



Consumers in Control?

Are we a society of informed
and discerning consumers?



Consumer Proficiency Progress Report for 2015-2016

Please note the consumer proficiency tracking slides from Millward Brown Ulster, which contain the full set of graphs and data, are available from the Consumer Council website at: www.consumerCouncil.org.uk/publications

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1. Executive Summary

- 1.1 Every four years the Consumer Council undertakes research into consumer proficiency levels in NI. This measures consumers' knowledge of their rights, explores their shopping behaviours and experiences, and also finds out where consumers go for help and advice if things go wrong.
- 1.2 In this latest wave of research we have explored in more depth consumers' frequency of online shopping and access to other online services. The research also sought to find out consumers' exposure to scams.
- 1.3 The research was conducted by Millward Brown Ulster (MBU), between 15 November and 3 December 2015 using an omnibus survey. This involved face-to-face interviews with a sample of consumers aged 16 and over who are representative of the NI population in terms of age, gender, religion, and socio-economic group.

Key Findings

1.4 Awareness of rights and experience of complaints

- There has been a statistically significant increase in the percentage of consumers who feel well informed about their rights compared to four years ago (60% in 2015 compared to 52%); and
- Encouragingly, the majority of consumers (81%) had not experienced a problem with goods or services in the past 12 months.

1.5 Online shopping habits, safety and skills

- Just over a third of consumers (35%) never shop online. Over half (53%) say they have no interest, while 29% state a lack of knowledge or skills;
- Meanwhile, the number of consumers who shop online daily or weekly has risen from 13% in 2011 to 17% in 2015. Those aged 25–34 are twice as likely to shop online at least once a week;

- The most prevalent online activities are:
 - Shopping for goods, gifts, clothes and household items (55%);
 - Banking (38%);
 - Booking air/sea travel (37%);
 - Shopping for holiday deals (36%); and
 - Comparing car insurance deals (33%).
- Worryingly; only a quarter of consumers would check their personal and financial details are safe when purchasing from a new and unfamiliar website.

1.6 Exposure to scams

- The research showed the vast majority of consumers (83%) had not been a victim of a scam in the last three years. Unfortunately however, 17% of consumers had been scammed;
- Over a third (34%) of the scams experienced relate to payment protection insurance (PPI) claims companies that charge upfront; and
- Telephone was the most commonly used method for scams (41%) followed by email (16%) and fake websites (13%).

Conclusions

- 1.7 The research shows a statistically significant increase in consumers' awareness of their rights, and their ability to protect themselves from poor purchases and financial harm. However, the research also finds there are some consumer groups (young, older, low income and disabled consumers) who are potentially vulnerable and/or financially disadvantaged by a lack of consumer knowledge and skills.

1.8 Furthermore, given the speed and complexity of everyday consumer life, particularly as products and markets advance technologically, there are new and emerging issues that can and will negatively impact consumers from all socio-economic groups. If consumers are not sufficiently vigilant and adequately equipped with the knowledge and skills they need, they may struggle to be fully informed and discerning in their outlook and behaviour.

Actions

1.9 The research findings have informed the development of the Consumer Council's Corporate Plan 2016–2021 and the following actions have been included in the Forward Work Programme for 2016–17:

- Develop a range of resources for teachers and youth sector group leaders to raise young people's awareness of their consumer rights and responsibilities;
- Develop a series of consumer rights videos and animations focussing on specific consumer knowledge gaps identified in the research;
- Deliver a series of 'Train the Advisor' workshops with advice sector organisations to increase participants' understanding of consumer law and the Consumer Council's complaint handling role. The workshops will enable participants to cascade vital information to their clients and service users;
- Continue to work with key strategic partners to support initiatives aimed at increasing consumers' digital skills and tackling digital exclusion;
- Disseminate resources aimed at increasing consumers' awareness of their online shopping rights and safety tips;

- Devise and implement a communications and media strategy to target consumer messages about online shopping rights at key times throughout the year such as 'Black Friday'¹ in November, as well as responding to relevant media stories to trigger alerts; and
- Build on relationships with the Police Service of Northern Ireland (PSNI), Trading Standards Service (TSS) and other key partners to devise and disseminate resources and messages aimed at increasing consumers' awareness on how to spot and avoid scams. This will include sharing relevant research findings with key partners and the media as part of the 'ScamswiseNI' partnership².

¹ Black Friday is the day after Thanksgiving in the United States and it has been regarded as the beginning of the Christmas shopping season, with retailers offering promotional sales.

² ScamswiseNI partnership is made up of Police Service of Northern Ireland, Policing and Community Safety Partnership, Department of Justice, Consumer Council for Northern Ireland, Age Sector Platform, Commissioner for Older People for Northern Ireland and Trading Standards Service.

2. Main Report

Aims

2.1 The consumer proficiency research is undertaken by the Consumer Council every four years to assess:

- Knowledge of consumer rights regarding goods and services;
- Awareness of sources of expert help and advice;
- Experiences of complaints; and
- Online shopping habits.

Objectives

2.2 The findings from this research are used to:

- Inform and support delivery of the Consumer Council's Corporate Plan 2016-2021 and Forward Work Programme 2016-2017;
- Provide an evidence base for consumer skills resource development and policy work; and
- Contribute to the work across all sections of the Consumer Council to look at how proficiency levels affect consumers of water, energy, transport, postal and financial services.

Background

2.3 The Consumer Council is committed to creating a society of skilled and informed consumers who can make good purchasing decisions. This benefits individual consumers and is also an important cornerstone of a strong local economy.

2.4 Discerning consumers shop with more confidence and help to drive competition. Consumers who take action when they purchase faulty goods or poor service give the trader a chance to address the issue and become alerted to a potentially wider product or service failure.

2.5 The Consumer Council has been measuring consumer proficiency for the past 17 years. From the first report 'Consumers in the Dark', published in 1999, we have been tracking how well informed NI consumers feel about their rights, and their willingness to take action when things go wrong.

2.6 Over these 17 years we have consistently asked the following questions:

- To what extent respondents feel well informed about their consumer rights;
- If they had taken complaint action about faulty goods or poor service purchased in the last 12 months;
- How satisfied they were with the response to their complaint; and
- How often, if ever, respondents shop online.

2.7 The proficiency research also enables us to explore topical issues and follow trends. In 2004, we were keen to find out about consumers' likelihood of shopping online. Back then it was a relatively new trend which has seen marked growth since; prompting more detailed questions in this latest round of research.

Research Methodology

2.8 The Consumer Council commissioned Millward Brown Ulster (MBU) to carry out research into consumer proficiency levels amongst NI consumers aged 16 and over.

2.9 We worked with MBU to design a questionnaire that was conducted with 1,004 respondents chosen on the basis they were a representative sample in terms of age, gender, region and socio-economic group. Fieldwork took place between 15 November and 3 December 2015³.

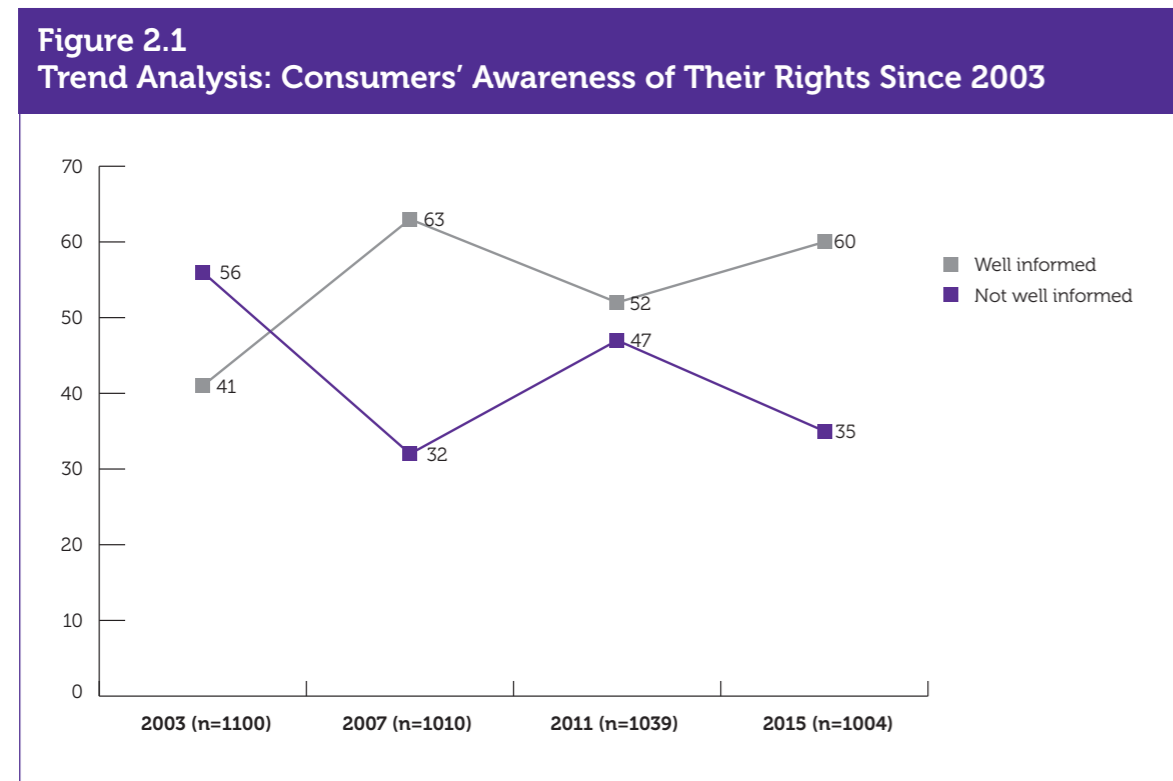
³ See Appendix A Table 1. for a breakdown of the survey sample by key demographic indicators.

2.10 Significance testing has been applied where the findings have been compared with previous waves of consumer proficiency research. All research was conducted in compliance with the International Standard ISO20252:2012 and the findings checked for their statistical robustness.

Findings

Consumers' Awareness of Rights

2.11 The proportion of consumers who feel well informed about their rights has increased in 2015, returning to levels last seen in 2007.



2.12 When we look at awareness of rights across the different socio-economic groups, consumers aged 16-34 and older consumers aged 65+ feel less confident about their rights. This is also the case for consumers on a lower income and disabled consumers⁴.

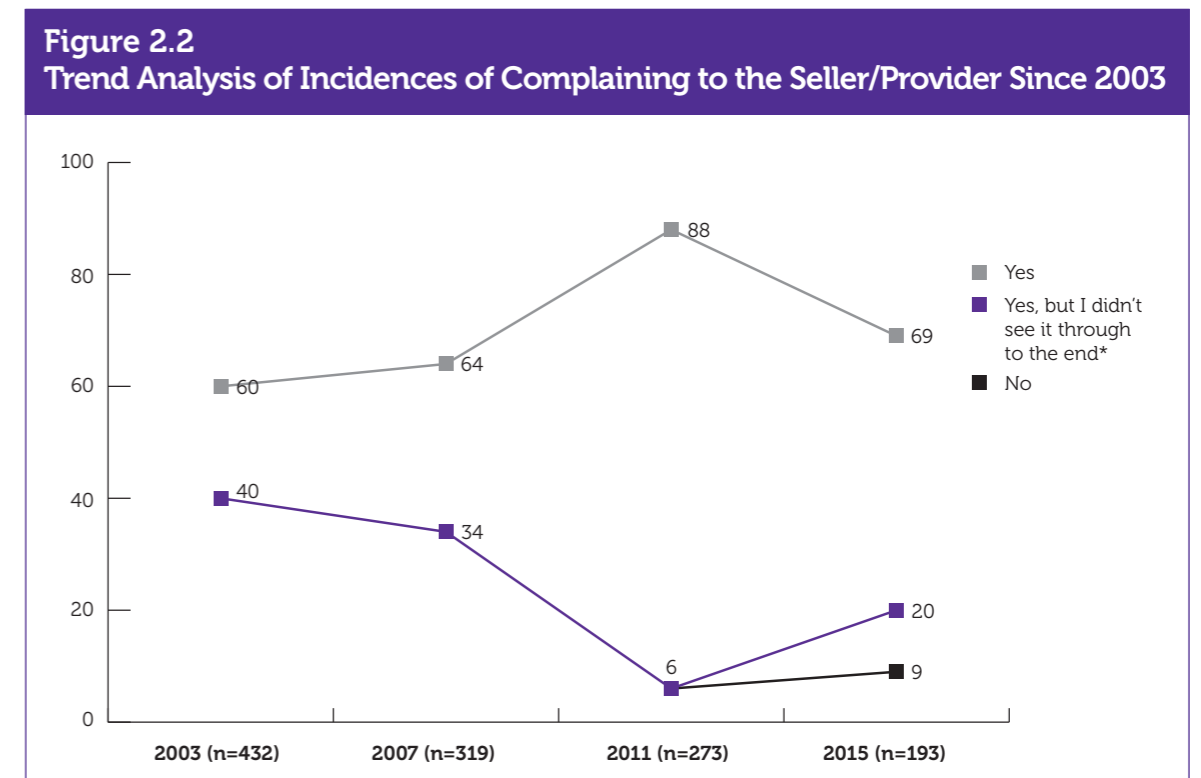
4 See Appendix B Table 1. for a full breakdown of findings by socio-economic factors.

2.13 In addition to asking how well informed consumers feel, we also tested them against true/false statements. These show that regardless of how well informed consumers perceive themselves to be, significant knowledge gaps exist.

2.14 In particular, there is confusion regarding incorrectly priced goods; entitlements to refunds for goods that were not faulty, and rights when a warranty period has expired⁵.

Consumers' Experiences of Faulty Goods and Services

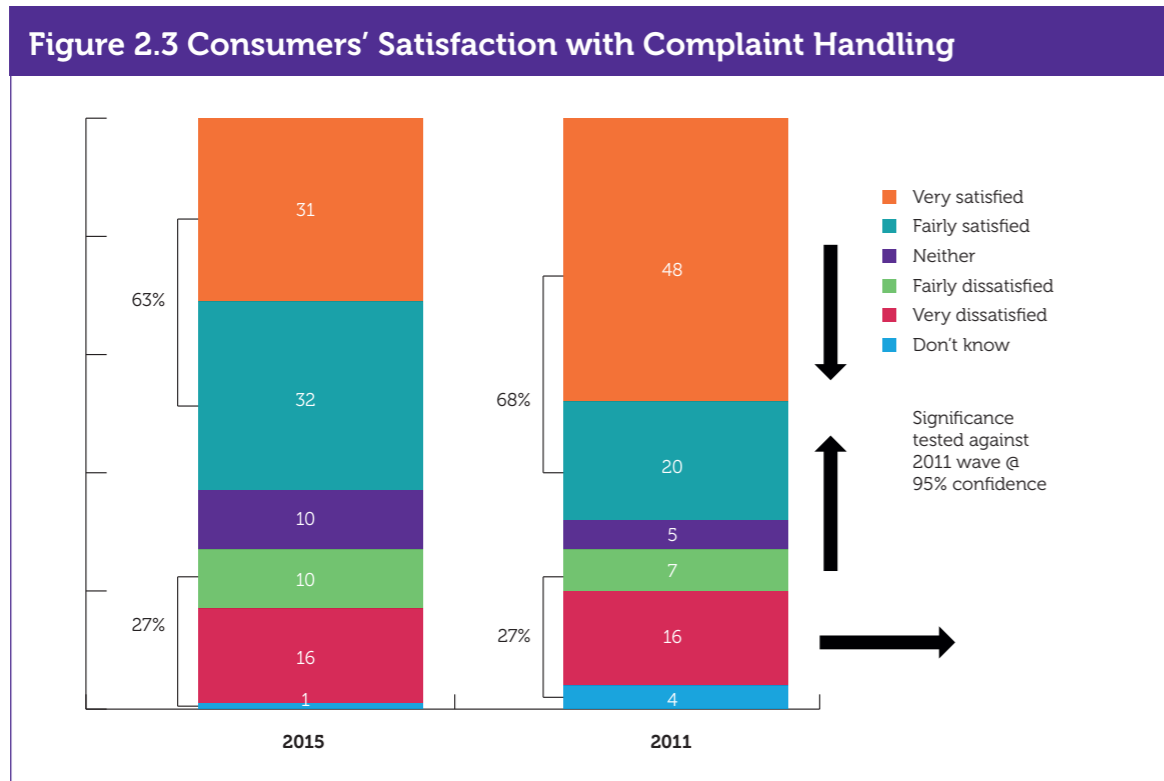
2.15 Only a fifth (19%) of consumers had experienced an issue with a purchase in the last twelve months, and of those, more than two fifths related to faulty goods.



*question changed since 2011 to include answer code for 'yes, but didn't see it through to the end'.

5 See Appendix B Table 2. for a breakdown of how consumers performed against the true/false statements.

2.16 Where problems had occurred, 7 in 10 consumers complained directly to the trader and in two thirds of cases were dealt with satisfactorily⁶.



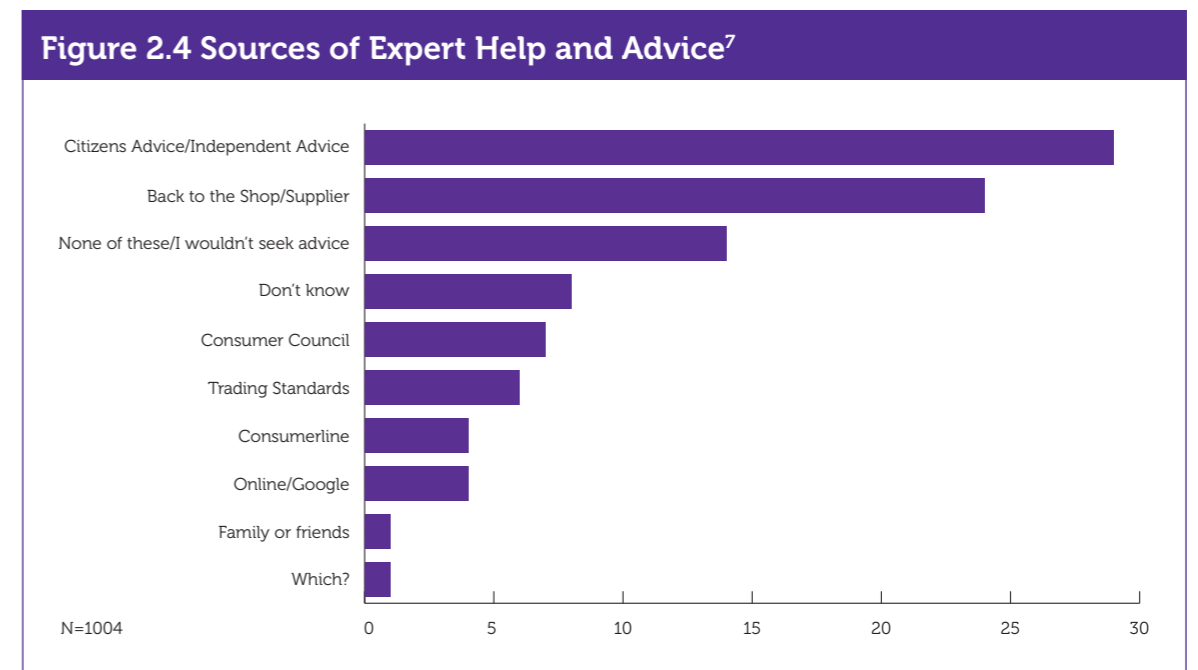
2.17 We asked consumers who had purchased defective goods or service the value of the purchase in monetary terms. On average, issues with goods and services were equivalent to £224.58 in direct costs. A further £5.50 on average was incurred through taking complaint action, ie telephone calls, visiting the trader or returning goods.

Sources of expert help and advice

2.18 The most cited source for expert advice with problem purchases were Citizens Advice Bureaux (CABNI) and independent advice centres (29%).

2.19 Almost a quarter of consumers (24%) identify the trader they bought from as being a source of expert help and advice.

2.20 Encouragingly, there has been a statistically significant decrease in the number of consumers not knowing where to go for help and advice; down from 22% in 2011 to just 8% now.



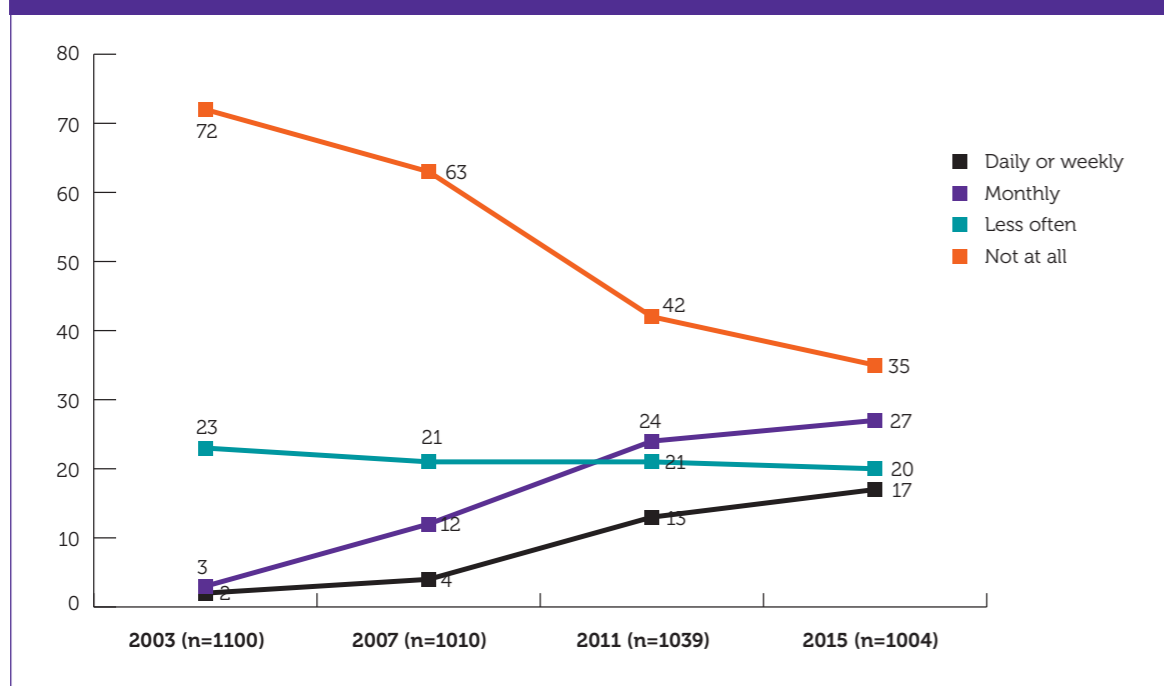
Online and 'offline' consumers

2.21 As in previous years, we asked consumers how often, if at all, they shopped online.

⁶ Question asked: Thinking about the most recent experience, did you complain to the seller/provider when you purchased faulty goods or received poor service? (Base: All consumers who experienced an issue with products or service in the last 12 months N=193). See Appendix B Table 3. for a breakdown by socio-economic factors of the satisfaction levels felt by consumers as to how their complaint was handled.

⁷ Question asked: If you experienced a problem with goods or services you'd bought, where would you go first for expert advice? See Appendix B Table 4. for a breakdown by socio-economic factors of where consumers go for expert help and advice.

Figure 2.5 Trend Analysis of Online Shopping Frequency Since 2003⁸



2.22 There has been a statistically significant decrease in the percentage of consumers who do not shop online from 72% in 2003 down to 35% in 2015.

2.23 Conversely, the percentage who shop online daily or weekly has grown significantly, with the 25-34 age group twice as likely to shop online at least once a week compared with findings in 2011⁹.

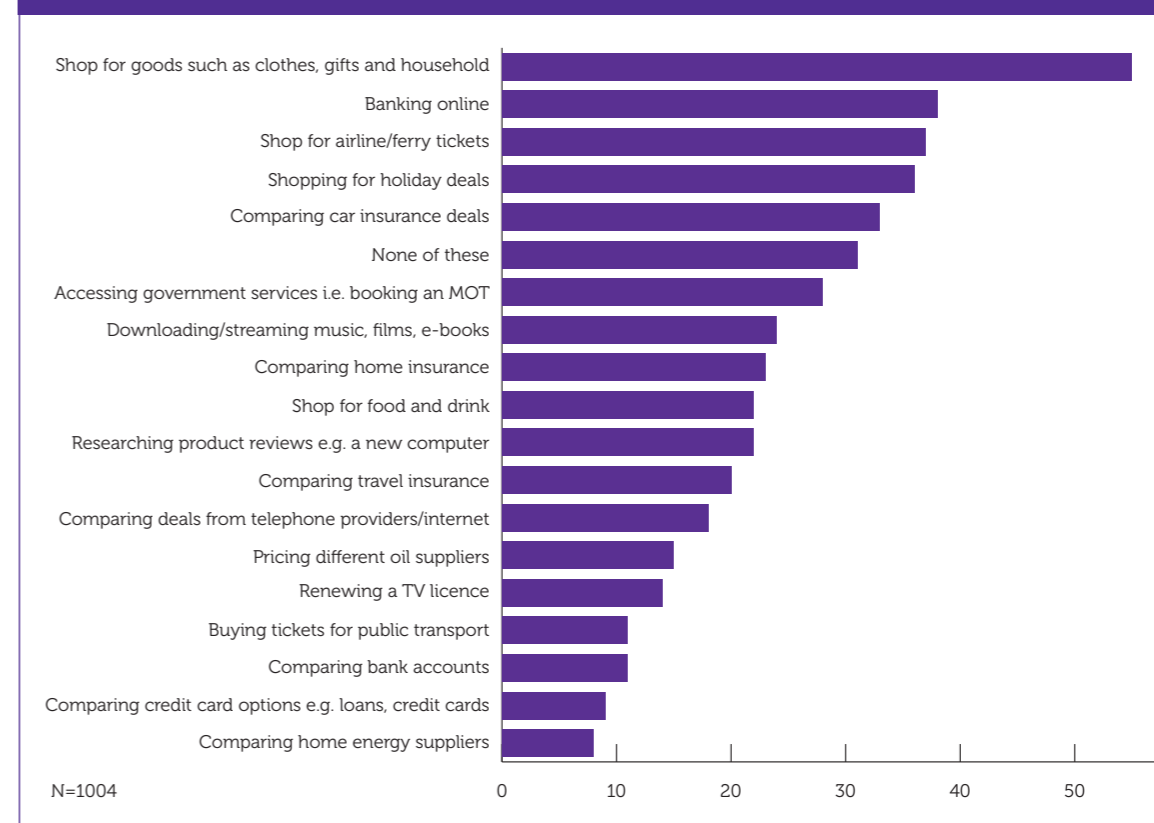
Online transactions

2.24 Shopping online for clothes, gifts, entertainment and household goods account for over half of consumers' online purchases at 55%.

2.25 Online banking came second in consumers' use of the internet at 38%, followed by purchasing flights and ferry tickets (37%) and shopping for holiday deals, such as packaged flights and accommodation (36%).

2.26 Accessing government services online such as booking an MOT or ordering a passport were less prevalent at 28%.

Figure 2.6 Online Transactions¹⁰



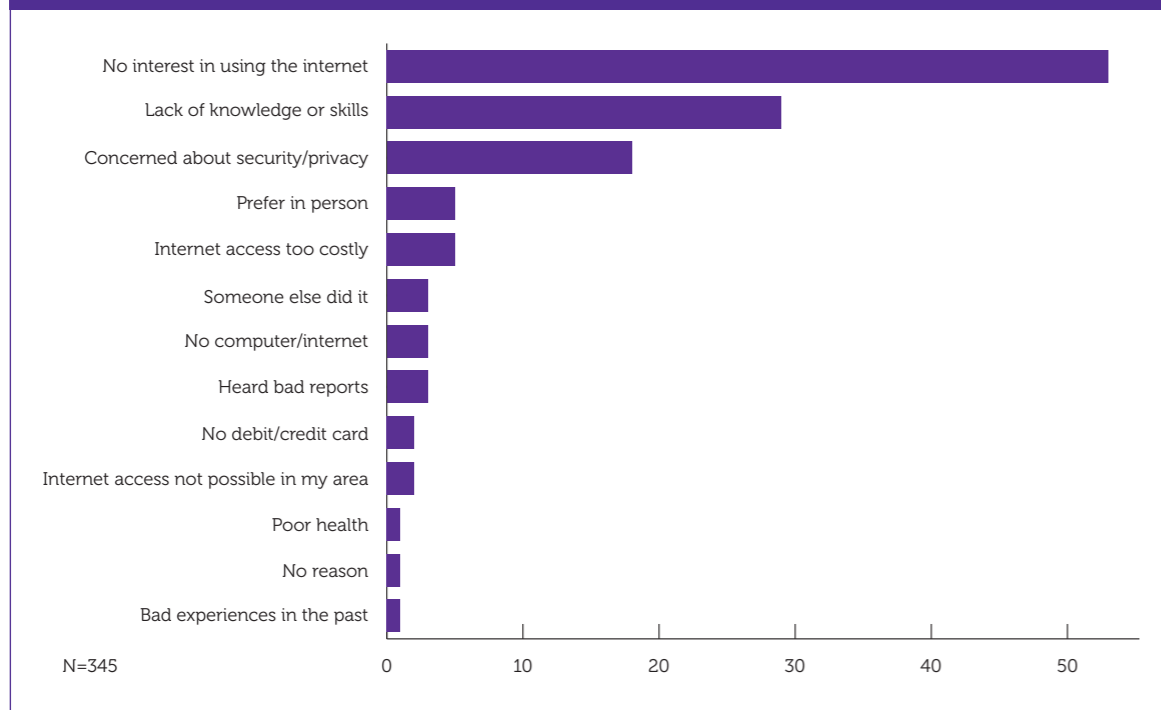
Reasons for not accessing goods and services online

2.27 The primary reason given by consumers who do not shop or access services over the internet ('offline consumers') was a lack of interest (53%). This was highest amongst those aged 50 and over. The second most cited reason was a perceived lack of knowledge or skills to purchase goods and services online (29%).

⁸ Question asked: How often, if ever, do you shop online?

⁹ See Appendix B Table 5. for a breakdown by socio-economic factors of online shopping behaviours.

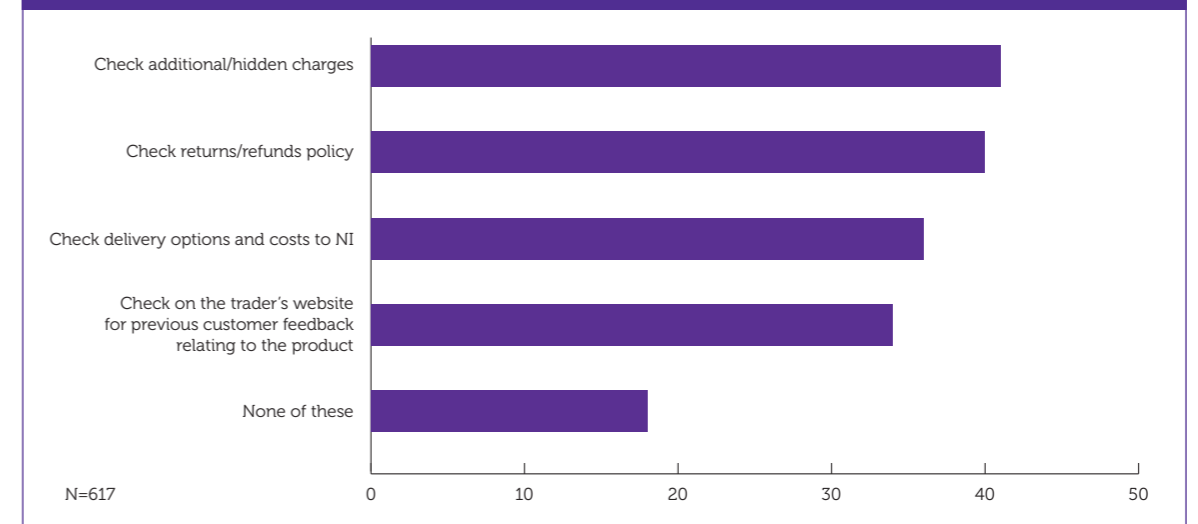
¹⁰ Question asked: Which if any of the following activities have you done online?

Figure 2.7 Reasons for being 'Offline'¹¹

Consumers' safety awareness online

2.28 In a scenario whereby consumers are shopping from a website they have not purchased from before, 41% of consumers said they would check for hidden charges, and 40% would check the returns or refund policy.

2.29 However, it is concerning that only a quarter of consumers would check whether the website is safe before entering their personal and payment details. Likewise, few consumers (24%) would run a simple background check in a search engine to find out if other consumers have experienced problems with the web retailer.

Figure 2.8 Consumers' Safety Awareness Online¹²

2.30 When we tested respondents with true/false statements about online safety and things to watch out for, there were good levels of awareness, but it seems this knowledge is not necessarily always put into practice. However, rural consumers, and those who tended to shop online less often were more likely to be circumspect and to take precautionary actions¹³.

Scams exposure

2.31 The majority of respondents (83%) had not been targeted by a scam in the past three years. However, a sizeable proportion (17%) had been victims. These figures may not be entirely accurate as this is an issue that can often be under-reported, because some consumers may not realise they have been targeted, whilst others are too embarrassed to admit it.

2.32 The most commonly cited type of scam related to payment protection insurance (PPI) scams (34%). Banking scams were the second most common (21%) followed by phishing emails at 15%¹⁴.

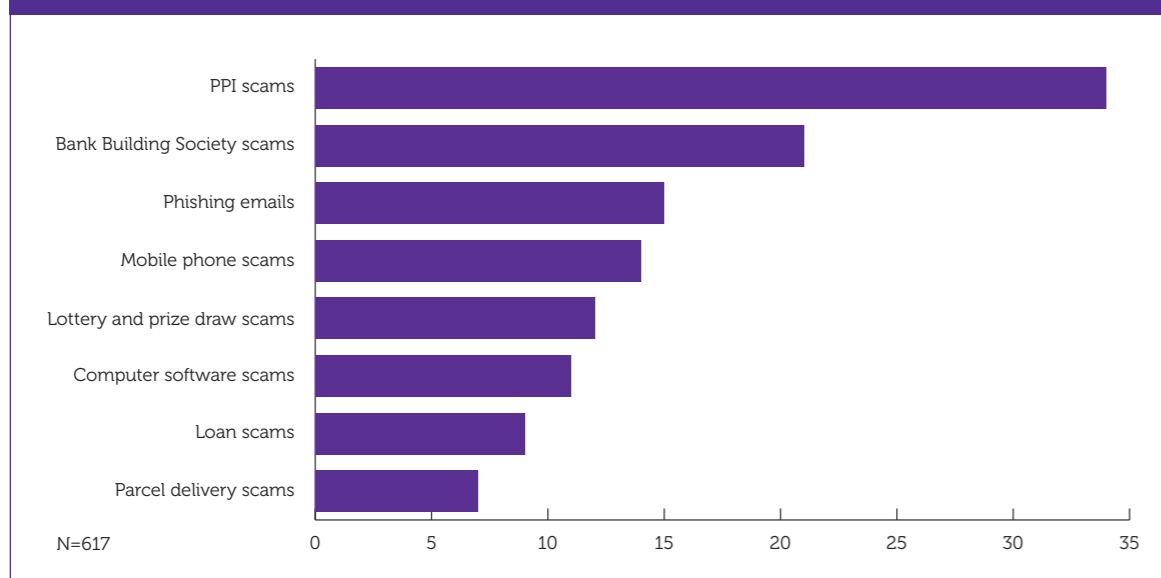
2.33 Telephone was the most commonly experienced method of scams contact at 41%, which correlates with the type of scam most often reported by respondents.

¹¹ Question asked: Why do you not shop or access services online? See Appendix B Table. 6 for a breakdown by socio-economic factors of reasons given for not shopping or accessing services online.

¹² Question asked: If you are buying from a website that you have not used before, which of any of the following would you do? [Base: All consumers who shop online N=617]

¹³ See Appendix B Table. 7 for a breakdown of how consumers performed against the online shopping true/false statements.

¹⁴ See Appendix D for a description of scam types and how they work.

Figure 2.9 Scams Consumers Have Been Targeted by in the Last 3 Years¹⁵

Conclusions and Actions

Raising Consumer Proficiency Levels

2.34 Whilst the findings show an increase in consumers who feel well informed about their rights; the research has also identified key groups who are not as proficient. In the main, younger consumers, consumers living on a low income and older consumers aged 65+ tend to be less proficient.

2.35 Furthermore, the true/false statements used to test consumers' knowledge of their rights reveal how even those consumers who feel confident are not as well informed as they might think.

2.36 Regardless of the degree to which a consumer knows their rights, there may be times when they need expert help and advice. The research shows that awareness of advice centres has remained more or less static at 29% in 2015 compared with 30% in 2011. To ensure consumers get the appropriate level of expert help, more will need to be done to ensure queries and complaints are signposted effectively.

Actions:

1. Develop a range of resources for teachers and youth sector group leaders to raise young people's awareness of their consumer rights and responsibilities; and a series of consumer rights videos and animations for social media focussing on specific consumer knowledge gaps identified in the research;
2. Deliver a series of 'Train the Advisor' workshops with advice sector organisations to increase participants understanding of consumer law and the Consumer Council's complaint handling role. The workshops will enable participants to cascade vital information to their clients and service users; and
3. Establish an effective complaint referral mechanism with Citizens Advice Bureaux and Advice NI to ensure consumers access the most appropriate source of advice as easily and quickly as possible.

Responding to the Needs of Online and Offline Consumers

2.37 Consumers aged 25-34 are twice as likely to shop online at least once a week and the under 50 age brackets also lead the way in other online activities such as banking, booking travel products and accessing government services.

2.38 However, almost a third of consumers are not shopping or accessing services online. Of those, 53% state this is because they have no interest and 29% say they lack the knowledge or skills.

2.39 Consumers who do use the internet to shop and carry out transactions online were also in some cases lacking the knowledge, skills and good habits needed to protect themselves effectively.

¹⁵ Question asked: Which, if any, of the following scams have you been victim to in the last 3 years? [Base: All victims of scams in the last 3 years N=156]

Appendix A – Methodology

Actions:

4. Continue to work with key strategic partners to support initiatives aimed at increasing consumers' digital skills and tackle digital exclusion;
5. Disseminate resources aimed at increasing consumers' awareness of their online shopping rights and safety tips; and
6. Devise and implement a communications and media strategy to target consumer messages about online shopping rights at key times throughout the year such as 'Black Friday', as well as responding to relevant media stories to trigger alerts.

Increasing Scams Awareness

2.40 Although the majority of consumers surveyed had not been a victim of a scam in the last three years, the fact that 17% adults had been a victim gives cause for concern.

Action:

7. Build on relationships with PSNI, TSS and other key partners to devise and disseminate resources and messages aimed at increasing consumers' awareness on how to spot and avoid scams.

Table 1. Demographics of the Survey Sample

Demographic indicator		Percentage of the sample
Gender	Male	49
	Female	51
Age	16-24	15
	25-34	17
	35-49	26
	50-64	22
	65+	20
Socio-economic group	ABC1	45
	C2	26
	DE	30
Location (Urban and rural areas selected throughout)	Belfast City	23
	North	15
	South	36
	West	26
Community background	Protestant	42
	Catholic	41
	Other	17
Disabled or long-term sick		13
Base: N=1004		

Appendix B – Data Tables

Table 2. Definition of the Socio-Economic Classifications

Classification	Definition
A	Upper middle class, higher managerial, administrative or professional
B	Middle class, intermediate managerial, administrative or professional
C1	Lower middle class, supervisor or clerical and junior managerial, administrative or professional, skilled non-manual workers
C2	Skilled working class, skilled manual workers
D	Working class, partly skilled workers
E	Those at the lowest level of subsistence, unskilled labour

Table 1. Consumers' Awareness of Their Rights by Socio-Economic Factors

Demographic Indicator		Very well informed	Fairly well informed	Not well informed	Not at all well informed	Don't know	N=
All		11%	49%	24%	11%	5%	1004
Gender	Male	11%	52%	23%	10%	3%	510
	Female	11%	45%	25%	12%	7%	494
Age	16-24	5%	38%	30%	19%	8%	131
	25-34	13%	49%	22%	10%	7%	164
	35-49	13%	57%	22%	5%	4%	260
	50-64	15%	53%	20%	9%	3%	220
	65+	10%	41%	29%	16%	5%	229
Socio-economic group	ABC1	15%	54%	19%	8%	4%	439
	C2	9%	52%	23%	11%	5%	202
	DE	8%	37%	33%	15%	7%	363
Location	Urban	12%	47%	24%	12%	6%	639
	Rural	11%	52%	24%	9%	4%	311
Disability	With a disability	8%	47%	25%	15%	5%	143
	No disability	12%	49%	24%	10%	5%	859

Table 2. Outcome of Consumer True/False Statements by Socio-Economic Factors

Answer	% who answered correctly ✓ or incorrectly ✗	Gender		Age					Social Class			How well informed	
		Total N=1004	Male N=510	Female N=494	16-24 N=131	25-34 N=164	35-49 N=260	50-64 N=220	65+ N=229	ABC1 N=434	C2 N=202	DE N=363	Well N=591
A) If you bought a TV costing £499.99 using your credit card, the law says you can claim compensation from the credit card company if the TV develops a fault ten months later. (True)	64% ✓	64%	64%	61%	60%	63%	68%	67%	69%	60%	60%	66%	61%
	36% ✗	36%	36%	39%	40%	37%	32%	33%	31%	40%	40%	34%	39%
B) If a designer bag is priced at £59.00 but when you get to the pay desk the sales assistant says it's meant to be at £95.00, by law you only have to pay the lower ticket price. (False)	32% ✓	31%	32%	33%	30%	35%	31%	29%	33%	27%	33%	30%	32%
	68% ✗	69%	68%	67%	70%	65%	69%	71%	67%	73%	67%	70%	68%
C) As long as you have a receipt, you are legally entitled to a refund if you return a coat you bought two weeks ago that you no longer want. (False)	33% ✓	35%	30%	31%	33%	34%	34%	30%	33%	33%	31%	33%	31%
	67% ✗	65%	70%	69%	67%	66%	66%	70%	67%	67%	69%	67%	69%
D) If your computer develops a fault after 18 months, by law you can ask the retailer for a free repair or replacement even though it's outside of the warranty period. (True)	25% ✓	27%	24%	26%	25%	22%	22%	34%	24%	27%	26%	23%	28%
	75% ✗	73%	76%	74%	75%	78%	78%	66%	76%	73%	74%	77%	72%
E) You purchase the latest e-book from your favourite author but it keeps freezing on your digital device. The web retailer says they can't issue a refund now that the content has been downloaded. (False)	60% ✓	61%	59%	52%	54%	61%	62%	68%	59%	65%	58%	63%	56%
	40% ✗	39%	41%	48%	46%	39%	38%	32%	41%	35%	42%	37%	44%
F) If you bought a lamp costing £70 using your debit card, you can claim your money back from the card provider if the goods don't arrive, arrive damaged, are not as described or the business goes bust. (True)	70% ✓	68%	73%	70%	67%	72%	70%	70%	68%	68%	76%	70%	72%
	30% ✗	32%	27%	30%	33%	28%	30%	30%	32%	32%	24%	30%	28%

Table 3. Consumers' Satisfaction with Response Received From the Seller/ Provider by Socio-Economic Factors

Demographic Indicator		Very satisfied	Fairly satisfied	Neither	Fairly Dissatisfied	Very Dissatisfied	N=
All		31%	32%	10%	10%	16%	169
Age	16-49	42%	30%	9%	7%	12%	115
	50+	24%	33%	15%	12%	12%	54
Location	Urban	14%	48%	7%	10%	17%	98
	Rural	42%	30%	9%	7%	12%	71
Disability	With a disability	42%	30%	9%	7%	12%	23*
	No disability	50%	20%	10%	20%	10%	146

* Caution: small base

Table 4. Sources of Expert Help and Advice by Socio-Economic Factors

Demographic Indicator		Citizens Advice / Independent Advice Centres	Back to the Shop / Supplier	Consumer Council	Trading Standards Service	Online / Google	Consumerline	Which?	Family/Friends	None of these / I wouldn't seek advice	Don't know	N=
All												1004
Ages	16-24	19%	25%	5%	4%	6%	4%	1%	2%	22%	12%	131
	25-34	26%	22%	9%	8%	8%	3%	1%	1%	14%	6%	164
	35-39	32%	22%	10%	8%	4%	3%	1%	1%	11%	6%	260
	50-64	33%	23%	6%	9%	2%	4%	1%	1%	13%	9%	220
	65+	30%	30%	6%	3%	1%	3%	0%	-	14%	10%	229
Socio-economic group	ABC1	28%	24%	10%	5%	5%	3%	2%	1%	11%	9%	439
	C2	35%	16%	5%	10%	4%	4%	1%	1%	17%	7%	202
	DE	26%	31%	7%	5%	2%	3%	-	1%	16%	9%	363
Location	Urban	29%	24%	8%	6%	3%	4%	1%	1%	15%	7%	693
	Rural	28%	24%	7%	7%	4%	3%	1%	1%	12%	11%	311
Disability	Yes	29%	37%	4%	5%	1%	2%	-	1%	13%	9%	143
	No	29%	22%	8%	7%	4%	4%	1%	1%	14%	8%	859

Table 5. Frequency of Online Shopping by Socio-Economic Factors

Demographic Indicator		Everyday	4-6 times a week	2-3 times a week	Once a week	2-3 times a month	Once a month	Less than once a month	Not at all	Don't know	Total
All											1004
Age	16-24	1%	-	2%	16%	15%	20%	22%	23%	1%	131
	25-34	4%	4%	11%	14%	16%	19%	22%	9%	2%	164
	35-49	2%	1%	7%	14%	14%	22%	24%	17%	-	260
	50-64	1%	1%	2%	7%	7%	11%	25%	46%	-	220
	65+	-	-	0%	3%	5%	6%	9%	76%	2%	229
Socio-economic group	ABC1	2%	1%	5%	13%	15%	19%	22%	24%	1%	439
	C2	1%	1%	6%	9%	8%	14%	25%	35%	1%	202
	DE	2%	0%	3	8%	8%	12%	14%	52%	1%	363
Location	Urban	2%	1%	5%	11%	11%	15%	23%	31%	1%	639
	Rural	1%	1%	5%	10%	11%	16%	15%	42%	1%	311
Disability	With a disability	0%	2%	1%	8%	8%	9%	13%	57%	1%	143
	No disability	2%	1%	5%	11%	11%	17%	22%	31%	1%	859

Table 6. Reasons for Not Shopping or Accessing Services Online by Socio-Economic Factors

Reason given	Total N=345	Gender		Age					Social Class			Location		Disability	
		Male N=181	Female N=164	16-24 N=28	25-34 N=19	35-49 N=41	50-64 N=94	65+ N=163	ABC1 N=91	C2 N=68	DE N=186	Urban N=219	Rural N=125	Yes N=80	No N=264
No interest	53%	52%	53%	20%	20%	40%	59%	63%	45%	55%	56%	56%	48%	61%	51%
Lack of knowledge/ skills	29%	27%	31%	8%	14%	26%	30%	34%	20%	25%	35%	27%	31%	39%	25%
Concerns about privacy/security	18%	21%	15%	42%	34%	24%	22%	7%	23%	25%	11%	20%	15%	14%	19%
Internet access too costly	5%	3%	8%	14%	7%	13%	3%	2%	3%	7%	6%	7%	3%	5%	5%
Prefer in person	5%	5%	4%	2%	11%	12%	5%	2%	4%	5%	5%	5%	5%	-	6%
Heard bad reports	3%	3%	4%	8%	5%	-	1%	5%	3%	4%	3%	3%	3%	-	4%
No computer/ internet	3%	4%	3%	3%	4%	-	3%	5%	4%	5%	3%	3%	3%	4%	3%
Someone else does it for me	3%	4%	2%	4%	-	9%	1%	3%	5%	4%	1%	2%	4%	2%	3%
No internet access in my area	2%	2%	1%	4%	6%	-	2%	1%	4%	3%	-	1%	3%	-	2%
No debit card/credit card	2%	2%	2%	6%	10%	4%	2%	1%	1%	-	5%	4%	1%	4%	2%
Bad experiences of it in past	1%	1%	2%	6%	10%	-	1%	-	1%	2%	1%	0%	3%	-	2%
No reason	1%	1%	1%	-	-	-	1%	1%	1%	-	1%	-	1%	1%	0%
Poor health	1%	1%	1%	-	-	-	1%	1%	1%	-	1%	-	1%	1%	0%

Table 7. Outcome of Consumer True/False Statements about Online Shopping by Socio-Economic Factors

Answer	% who answered correctly ✓ or incorrectly ✗	Gender		Age					Social Class			How well informed	
		Total N=1004	Male N=510	Female N=494	16-24 N=131	25-34 N=164	35-49 N=260	50-64 N=220	65+ N=229	ABC1 N=439	C2 N=202	DE N=363	Well N=591
A) The padlock icon in the browser bar shows you are locked in to that website (False)	58% ✓	60%	56%	61%	57%	60%	54%	56%	55%	63%	57%	55%	62%
	42% ✗	40%	44%	39%	43%	40%	46%	44%	45%	37%	43%	45%	38%
B) By law, all web retailers must provide their postal address and contact details somewhere on the website (True)	81% ✓	78%	83%	89%	87%	82%	80%	68%	86%	80%	74%	83%	77%
	19% ✗	22%	17%	11%	13%	18%	20%	32%	14%	20%	26%	17%	23%
C) If a website address begins with https then you know this is a secure and safe website (True)	62% ✓	59%	64%	67%	57%	64%	62%	59%	66%	57%	60%	64%	60%
	38% ✗	41%	36%	33%	43%	36%	38%	41%	34%	43%	40%	36%	40%
D) If a website ends .co.uk you know the company website is based in the UK (False)	31% ✓	34%	27%	21%	31%	33%	27%	38%	25%	33%	37%	28%	35%
	69% ✗	66%	73%	79%	69%	67%	73%	62%	75%	67%	63%	72%	65%
E) You have 14 calendar days from the date your order arrives to return an item you no longer want and request a full refund (True)	77% ✓	77%	76%	78%	76%	82%	76%	70%	80%	76%	72%	80%	72%
	23% ✗	23%	24%	22%	24%	18%	24%	30%	20%	24%	28%	20%	28%

Table 8. Those Consumers who have been a victim of a scam by Socio-Economic Factors

Gender		Age					Social Class			Location		Disability	
Male N=510	Female N=494	16-24 N=131	25-34 N=164	35-49 N=260	50-64 N=220	65+ N=229	ABC1 N=439	C2 N=202	DE N=363	Urban N=639	Rural N=311	Yes N=143	No N=859
18%	16%	13%	18%	20%	16%	15%	19%	14%	16%	15%	21%	21%	16%

N=1004

Appendix C

Survey questionnaire used in this research:

Problems and Complaints

1. If you experienced a problem with goods or services you'd bought and were unhappy with the response from the trader, where would you go to for expert help and advice? (Record verbatim)
- 2a. Have you experienced a problem with anything you purchased in the last twelve months? For example, goods that were faulty or not fit for purpose; goods or services that were not as advertised; delivered late; poorly installed or repaired badly?
 - Yes, once
 - Yes, more than once
 - No
- 2b. If you answered yes, what was the estimated monetary value of this problem or problems?
 - None
 - A few pence
 - More than that
 please specify _____
3. If you answered yes to 2a, did you complain to the business you bought the goods or services from?
 - Yes
 - Yes, but I didn't see it through to the end
 - No

4. If you experienced a problem but didn't complain (or see the complaint through to the end), please specify why you didn't take further action?

POSSIBLE ANSWERS/PROMPTS:

- Thought it would be too much hassle
- Complaints process was too complicated
- Wasn't sure of the complaints process
- Wasn't sure if I had the right to complain
- Thought it would be a waste of time
- Didn't consider the problem was serious enough
- Didn't consider the problem was costly enough
- Unable to speak to someone at the retailer's to get their advice
- Felt too embarrassed/ awkward to complain
- I had to do all the chasing
- I let too much time go by
- Other – please specify _____

- 5a. If you did make a complaint, were you satisfied with the response you received from the business?

- Very satisfied
- Quite satisfied
- Neither
- Quite dissatisfied
- Very dissatisfied
- Don't know

- 5b. Why were you satisfied or dissatisfied with the response? Record verbatim

POSSIBLE ANSWERS/PROMPTS

Satisfied

- The effective and efficient way your complaint was handled;
- You received more than you had hoped for in terms of a refund, letter of apology, goodwill gesture etc;
- The company exceeded your expectations on how they dealt with your complaint;
- You felt valued by the retailer;
- The company resolved the complaint with little effort on your part.

Dissatisfied

- The way in which your complaint was handled;
- You had hoped for more;
- You were perhaps unrealistic in your expectations;
- You didn't feel appreciated as a customer;
- You had to do all the hard work in pushing for a response;
- With hindsight, you think you were entitled to a better response/ more compensation.

Consumer Knowledge

6. How well informed do you feel about your rights as a consumer?

- Very well informed
- Fairly well informed
- Not well informed
- Not at all well informed
- Don't know

Test Questions

7. Please answer true or false to the following statements:

- A) If you bought a TV costing £499.99 using your credit card, the law says you can claim compensation from the credit card company if the TV develops a fault ten months later. **(TRUE)**
- B) If a designer bag is priced at £59.00 but when you get to the pay desk the sales assistant says it's meant to be £95.00, by law you only have to pay the lower ticket price. **(FALSE)**
- C) As long as you have a receipt, you are legally entitled to a refund if you return a coat you bought two weeks ago that you no longer want. **(FALSE)**
- D) If your computer develops a fault after 18 months, by law you can ask the retailer for a repair or replacement even though it's outside of the warranty period. **(TRUE)**
- E) You purchase the latest e-book from your favourite author but it keeps freezing on your digital device. The web retailer says they can't issue a refund now that the content has been downloaded. **(FALSE)**
- F) If you bought a lamp costing £70 using your debit card, you can claim your money back from the card provider if the goods don't arrive, arrive damaged, are not as described or the business goes bust. **(TRUE)**

Shopping Online

8. Do you shop online?

Yes /No

If No – go to Q14

9. If you answered yes to Q8, how often do you shop online?

- Daily or weekly
- Monthly
- Less often
- Not at all
- Don't know

10. Imagine you're buying from a website you've never used before, which of the following activities would you typically do before making a big purchase?

Activity	Always	Sometimes	Never	Comments on any of these
Check returns/refunds policy				
Check delivery times				
Check your cancellation rights				
Check delivery options and costs to NI				
Check additional/hidden charges				
Check on the trader's website for previous customer feedback relating to the product and/or trader				
Do a separate search on the internet for previous customer feedback relating to the product and/or trader				
Check the Terms and Conditions				
Check your personal and financial details will be protected from fraud and identity theft				
Check prices against other providers				
Other (please specify)				

11. If you answered yes to Q10 please tell us more about your use of the internet:

Activity	Always	Sometimes	Never	Comments about any of these
Shop for consumer goods such as clothes, gifts and household goods				
Shop for food & drink				
Shopping for holiday deals				
Researching product reviews eg a new computer or dishwasher				
Comparing deals from telephone/internet providers				
Comparing bank accounts				
Comparing credit options eg loans, credit cards, overdrafts etc				
Comparing warranty deals				
Comparing deals from different home energy suppliers				
Pricing different oil suppliers				
Comparing car insurance offers				
Comparing home insurance				
Comparing travel insurance				
Researching your consumer rights or how to make a complaint				
Finding a trustworthy tradesperson				
Finding a trustworthy high street retailer				
Finding a trustworthy web retailer				
Downloading/streaming music, films, e-books				
Buying tickets for public transport				
Accessing government services ie booking an MOT, ordering/updating a new passport, ordering/updating a driving licence				
Banking online				
Renewing a TV license				
Other: please specify				

12. If you do not shop or access services online, what is the reason for this?

- Internet access not possible in my area
- Internet access too costly
- No interest in using the internet
- Lack of knowledge or skills
- Concerned about security/privacy
- Bad experiences in the past
- Heard bad reports
- Other please specify _____

Test Questions

13. Please answer true or false to the following statements:

- A) The padlock icon in the browser bar shows you are locked into that website **(FALSE)**
- B) By law, all web retailers must provide their postal address and contact details somewhere on the website **(TRUE)**
- C) If a website address begins with **https** then you know this is a secure and safe website **(TRUE)**
- D) If a website address ends **.co.uk** you know the company website is based in the UK **(FALSE)**
- E) You have 14 calendar days from the date your order arrives to return an item you no longer want and request a full refund **(TRUE)**

Scams

14a. Scams are becoming increasingly sophisticated and anyone can be caught out. Please tell us if you have been victim to a scam in the past three years?

Yes/No

14b. What type of scam was it?

- Telephone
- Email
- Postal
- Doorstep
- Fake website
- Fake newspaper advertisement
- Fake goods

Examples would include the following:

- Lottery and prize draw scams
- Clairvoyant Scams
- Catalogue and brochure scams
- Bank and Building Society scams
- Debt recovery scams
- Betting scams
- Courier scams
- PPI scams
- Parcel delivery scams
- Prize holding scams
- Religious scams

15. If you spotted or were the victim of a scam, where would you report it?

(Use showcard options)

- PSNI
- Trading Standards Service
- Citizens Advice/Independent Advice Centre
- Local MLA constituency Office
- Action Fraud
- Royal Mail
- Direct Marketing Association
- Wouldn't report it
- Don't know

Appendix D

Description of scams and how they work:

Bank and Building Society scams - these scams typically involve a fraudster posing as a member of banking staff who advises you've been a victim of fraud. They will ask for personal and financial information in order to gain access to the consumer's bank account and/or commit identity theft.

Betting scams - scammers make offers of inside information or 'foolproof' systems that guarantee profit from gambling, mostly horse racing but could be any sport.

Catalogue brochure scams - scammers send out literature promising a variety of different 'free gifts' or 'prizes'. These 'gifts' are either worthless; never materialize or require an order to be placed by sending money or telephoning (often at premium rate).

Charity scams - these scams involve a person or a group of people pretending to represent a non-existing charity and asking for a donation.

Clairvoyant and religious scams - a consumer receives a letter from someone claiming to be 'psychic', or a person from a religious order who gives the impression they are concerned about the consumer's good health, wealth and happiness. They threaten harm or bad luck unless money is sent to them.

Computer software scams - these scams involve a phone call claiming to be from a well known software company saying there is a problem with the consumer's computer, which will require remote access to resolve it. A fee is often charged and then the fraudsters may have unlimited access to the computer to commit fraud and/or identity theft.

Copycat government scams – these involve websites designed to look like the official government websites, and charge a fee to process or renew official documents eg passports or visas; which the consumer could do themselves for free or cheaper. Sometimes a fee is charged but the application is not processed at all.

Courier scams - fraudsters claiming to be from your bank or building society telephone the consumer to say they have been a victim of fraud and their bank cards must be cancelled and new ones reissued. The consumer is tricked into

handing their debit/credit cards and PIN numbers to a courier who arrives at their door. These scams are linked to Bank and Building Society scams detailed previously.

Dating and romance scams - consumers are conned into thinking they've met their perfect partner online. Once trust has been gained, the fraudster will begin to ask for money for a variety of emotive reasons.

Health and medical scams - these come in the form of emails or newspaper advertisements promising miracle tablets and cures that offer unbelievable results. Another type of scam involves fake online pharmacies offering real or counterfeit drugs and medicines very cheaply, or without prescription.

Insurance scams - a scammer claims to be an insurance broker but when a claim is made or the insurance policy is checked, it is only then discovered that insurance is not actually in place.

Investment scams - fraudsters offer the chance to invest in things such as share sales; wine investments; land banking and carbon credits. Another emerging scam involves false claims about pension liberation, also known as 'pension loans'.

Landline telephone scams - scammers take control of the consumer's landline and trick victims into giving away their personal information. Often you receive a message alert asking you to call a specific number as your card details may have been compromised. You are then asked to key-in your credit or debit card details including your PIN number.

Loan scams - this is often where the consumer has replied to an advert offering a fast loan that will be approved regardless of credit history. Before the loan is paid out, the consumer is asked to pay an upfront fee to cover the insurance. Once this fee is paid the loan is never received.

Lottery and prize draw scams - a consumer is told they have won a large sum of money in an international lottery, sweepstake or other prize draw. They will be asked to supply a copy of the consumer's passport, and bank details. Once these have been provided the fraudsters will then ask for various fees to be paid - eg taxes, legal fees, banking fees so they can release the non-existent winnings.

Mobile phone scams - these scams persuade the consumer to buy phone-related products/services that turn out to be substandard or non-existent; or to make phone calls or send texts to premium services by accident. Consumers can also unknowingly sign-up to expensive subscription services.

Parcel delivery scams - A postcard is put through the letterbox by a fake delivery company claiming they have a parcel for the homeowner and that delivery can be arranged by telephone. If the consumer calls, they are asked to pay a sum of money by credit card and told the (non-existent) package will be delivered the same day.

Phishing emails - Phishing emails often have a web address embedded in the email and the consumer is asked to click on this link which takes them to a fake website. When the consumer is prompted to enter or update their personal information such as bank account numbers, credit card or password, this allows the fraudster to use these details to commit fraud.

PPI scams - Scammers suggest you could be owed money - often for repayment of bank charges or mis-sold payment protection insurance (PPI) but first ask the consumer for an upfront payment to enable them to receive the money.

Subscription scams - the consumer is invited to subscribe to a 'free' trial of a product and asked to provide bank details to cover the fee for postage and packing. The small print terms and conditions will likely say that unless the subscription is cancelled at the end of the month, a monthly subscription fee will be charged. Scammers make their money by continuing to take a small (unnoticeable) amount every month for the 'free' subscription.

Tickets scams - this relates to tickets bought directly from another consumer or via a secondary ticket agent site. In some cases the ticket never existed (as the event was sold out), or the seller had no intention of handing over the ticket.

Travel and leisure scams - holidays are advertised on the web at incredibly low prices. After paying a deposit the consumer discovers the holiday doesn't exist and they lose their money or only get part of what they paid for.



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Consumer Council Northern Ireland



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