

Ofcom has today published an exploratory qualitative research report by DuckFoOt, on behalf of Ofcom, on how people assess online content and services

The research is designed to examine how people assess the trustworthiness, independence and balance of online content and services and to also explore how perceptions about online regulation may influence people's online behaviour. The study included a range of people from heavy to light home internet users and forms part of Ofcom's work to promote media literacy.

Key findings

- Participants used both unconscious judgements and conscious processes when evaluating which online content to trust.
- Familiarity was the most important factor when assessing trustworthiness and was established by consciously recognising cues (such as brands) and by quick, intuitive judgements which could lead to a false perception of familiarity and trust.
- Conscious evaluation included reading the site for signs, such as geographic contact details or a 'professional presentation'. Other factors included ease of navigation and reputation. Off-line reputation or word-of-mouth recommendations from friends or family were also factors in deciding which sites to use.
- More detailed research and checking was generally confined to price comparisons and reading fellow users' reviews.
- The research also highlighted how a participant's desire for a content or service has the potential to override all other factors in establishing trust, for example when buying a discounted product online.
- Participants also welcomed the provision of information and tools which they thought would be useful in helping them make decisions about online content and services.