Consent to link survey & Twitter data

Qualitative interviews, experimental evidence & characteristics of consenters

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Background

What are we trying to do, and why?

- Link survey participants' answers to publicly available information from their Twitter accounts

- Allows survey data to benefit from real-time, 'natural' behavioural and attitudinal data

- Adds the 'who' to Twitter data – creates a sample frame, and allows for the analysis of different groups

Key challenge: collection informed consent

- As we are in contact with participants, have the opportunity to ask people for consent to access their Twitter data (and link it to their survey answers)

- But there are a number of challenges:
  - Low consent rates (especially in web surveys) – c. 27%
  - How informed are choices (especially in web surveys)?

Goal: to understand public attitudes to linking survey and Twitter data and improve our approach to collecting informed consent

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Consent to link survey and Twitter data in panel surveys - Qualitative evidence

Methods

- 25 depth interviews with purposive sample of British adult Twitter users recruited from NatCen's research panel

  - Level of Twitter use; age; previously given/refused consent

- Two rounds of fieldwork, allowing for adaptation of design

- All participants presented with set of survey questions and then consent question

- Mixture of interview methods:

  - 'Think-aloud' techniques, with direct probes after answering questions

  - Wider discussion of attitudes

Consent question design approach

- Built on wording previously used on NatCen Panel/Understanding Society Innovation Panel
  - Reviewed by team, plus input from colleagues & ethics committee

- Three key goals:
1. Cover pieces of information needed for informed consent
2. Keep the wording broad to allow data to be re-used
3. Keep the information accessible

Consent question wording

As social media plays an increasing role in society, we would like to know who uses Twitter, how people use it, and what they say on it. We are also interested in being able to add the information people, and specifically you, have provided for this study to publicly available information from your Twitter account such as your profile information, tweets in the past and in future, and information about how you use your account.

Your Twitter information will be treated as confidential and given the same protections as your interview data. Your Twitter username, and any information that would allow you to be easily identified, will not be published without your explicit permission.

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Consent question help-links

What information will you collect from my Twitter account?

What will the information be used for?

Who will be able to access the information?

What will you do to keep my information safe?

What if I change my mind?

Findings from qualitative research

- People rely on short-cuts when making these decisions
  - Four key factors driving consent decision: Risk; Benefit; Trust; Control

- No participants 'fully' understood what they were consenting to
  - But they didn't change their minds after discussing in more detail

- Varying preferences in presentation & use of information

Consent to link survey and Twitter data in panel surveys - experimental evidence

Data collection

	USoc IP15	NatCen Panel	Yonder Panel
Twitter users (n)	696	646	3,928
Mode	Web/Tel/F2F	Web/Tel	Web
Fieldwork dates	15/06/22 – 25/11/22	03/11/22 – 04/12/22	03/11/22 - 02/12/22
Help links position	On same and different page to consent question	On **different** page to consent question	On **same** page as consent question
Incentive	£20-£30 for survey None for consent	£5 for survey None for consent	£3 for survey £2 vs £0 for consent
Sample type	Probability panel	Probability panel	Non-probability panel

Updates to consent question

As social media plays an increasing role in society, who uses Twitter, how they use it, and what they say on it can provide useful information for social researchers trying to understand society.

We would like to add publicly available information from your Twitter account such as your profile information, tweets in the past and in future, and information about how you use your account to the information you have provided for this study.

By doing so, we will be able to get a more well-rounded understanding of people's lives. For example, in a survey we can ask people's views on a particular issue, but by adding their Twitter information we can get a deeper understanding by seeing what news accounts they follow, how they talk about the issue (if at all), and whether they are connected to people with similar or different views.

Your Twitter information will be treated as confidential and given the same protections as the other information you give us in accordance with GDPR. Researchers who wish to see your detailed Twitter information will have to apply to do so and give reasons for that access.

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Updates to help links

What information will you collect from my Twitter account?

What will the information be used for?

Why is my Twitter information useful for researchers?

What if what I do on Twitter isn't the 'real' me?

Who will be able to access the information?

What will you do to keep my information safe?

How long will you collect and store my information for?

What if I change my mind?

Experiment with help link positioning

Are you willing to tell us the username for your personal Twitter account, and for your Twitter information to be collected and added to the information you have provided for this study?
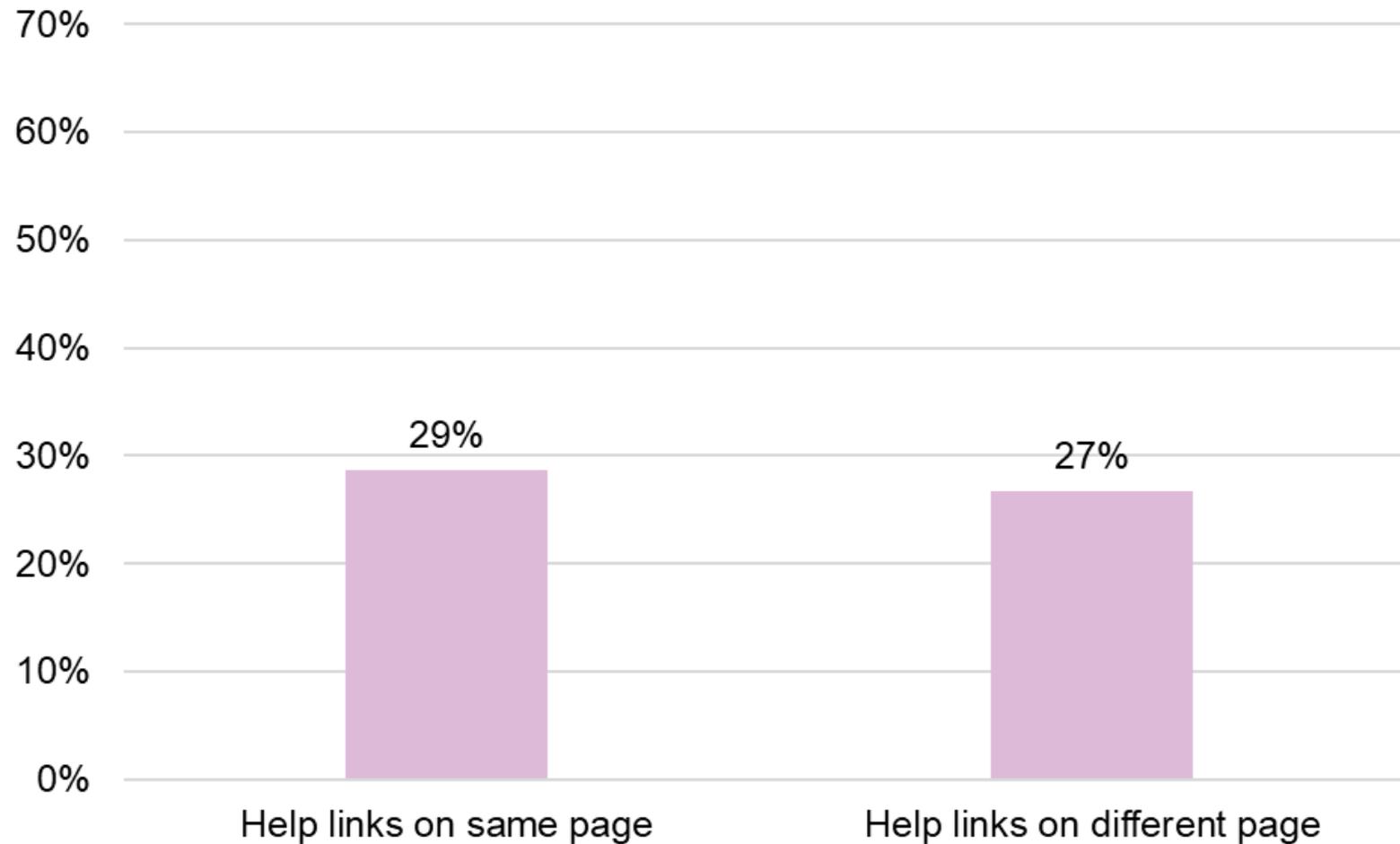
Group 1:

[HELPLINKS PRESENTED UP-FRONT]

1. Yes

2. No

Group 2:

1. Not sure, I would like more information [GO TO HELPLINKS PAGE]

2. Yes

3. No

Consent to link survey & Twitter data by presentation of additional information

- 4% (n=14) participants asked to see more information

Incentive experiment

Are you willing to tell us the username for your personal Twitter account, and for your Twitter information to be collected and added to the information you have provided for this study?

You will receive a **£2 incentive** as a thank you for sharing a valid username.

1. Yes
2. No

Consent to link survey & Twitter data by whether offered £2 incentive
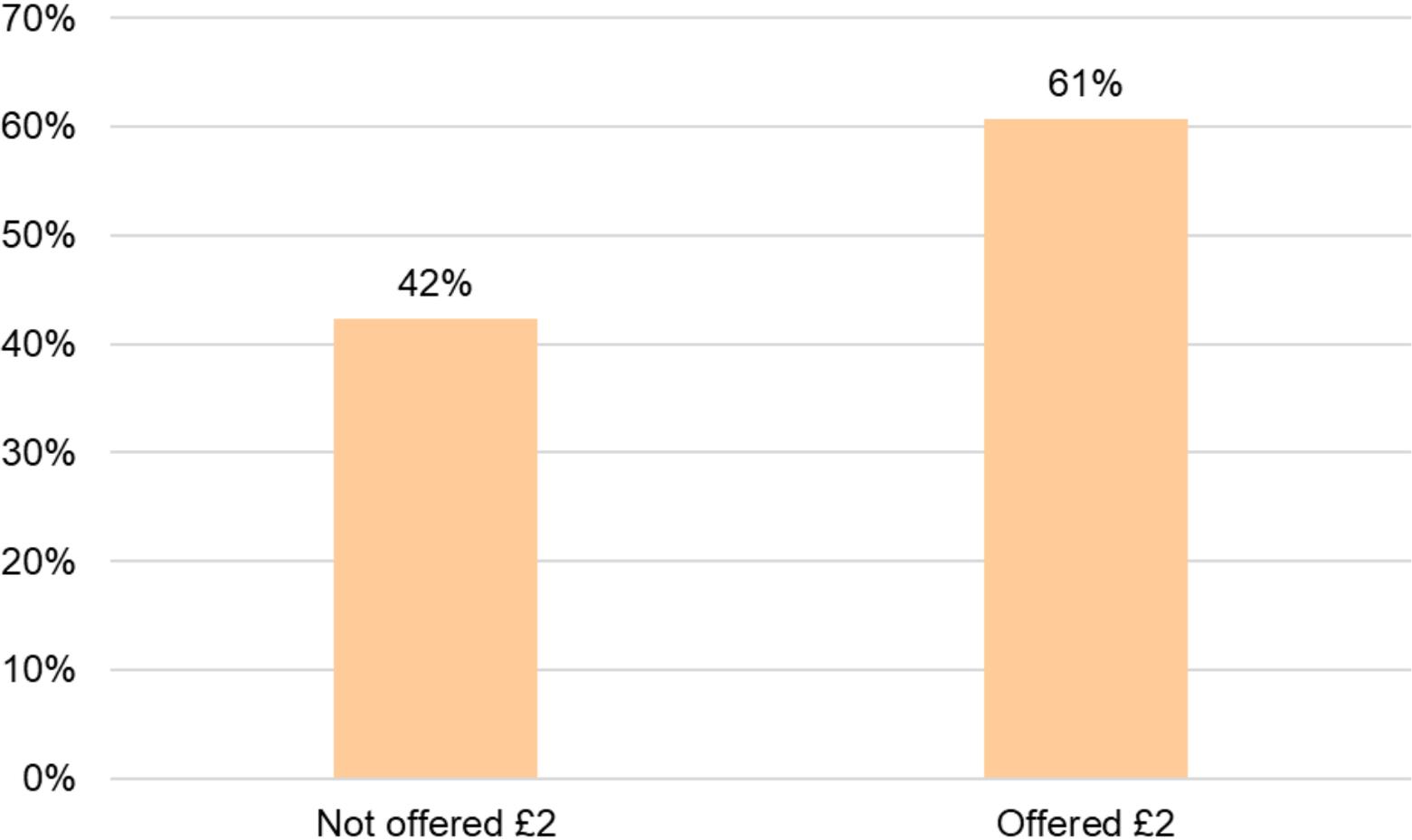
Consent to link survey & Twitter data by whether offered £2 incentive

	Not offered £2	Offered £2
Number of survey completes	2,361	1,647
Survey incentive costs	£7,084	£4,941
Consent rate	42%	61%
Number of consenters	1,000	1,000
Consent incentive costs	£0	£2,000
TOTAL incentive costs	**£7,084**	**£6,941**

Is consent to link survey and Twitter data associated with reported Twitter behaviour?
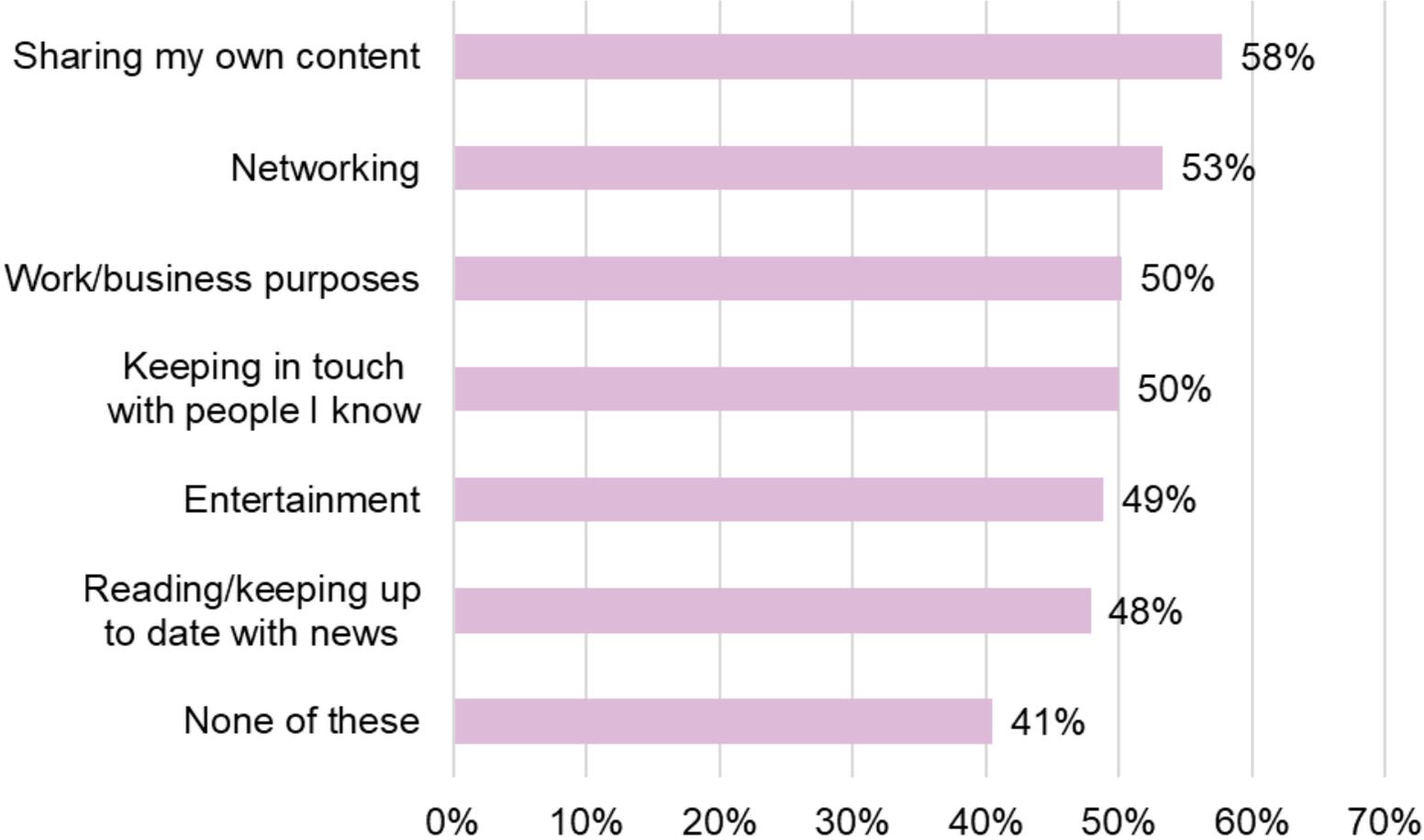
Demographics: groups <u>less</u> likely to consent

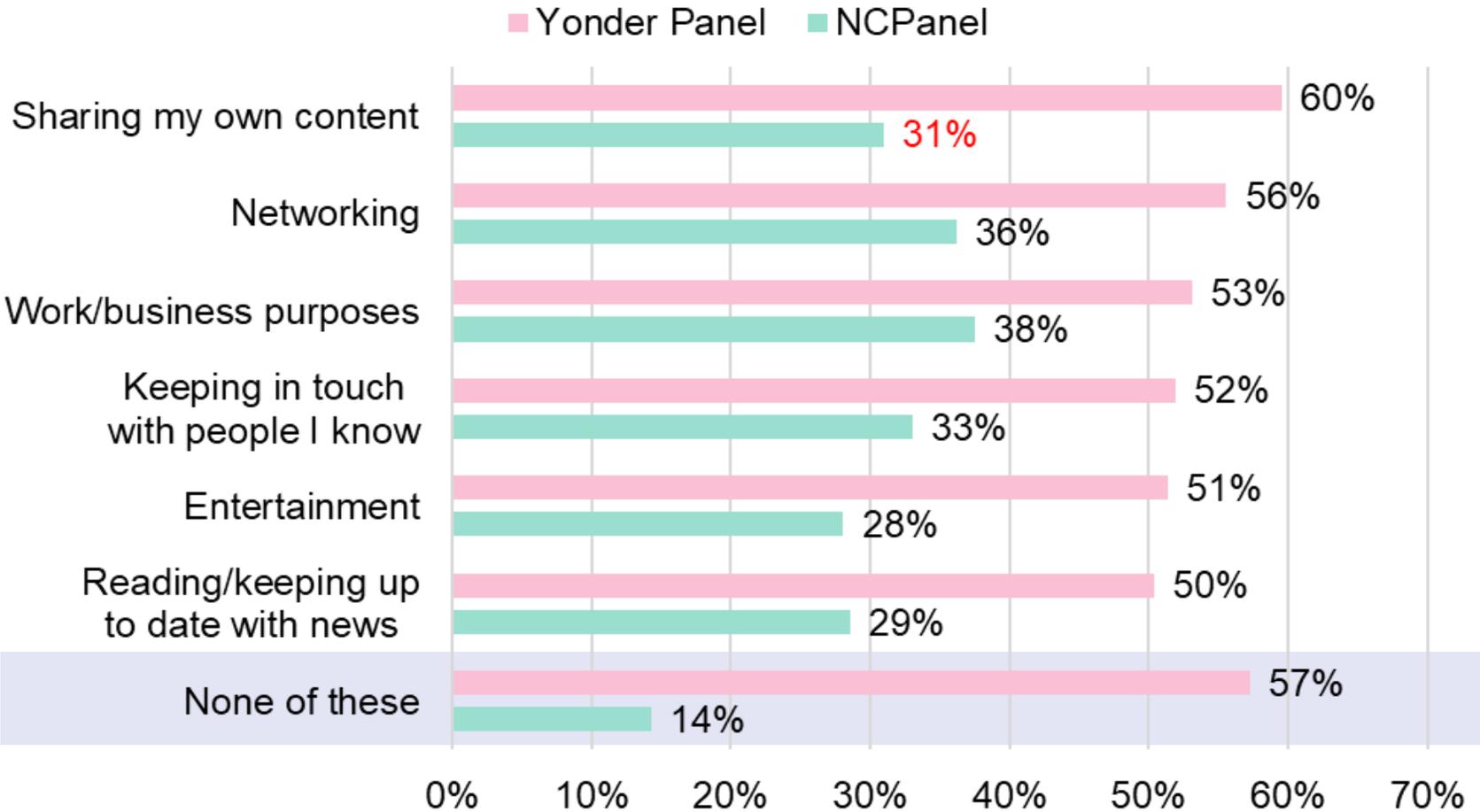|	IP10	NatCen Panel (Jul17)	NatCen Panel (Nov22)	Yonder Panel
Sex	Not sig.	Women	Not sig.	Not sig.
Age	Not sig.	Older participants	Not sig.	Older participants
Education	Not sig.	Not sig.	Fewer qualifications	Not sig.
Financial circumstances	Not sig.	Not sig.	Not sig.	Better off*
Political party supported	-	-	Not sig.	Conservative & none
Internet use	-	-	Less than several times a day	More than weekly

Consent rates by self-reported frequency of Twitter activity
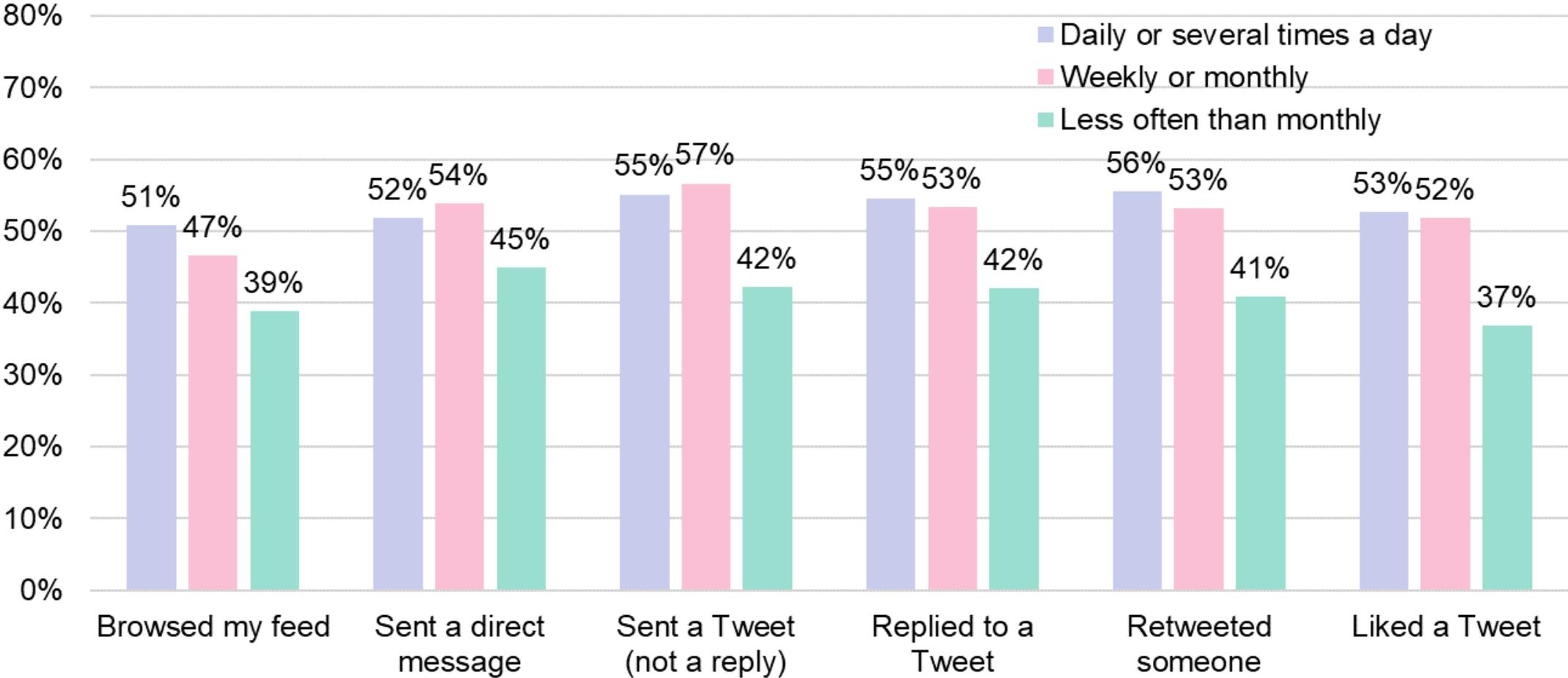
Legend:
- Daily or several times a day
- Weekly or monthly
- Less often than monthly

Activity	Daily or several times a day	Weekly or monthly	Less often than monthly
Browsed my feed	51%	47%	39%
Sent a direct message	52%	54%	45%
Sent a Tweet (not a reply)	55%	57%	42%
Replied to a Tweet	55%	53%	42%
Retweeted someone	56%	53%	41%
Liked a Tweet	53%	52%	37%

Consent rates by main purpose of Twitter use

Purpose	Consent rate
Sharing my own content	58%
Networking	53%
Work/business purposes	50%
Keeping in touch with people I know	50%
Entertainment	49%
Reading/keeping up to date with news	48%
None of these	41%

Consent rates by main purpose of Twitter use and sample source

Legend: ■ Yonder Panel ■ NCPanel

Main purpose	Yonder Panel	NCPanel
Sharing my own content	60%	31%
Networking	56%	36%
Work/business purposes	53%	38%
Keeping in touch with people I know	52%	33%
Entertainment	51%	28%
Reading/keeping up to date with news	50%	29%
None of these	57%	14%

Summary & reflections

Summary & reflections – Qual findings

- New challenges for researchers
  - What is their responsibility when attempting to collect informed consent?
  - How do we reconcile varying respondent preferences?

- Some initial thoughts:
  - Keep information as accessible as possible but highlight key issues
  - But ensure the detail is available, and easy to get to
  - [Repay trust through minimising harm & maximising value]

Summary & reflections – Experimental evidence

- Changes to consent question wording, including positioning of additional information, does not appear to have affected consent *rates*

  - But the impact on how *informed* consent is is unknown.

  - Is a more dramatic change needed? Or would it continue to make no difference?

- Incentivising consent to data linkage may improve response rates in a cost-effective manner

  - How will it work outside of non-probability web panel context?

  - Ethical considerations?

Summary & reflections – Bias from non-consent

- Some patterns emerging in differential consent rates:
  - Older participants, people not supporting a political party
  - In general, people who are less active on Twitter are also less likely to consent

References

- Al Baghal, T. et al. (2020) 'Linking Twitter and Survey Data: The Impact of Survey Mode and Demographics on Consent Rates Across Three UK Studies', Social Science Computer Review, 38(5), pp. 517–532.

- Jessop, C. et al. (2024) 'Attitudes to linking survey and Twitter data', NatCen.

- Sloan, L. et al. (2020) 'Linking Survey and Twitter Data: Informed Consent, Disclosure, Security, and Archiving', Journal of Empirical Research on Human Research Ethics, 15(1–2), pp. 63–76.

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Questions?

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