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SOCIAL SCIENCE

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Selected current projects
2018-19

TRUST IN A CHANGING WORLD

SUMMARY



To be effective and influential, regulatory bodies need to have public trust, otherwise they will struggle with stakeholder acceptance of communications and co-operation, and public health will be put at risk.

The project aim is to identify enablers of and barriers to trust among consumers, as relevant to the food industry and food regulator and make recommendations for a modern, accountable regulator to maintain trustworthiness.

METHODOLOGY



- Rapid Evidence Assessment by ICF Consulting, systematically assessing relevant research literature.
- Deliberative Citizen's Forums by 2CV and Community Research, gathering spontaneous then more informed public views. 6 day-long workshops were held with a diverse range of participants in England, Wales, and Northern Ireland.

FINDINGS



High levels of trust in FSA are rarely based on, for example, awareness of FSA high performance. The reports explore how trust is influenced by factors such as:

- media coverage and crises
- endorsement of others
- confirmation bias
- perceptions of complexity
- familiarity
- honesty
- consistency
- independence
- ability
- and good intentions

Maintaining trustworthiness in parallel with trust is key. The public want a visible, powerful FSA protecting their interests in the food system and maintaining proactive consumer communications that help the public empower themselves. Recommendations have been made for consideration by FSA senior leadership.

PUBLICATION

<https://www.food.gov.uk/research/research-projects/trust-in-a-changing-world>

SOCIAL MEDIA LISTENING

SUMMARY



The FSA has been tracking consumer attitudes towards food related topics and trust in the FSA and food system for several years. With the FSA increasing its risk assessment capabilities there is a growing need to gather evidence, monitor and horizon scan for emerging trends. Building on a similar exercise in 2016, we are commissioning research to understand what social media can tell us about emerging trends in food these days. We want to listen to what people are saying about food and the food system, without agenda, without any topic prompts or the false environment of a research group.

We also want to understand the potential for this kind of monitoring to inform horizon scanning exercises and our understanding of emerging risks going forward.

METHODOLOGY



We expect the research will comprise several stages:

- 1 Desk research
- 2 Analysis of natural consumer chatter to understand volume and key themes, to gather insight related to key conversations and determine knowledge gaps using established social media tools
- 3 Identification of trends, proxy psychographic segments, communities and the topics which garner the most interest and 'shareability'
- 4 Profiling - matching against other datasets, it might be possible to identify emerging interest groups and their characteristics including other interests and demographics.

FINDINGS



We expect to have findings by spring 2019.

ACSS

ADVISORY COMMITTEE FOR SOCIAL SCIENCE

SUMMARY



The Advisory Committee for Social Science provides expert strategic advice to the FSA on its use of the social sciences to help FSA utilise these sciences to shape and deliver its strategic objectives and understand its impact.

METHODOLOGY



The Advisory Committee for Social Science is an independent expert committee of the Food Standards Agency. It is comprised of eight expert members and one lay member. The Committee meets twice a year in open session, and its working groups meet ad hoc to deliver individual pieces of work.

THE COMMITTEE



At the Committees' inaugural meeting the group set up three working groups with a number of volunteers for each. The outputs from which will shape the future direction of FSA's behavioural science work, a new framework for risk communication and steer both content and mode of the flagship social survey Food and You – a key investment for FSA and an official statistic.

For further details on the Committee, its members, its meetings or its working groups go to <https://acss.food.gov.uk/>

PUBLIC ATTITUDES TRACKER

SUMMARY



Since 2010 the FSA has been tracking changes in consumer attitudes towards the Agency and food related issues through our bi-annual Public Attitudes Tracker.

Questions cover several topics of interest for the Agency, including concern about food safety issues, awareness of food hygiene standards, awareness of the FSA and its responsibilities, trust in the FSA and the food industry, and confidence in food labelling.

METHODOLOGY



- Bi-annual survey (fieldwork in May and November)
- Face to face interviews
- Random location sampling
- Sample size c.2000 respondents per wave
- Nationally representative (England, Wales and Northern Ireland)
- An Official Statistic

FINDINGS



Latest findings from May 2018:

- The top issues of concern were the amount of sugar in food (55%), food waste (51%), food prices (43%), and animal welfare (42%)
- 82% of respondents reported that they were aware of hygiene standards in places they eat out at or buy food from
- Of the 79% of respondents aware of the FSA, 69% trusted the FSA to do its job and 72% trusted the FSA to tell the truth in the information it provides
- The majority reported that they trust that food is what it says it is and is accurately labelled (75%) and 73% trusted the authenticity of ingredients / origin / quality of food.

PUBLICATION

Latest report published in August 2018

<https://www.food.gov.uk/about-us/biannual-public-attitudes-tracker>

SMALL & MICRO BUSINESS TRACKER

SUMMARY



The FSA has been tracking consumer attitudes towards food related topics and trust in the FSA and food system for several years. With changes as a result of EU Exit and the Regulating our Future programme, there is now a growing need to also track this information amongst small food business audiences.

As such, we have now set up a business tracker to better understand the experiences and attitudes of small and micro food businesses.

The survey covers a range of topics, including:

- Attitudes towards food regulation
- Knowledge of and attitudes towards FSA
- Business concerns
- Expectations for impact of EU exit
- Awareness of the National Food Crime Unit

METHODOLOGY



- Annual survey
- Sample size c.525 businesses (across England, Wales and Northern Ireland)
- Telephone interviews (complemented with face to face interviews for harder to reach businesses)
- Coverage includes primary, manufacturing, retail and consumer facing businesses

FINDINGS



The first wave of fieldwork has just been completed – we expect to receive findings in December.

BEHAVIOURAL THINKING WORKSHOPS

SUMMARY



As part of our Behavioural Science strategy, the Social Science team have been running a series of workshops with FSA colleagues to identify issues across the agency which could benefit from a behavioural science perspective. These workshops follow the BASIC framework approach (from the Danish iNudgeyou team) and have allowed colleagues to explore work issues through a behavioural lens.

APPROACH



In this series of 3 hour interactive workshops, we have worked with colleagues to explore:

- Key “big issues” in their work area
- The behaviours (individual and business-level) which may be contributing to these issues
- Cognitive biases and heuristics which may be causing problematic behaviours (based on Attention, Beliefs, Choices and Determination)
- Potential solutions to the issues

OUTCOMES



- A large number of problems, behaviours, and solutions were identified and discussed across the workshops. Some examples include:
 - Reducing incidents in food and feed by encouraging healthier food hygiene behaviours. Focusing on attention and beliefs, solutions could include making germs more visible with UV lights or an app showing germs around the house.
 - Reducing obesity by encouraging healthier food choices on the go. Focusing on determination, solutions could include loyalty club rewards for healthier choices, or free meal planners.
- Encouraging businesses to comply with new Regulating our Future funding model. Looking at choice architecture, solutions could include offering different levels of service, or rewards for adopting the model quicker.

NEXT STEPS



The ideas from these workshops will be reviewed by the team and our Advisory Committee for Social Science, and priority areas will be taken forward for behavioural research and trials in 2019 onwards.

KNOW YOUR CALORIES

A CAMPAIGN IN NORTHERN IRELAND

SUMMARY



A 4-5 year project to increase consumer engagement with and understanding of nutrition information on food product labels via an integrated campaign to raise awareness of calories in NI so that people can make informed decisions about the food they eat.

METHODOLOGY



A mixed method approach to set a baseline for the campaign, develop campaign material and explore consumers understanding in relation to engaging and understanding nutritional information on food product labels.

Biannual tracking study in Northern Ireland with 300 participants per wave. 10 minute online survey amongst a nationally representative sample provides the FSA with robust statistical tracking evidence to demonstrate the perceived effectiveness of the FSA's activity in Northern Ireland.

The campaign material was reviewed and evaluated qualitatively to explore impact, effectiveness and opportunities for the second wave of the campaign.

FINDINGS



Baseline tracking results indicated that 15% of men in Northern Ireland knew what their daily calorie intake should be, compared to 44% of women.

The campaign will help people to become aware of their recommended daily intake and check calorie content on food labels on packaged foods and on menus when eating out.

EFFICACY OF RECALL DELIVERY PHASE

SUMMARY



Food Standards Agency and Food Standards Scotland jointly commissioned further social science research with consumers to better understand requirements for a standardised food industry recall notice template that food businesses could use to alert their consumers to a food recall.

METHODOLOGY



We worked with a creative agency, research agency and industry to develop draft content/stylistic options employing a multi-method approach.

We explored current recalls notices and early content/stylistic options and identify any needs for further information/iteration, etc using an online tool. The notices were further developed in two days of iterative, fast-paced testing and iteration with consumers to develop final content/style options to test quantitatively.

FINDINGS



The project is still in progress

ADULT FOOD ALLERGIES

SUMMARY



The Adult Food Allergy Project has been set up to build our understanding of food allergy in adulthood by determining its prevalence, describing its trajectories in relation to persistent allergy from childhood and adult-onset food allergy.

APPROACH



The project will make use of two complementary epidemiological approaches.

Firstly, a large cross-sectional study including a community survey of adults aged 20-70 years, will be carried out to identify the prevalence of food allergy in the general UK adult population.

Secondly, longitudinal cohorts which have now reached adulthood will be revisited and assessed for factors that are likely to be associated with the development of food allergy which will allow the study team to determine the trajectory of food allergy across the life course.

Thirdly, clinical confirmations of food allergy will be undertaken in both study populations.

OUTCOMES/OBJECTIVES



The projects main objectives are:

- To determine the prevalence of IgE-mediated food allergy in adulthood.
- To describe the different trajectories of food allergy across the life course
- To describe adverse reactions to foods that are not mediated by IgE in adults

The knowledge arising from the project will facilitate development of novel approaches and interventions for the prevention and treatment of food allergy in adulthood. It will also provide data which can be used to assess the impact of any public health policies or interventions designed to reduce the incidence and burden of food allergies in the UK in future.

NEXT STEPS



Project is due to start in November 2018 and will run for 3 years with an end date of December 2021.