

Developing rapid and effective communications testing: reputation indicators

These measures covered key factors to track the FSA's reputation, which we explore in this chapter. They were:

1. awareness
2. familiarity
3. favourability
4. trust

Key findings

- overall, there were **no clear patterns revealing key features which improve reputation**. This could be because only a few pieces tested were designed to increase the reputation of the FSA. These four pieces were about food sustainability – an emerging topic of interest for the organisation.
- there was a link between all the reputation scores (Awareness, Familiarity, Favourability and Trust). **The role of branding and positioning here is key**, as familiarity with the FSA positively impacted Favourability and Trust. Further research would be needed to understand the right balance between “too much branding” and “too little branding” when designing communications.
- **communication about topics typically associated with the FSA's work** were more likely to positively shift reputation scores; whereas those around topics not strongly associated with the FSA (for example, food sustainability) were less likely to build reputation. More research is needed to understand how the FSA can most effectively use communications to position itself as a trusted “voice” in emerging debates.

Awareness and Familiarity

Before being shown any communication material, the majority (84%) of respondents said they had heard of the Food Standards Agency ([footnote 1](#)). However, the proportion who were fairly or very familiar with the FSA (saying they know at least a little about what it does) was significantly smaller (54%). This meant that there was greater scope to increase levels of familiarity than to increase levels of awareness given its already high baseline level: on average, there was just a +1-percentage point shift in awareness, compared to a +8-point shift in familiarity.

Content most likely to improve familiarity with the FSA included: the video explaining FHRs, draft messages around milk (use by dates / sniff test), the article providing precautionary advice on cooking frozen raw breaded chicken products, the tweet around reheating rice safely, and the video outlining differences between best before and use by dates. In terms of content scoring particularly well or poorly, some patterns were observed:

- topics typically associated with the FSA (for example, **food safety**) positively increased Familiarity and Awareness scores. This is likely due to the strong association between the concepts covered in these materials and the role of the FSA.
- broadly speaking, the **most liked pieces** of communication were also the most effective at increasing Familiarity and Awareness. Although, draft milk messages (use by dates/ sniff test) were not amongst the most liked pieces, but still effective in shifting reputation scores.
- there was some correlation with increasing Familiarity and Awareness and specific engagement scores, particularly **clarity, carrying an important messaging and being for somebody like me**. However, this was not consistent (for example, the Milk Draft messages did not score well on engagement).

In contrast, three of the CBD draft messages, the tweet around wrinkly apples, article on consuming insects and the video exploring what it means for food to be pre-packed for direct sale (PPDS) scored poorly on Awareness and Familiarity metrics:

- in the case of the PPDS video, this likely reflects the **businesses-focussed** messaging as it was tested with the public instead of food industry stakeholders.
- the messages around CBD did not score well on engagement metrics, perhaps reflecting lack of awareness and interest in the **topic**.

Favourability

Before being shown any material, three in five (62%) were favourable towards the FSA (amongst those who have at least heard of the organisation). There was a +4-point average uplift in levels of favourability towards the FSA once exposed to the communication material.

There was variation in the levels of change pre-post exposure of different content, ranging from +30 to -12. The top performing pieces of content increasing favourability towards the FSA were:

- the video explaining FHRS
- the article on cooking frozen raw chicken
- the tweet on reheating rice safely
- the Tyler West Tik Tok video on allergy awareness

Again, these appeared to perform well on the broader reputational measures through a combination of **engaging content** and focus on **topics** which people are likely to associate with the FSA.

The pieces of material tested that were less likely to improve Favourability (in fact, they slightly decreased it but all not significantly) were:

- the blog on climate change and diet
- CBD draft message 4
- the article on environmental labelling rules
- one of the draft messages on milk labelling message 4
- the Jack video about allergies

There were no consistent features that seemed to drive favourability down. However, most of these pieces (with the exception of the video explaining FHRS) did not use **plain English** and they scored lower than average on **clarity, trustworthiness and memorability**.

Notably, the stakeholder update 'How climate change will impact on diet and what is the regulatory responsibility?' had the highest negative impact on favourability towards the FSA (and also on trust, as described in the next section). This is reflected in the low clarity and memorability engagement scores, and also potentially **lack of strong association between FSA and sustainability**.

Trust

The proportion who said they trust the FSA to do its job rose 3-points from 69% to 72% upon exposure to the communications within the survey ([footnote 2](#)). This average uplift masks significant variations across different materials tested, which ranged from +24 to -9.

The materials which scored highest and lowest in terms trust tended to be the same as those in similar positions within metrics on familiarity and/or favourability: the article on cooking frozen raw chicken and the video on use by vs best before dates were particularly successful in instilling trust in the FSA.

In contrast, the stakeholder update “How climate change will impact on diet and what is the regulatory responsibility?” and the article on environmental labelling rules - “Enormous sense of urgency: FSA calls for new environmental labelling rules”, appeared to slightly reduce levels of trust amongst those exposed to these materials. Both pieces aimed at increasing awareness of the topic of **sustainable food**, corroborating the earlier finding that suggests it could be challenging for the FSA to create a reputational impact when addressing new topics it is not known for.

1. As with the engagement score, the impact of FSA messaging on broader reputational metrics is assessed through measuring the difference in responses to relevant questions before and after exposure to the relevant piece of FSA communication. When interpreting these findings, it is important to note the relative baseline scores.
2. Trust in the FSA was measured specifically within the surveys as trust in the Food Standards Agency to do its job. That is to make sure that food is safe and what it says it is.