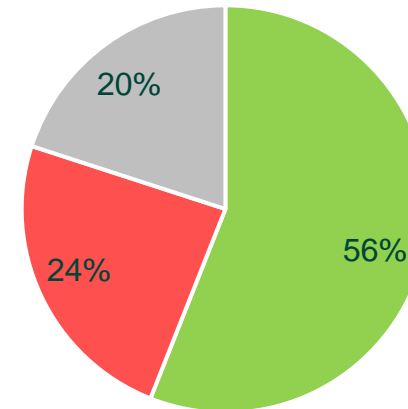
MQ8. When organisation A, with whom you do not have a direct relationship, has collected personal details about you so that they can sell it to other organisations that want to send you direct marketing, do you think you should be notified by organisation A about the data they hold and how they use it?

Online Audience



■ Yes ■ No ■ Unsure

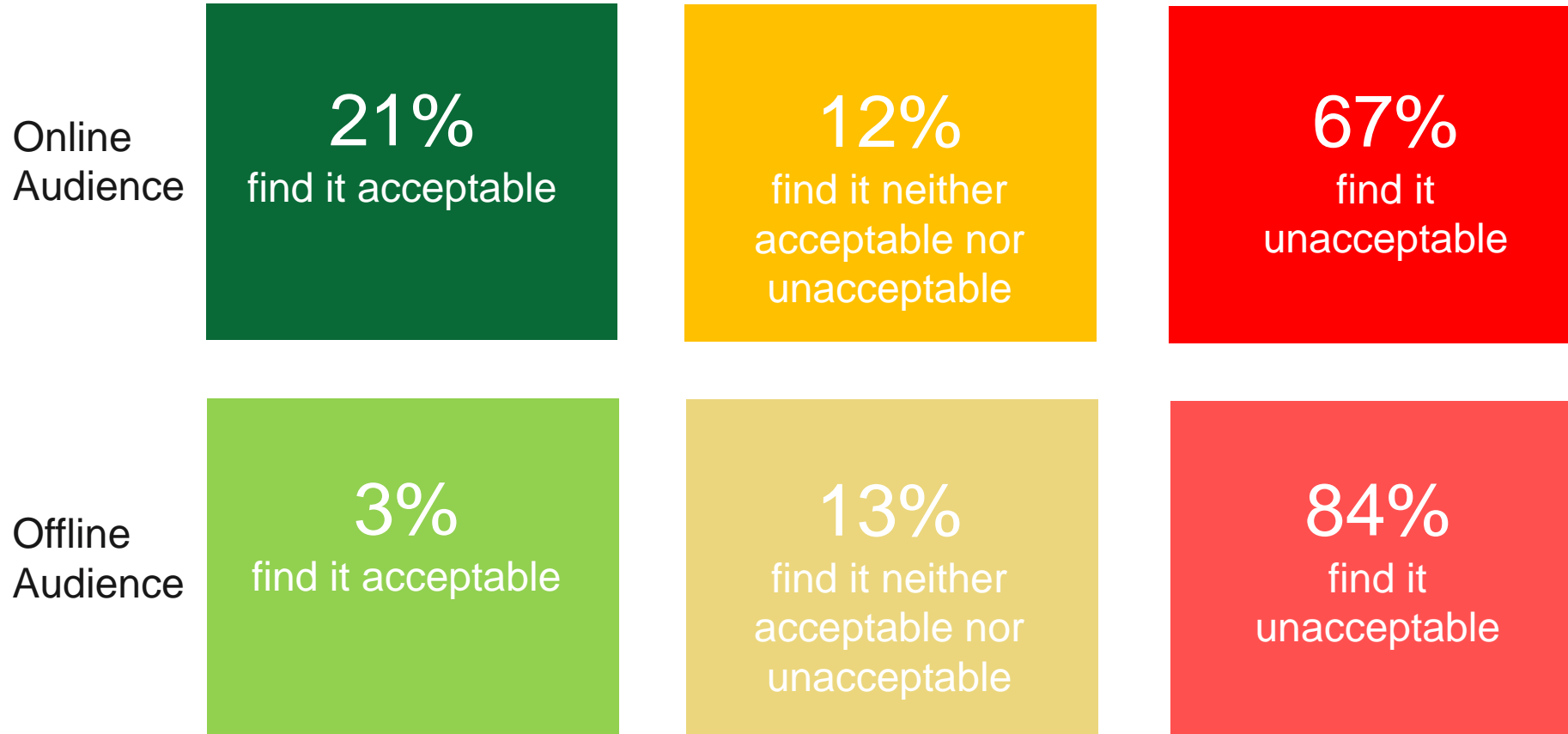
Offline Audience



■ Yes ■ No ■ Unsure

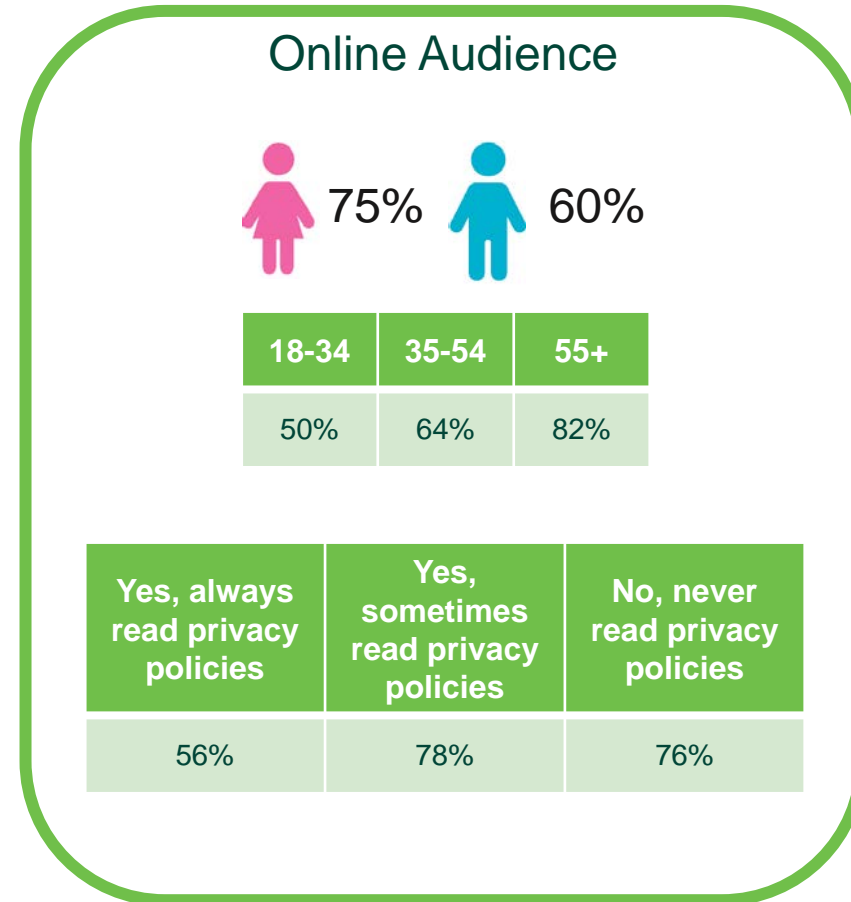
## Over two thirds of respondents find onward sharing unacceptable.

MQ7. In general, how acceptable or unacceptable is it that your details might be sold to or shared with other organisations other than for the original reason you shared your personal details?



Females and 55+ year olds who are online are more likely to find onward sharing unacceptable.

Find onward sharing unacceptable





**Perceptions after description of data  
brokers is shown**



## Respondents were presented with the following information about data brokers, halfway through the survey.

Many organisations that use marketing rely on data brokers. These brokers collect a lot of information about people, which can include (but is not limited to): name

- aliases (different names or identities)
- postal address (including previous addresses and the dates of these)
- telephone numbers (landlines and mobiles)
- email addresses
- date of birth
- gender
- marital status
- family connections (number of children, household make-up, etc)
- property type
- expected purchasing behaviour and interests
- financial background (including wealth and some credit file information)
- open electoral register information (an extract of the Electoral Register, that can be bought by any person or organisation for purposes like marketing)
- occupation
- interests
- charity donations
- information about culture, wealth and behaviour, which comes from detailed data about the area in which you live (based on a number of data sources including the anonymised National Census data)

This information is collected from a variety of sources, including: the details you give to organisations, credit information, organisations sharing their own marketing lists, the full and open electoral registers, or publicly available sources (anything from information obtained from websites about properties up for sale to Registers of Insolvency).

These pieces of information are pulled together into a profile about you (which can consist of more than 500 pieces of personal data) and sold on to other data brokers or organisations interested in marketing.

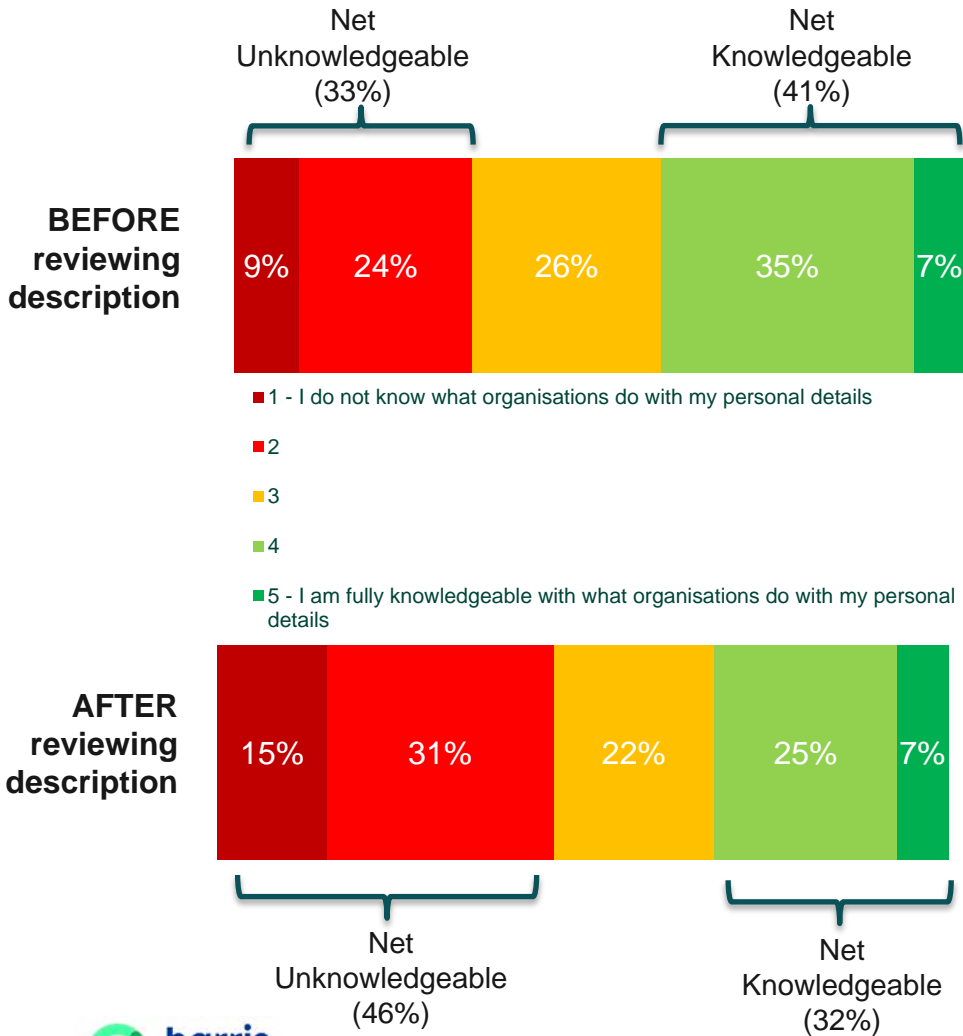
They will use the data to:

- target advertising at you,
- rule you in or out of marketing lists (depending on whether it is believed you can afford what is being sold),
- help organisations manage their relationship with you (what offers you should be sent, or what type of campaigns you are likely to respond to so that they retain your custom),
- help organisations who may only know one or two pieces of information about you to find out more information (e.g. they only have your email address so they find out your postal address)
- allow organisations who had sent you marketing before you moved to trace you to your new contact details so that they can continue sending marketing
- help organisations work out what your characteristics are as a customer so that they can send marketing to other people who are similar to you.

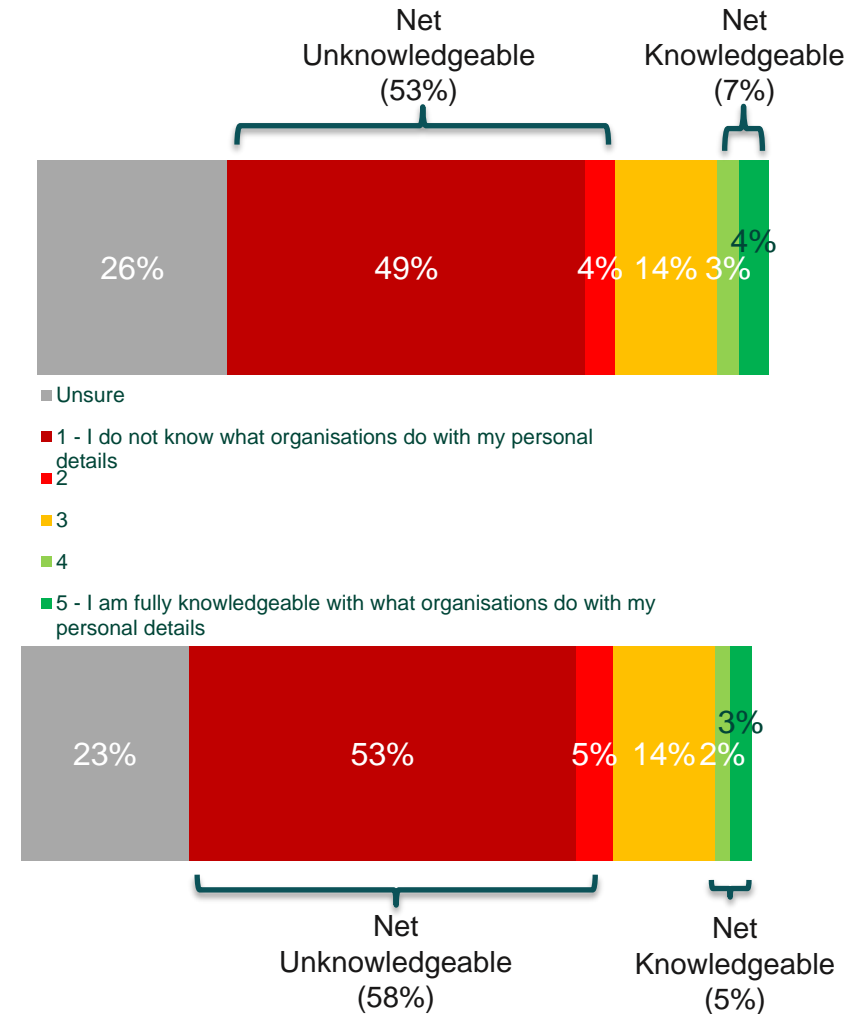
Your personal details can exchange hands between many different data brokers, potentially passing through more than five different organisations before eventually being used to send marketing to you.

# The description of data brokers leads to a slight shift in claimed knowledge of what organisations do with personal details.

## Online Audience



## Offline Audience



## Shift in perceptions amongst online respondents after reviewing description of data brokers: Knowledge

**13%** move towards feeling more knowledgeable

- 5% move from 'unknowledgeable' to 'neutral'
- 4% move from 'unknowledgeable' to 'knowledgeable'
- 4% move from neutral to 'knowledgeable'

**28%** move towards feeling less knowledgeable

- 11% move from 'neutral' to 'unknowledgeable'
- 10% move from 'knowledgeable' to 'unknowledgeable'
- 7% move from 'knowledgeable' to 'neutral'

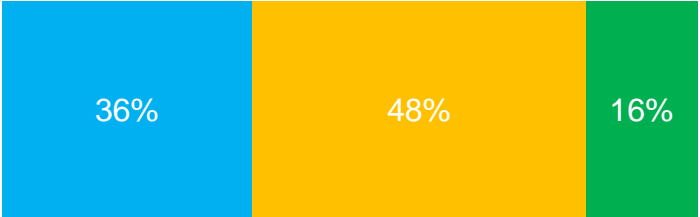
**58%** do not change their opinion

- 24% remained 'unknowledgeable'
- 24% remained 'knowledgeable'
- 10% remained 'neutral'

After reviewing the description of data brokers, there is a shift in perceptions towards the trade of information being in favour of the organisation.

Online Audience

BEFORE reviewing description



- The trade is in favour of the organisations
- The trade is balanced between the organisations and myself
- The trade is in my favour

AFTER reviewing description



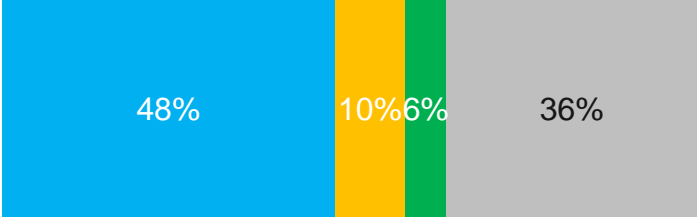
Offline Audience

48%

10%

6%

36%



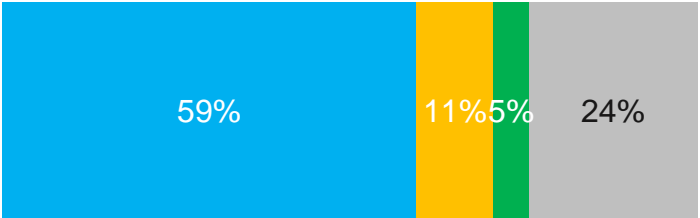
- The trade is in favour of the organisations
- The trade is balanced between the organisations and myself
- The trade is in my favour
- Don't know

59%

11%

5%

24%



## Shift in perceptions amongst online respondents after reviewing description of data brokers: Trade of information

**26%** move more towards the trade being in favour of the organisation

- 20% move from 'trade is balanced' to 'trade is in the organisation's favour'
- 4% move from 'trade is in the individual's favour' to 'trade is balanced'
- 2% move from 'trade is in the person's favour' to 'trade is in the organisation's favour'.

**4%** move more towards the trade being in favour of the individual

- 3% move from 'trade is in the organisation's favour' to 'trade is balanced'
- 1% move from 'trade is balanced' to 'trade in favour of the individual'.

**69%** do not change their opinion

- 32% remained 'trade is in the organisation's favour'
- 27% remained 'trade is balanced'
- 10% remained 'trade is in favour of the individual'

## Profile: Mike, 40, from Manchester

**This is Mike, 40, from Manchester. He provides his personal details by: “signing up to websites” and “signing up for catalogues”.**

**He feels fairly knowledgeable about how his data is used and thinks the trade of information is in his favour.**

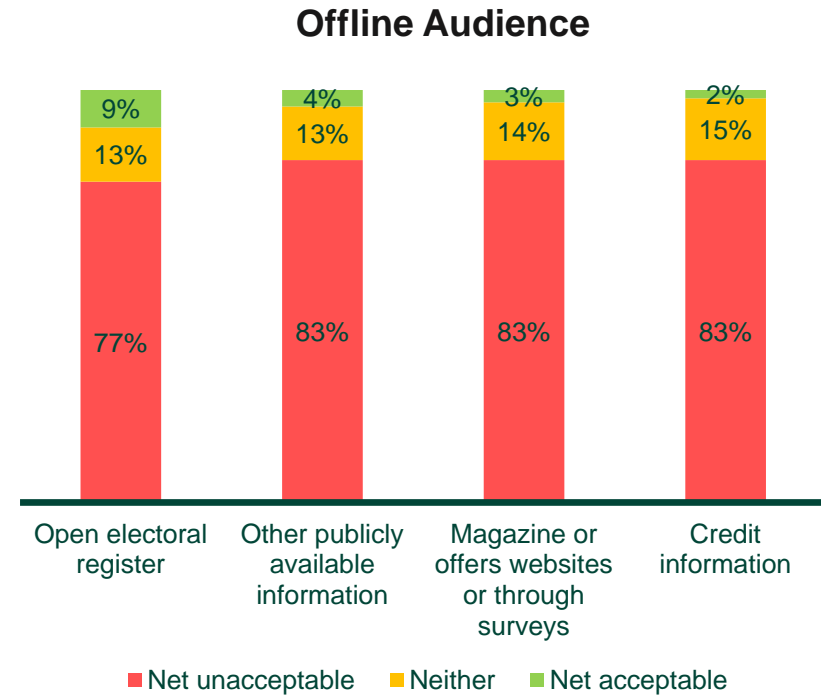
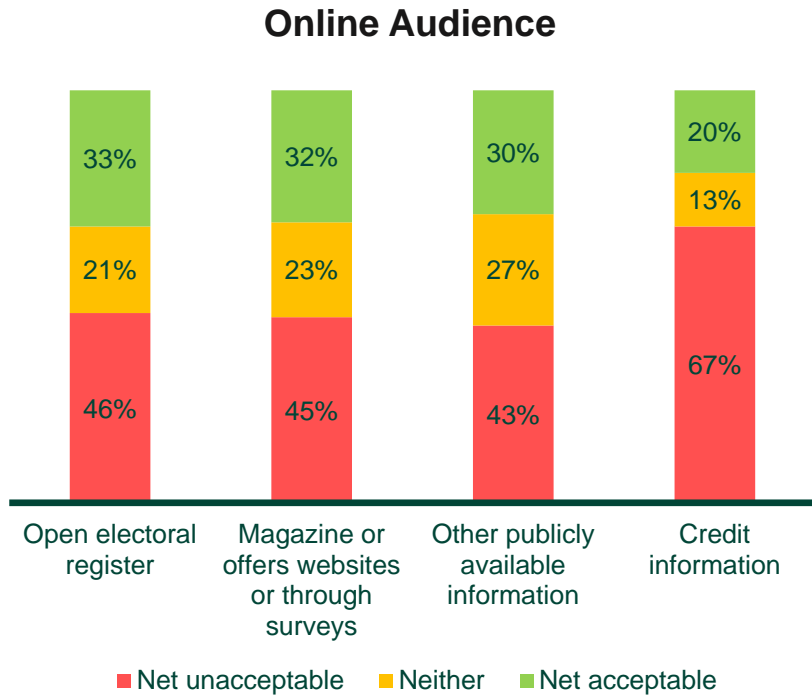
**After data broking is explained to him, he finds it acceptable that marketing could be targeted at him using the open electoral register but unacceptable credit information might be used.**

**Mike also now feels that the trade of information is in the favour of the organisations and feels less knowledgeable about what organisations do with his personal data.**



Credit information is the data source that online respondents find most unacceptable for targeted marketing. All sources are deemed equally unacceptable by offline respondents.

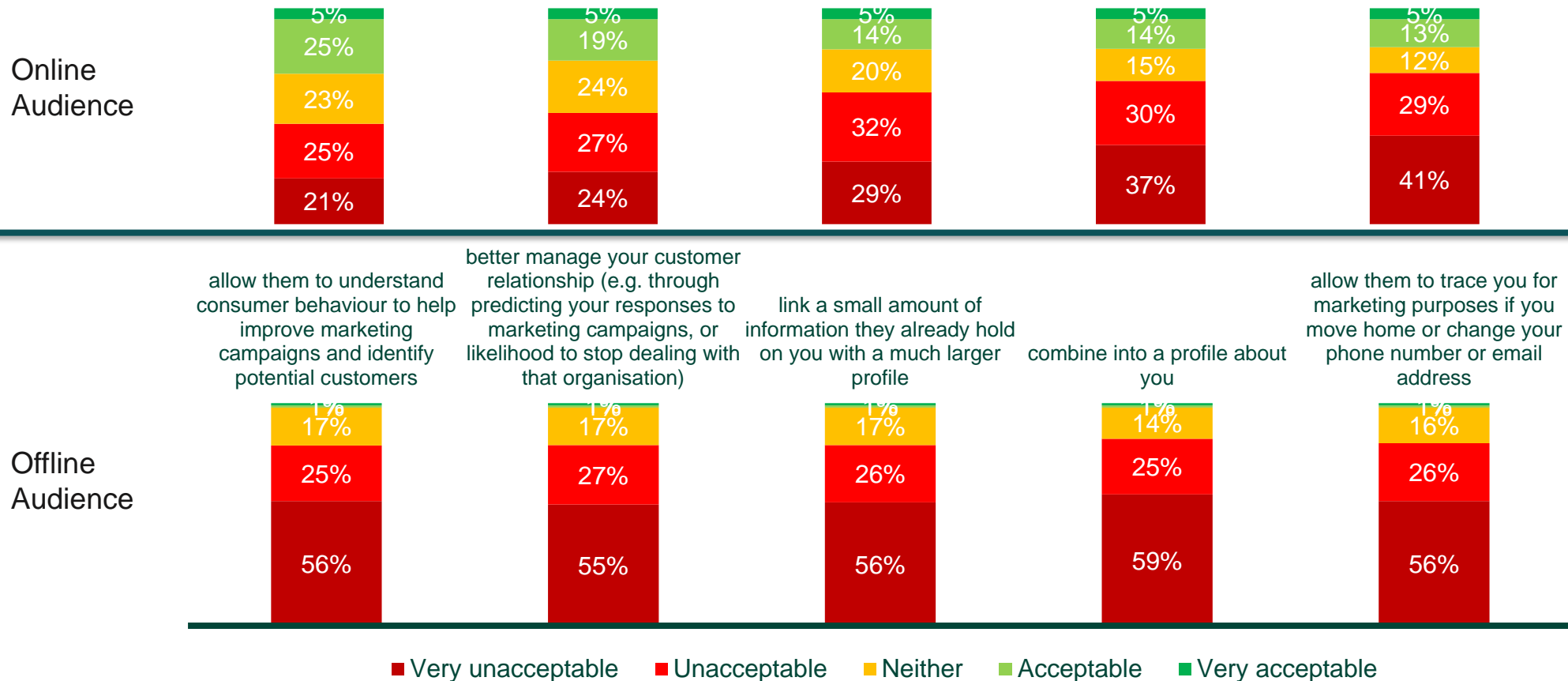
MQ9. In general, how acceptable or unacceptable would you find it if your personal details obtained from the following sources were used to target marketing at you?



Females and 55+ yr olds are most likely to find targeted marketing originating from these sources as being unacceptable

# Using personal details to understand behaviour, manage relationships, build profiles and for tracking is often seen as unacceptable.

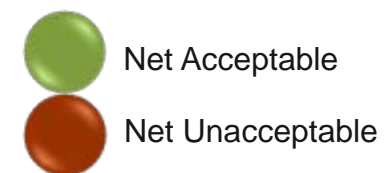
MQ10-14. Still thinking about these sources (magazine or offers websites, open electoral registers, other publicly available information, credit information etc), in general, how acceptable or unacceptable would you find it if your personal details obtained from these sources were sold to other organisations to ...















Using personal details to understand behaviour, manage relationships, build profiles and for tracking is often seen as unacceptable.

Summary: Acceptability of personal details being sold to other organisations to..:	Online Audience	Offline Audience
...allow them to understand consumer behaviour to help improve marketing campaigns and identify potential customers	30% (Net Acceptable) 46% (Net Unacceptable)	2% (Net Acceptable) 81% (Net Unacceptable)
...better manage your customer relationship (e.g. through predicting your responses to marketing campaigns, or likelihood to stop dealing with that organisation)	25% (Net Acceptable) 51% (Net Unacceptable)	2% (Net Acceptable) 81% (Net Unacceptable)
...link a small amount of information they already hold on you with a much larger profile	19% (Net Acceptable) 61% (Net Unacceptable)	1% (Net Acceptable) 82% (Net Unacceptable)
...combine into a profile about you	19% (Net Acceptable) 66% (Net Unacceptable)	2% (Net Acceptable) 85% (Net Unacceptable)
...allow them to trace you for marketing purposes if you move home or change your phone number or email address	18% (Net Acceptable) 70% (Net Unacceptable)	2% (Net Acceptable) 82% (Net Unacceptable)



## Amongst online respondents, females and 55+ year olds are most likely to find personal details being sold to other organisations unacceptable.

MQ10-14. Still thinking about these sources (magazine or offers websites, open electoral registers, other publicly available information, credit information etc), in general, how acceptable or unacceptable would you find it if your personal details obtained from these sources were sold to other organisations to ...:

	% Unacceptable	Differences by gender/age							
...allow them to trace you for marketing purposes if you move home or change your phone number or email address	70%	 77%  63%	<table border="1"> <tr> <th>18-34</th> <th>35-54</th> <th>55+</th> </tr> <tr> <td>53%</td> <td>67%</td> <td>85%</td> </tr> </table>	18-34	35-54	55+	53%	67%	85%
18-34	35-54	55+							
53%	67%	85%							
...combine into a profile about you	66%	 74%  59%	<table border="1"> <tr> <th>18-34</th> <th>35-54</th> <th>55+</th> </tr> <tr> <td>46%</td> <td>64%</td> <td>83%</td> </tr> </table>	18-34	35-54	55+	46%	64%	83%
18-34	35-54	55+							
46%	64%	83%							
...link a small amount of information they already hold on you with a much larger profile	61%	 68%  54%	<table border="1"> <tr> <th>18-34</th> <th>35-54</th> <th>55+</th> </tr> <tr> <td>44%</td> <td>59%</td> <td>76%</td> </tr> </table>	18-34	35-54	55+	44%	59%	76%
18-34	35-54	55+							
44%	59%	76%							
...better manage your customer relationship	51%	 56%  47%	<table border="1"> <tr> <th>18-34</th> <th>35-54</th> <th>55+</th> </tr> <tr> <td>35%</td> <td>49%</td> <td>65%</td> </tr> </table>	18-34	35-54	55+	35%	49%	65%
18-34	35-54	55+							
35%	49%	65%							
...allow them to understand consumer behaviour to help improve marketing campaigns and identify potential customers	46%	 50%  43%	<table border="1"> <tr> <th>18-34</th> <th>35-54</th> <th>55+</th> </tr> <tr> <td>34%</td> <td>42%</td> <td>58%</td> </tr> </table>	18-34	35-54	55+	34%	42%	58%
18-34	35-54	55+							
34%	42%	58%							

Around half of online respondents would ask for their personal details to be deleted if they found an organisation was selling and analysing their details.

Three in ten offline respondents would do nothing, as they do not expect any action to be taken.

MQ17. If you found out that an organisation was selling and analysing your personal details in the ways that have been discussed in this survey, what would you do about it?

	Online Audience		Offline Audience	
Ask them to delete my personal data	56%		30%	
Ask to see a copy of my personal data	40%	<b>Net: 76%</b>	13%	<b>Net: 43%</b>
Ask where they got my personal data from	39%		22%	
Complain about the use of my personal data to the organisation	34%		29%	
Complain about the use of my personal data to the Information Commissioner's Office (ICO)	28%	<b>Net: 46%</b>	20%	<b>Net: 40%</b>
Nothing, because I do not expect any action to be taken	13%	<b>Net: 16%</b>	30%	<b>Net: 32%</b>
Nothing, because I do not object to its use	4%		3%	