

Consent to link survey & Twitter data

Experimental evidence & characteristics of consenters

Curtis Jessop – NatCen Social Research

Acknowledgments

ESRC grant: “Understanding [Offline/Online] Society: Linking Surveys with Twitter Data”

- Luke Sloan – University of Cardiff
- Tarek Al Baghal – University of Essex
- Matthew Williams – University of Cardiff

Contents

Background

- Why link survey & Twitter data?
- Existing evidence

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

- Methods of presenting 'additional information'
- Offering a £2 incentive
- Probability & non-probability samples

Is consent to link survey and Twitter data associated with reported Twitter behaviour?

- Socio-demographics
- Twitter use

1

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)?

Findings from qualitative research (1)

- Heuristic decision making
 - No participants 'fully' understood what they were consenting to
 - People rely on short-cuts when making these decisions
 - But they didn't change their minds after discussing in more detail
- Four key factors driving consent decision: Risk; Benefit; Trust; Control
- Varying preferences in presentation & use of information

Findings from qualitative research (2)

- 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]

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

Consent question (1)

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.

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?

Data collection

	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

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:

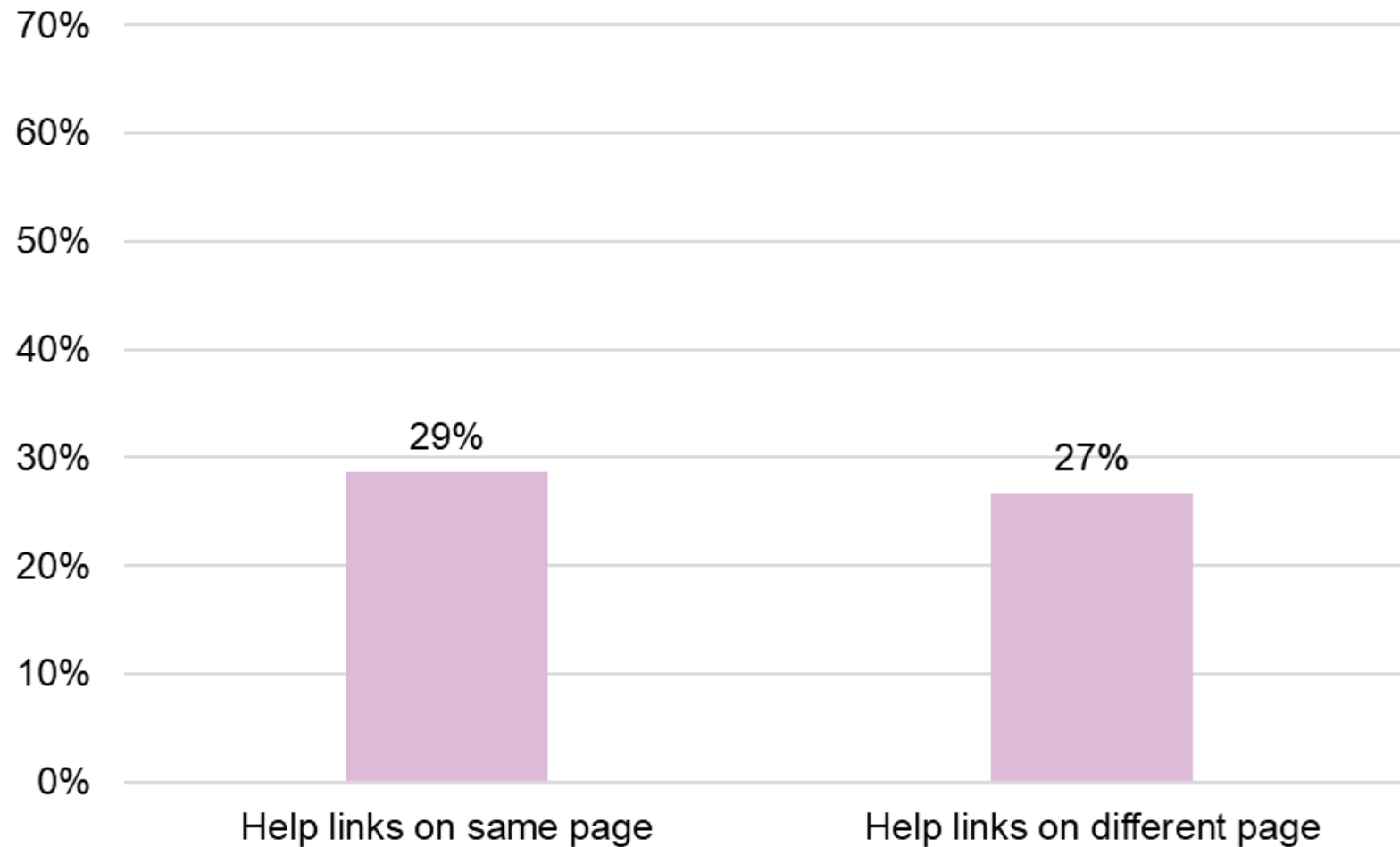
[HELPLINKS PRESENTED UP-FRONT]

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

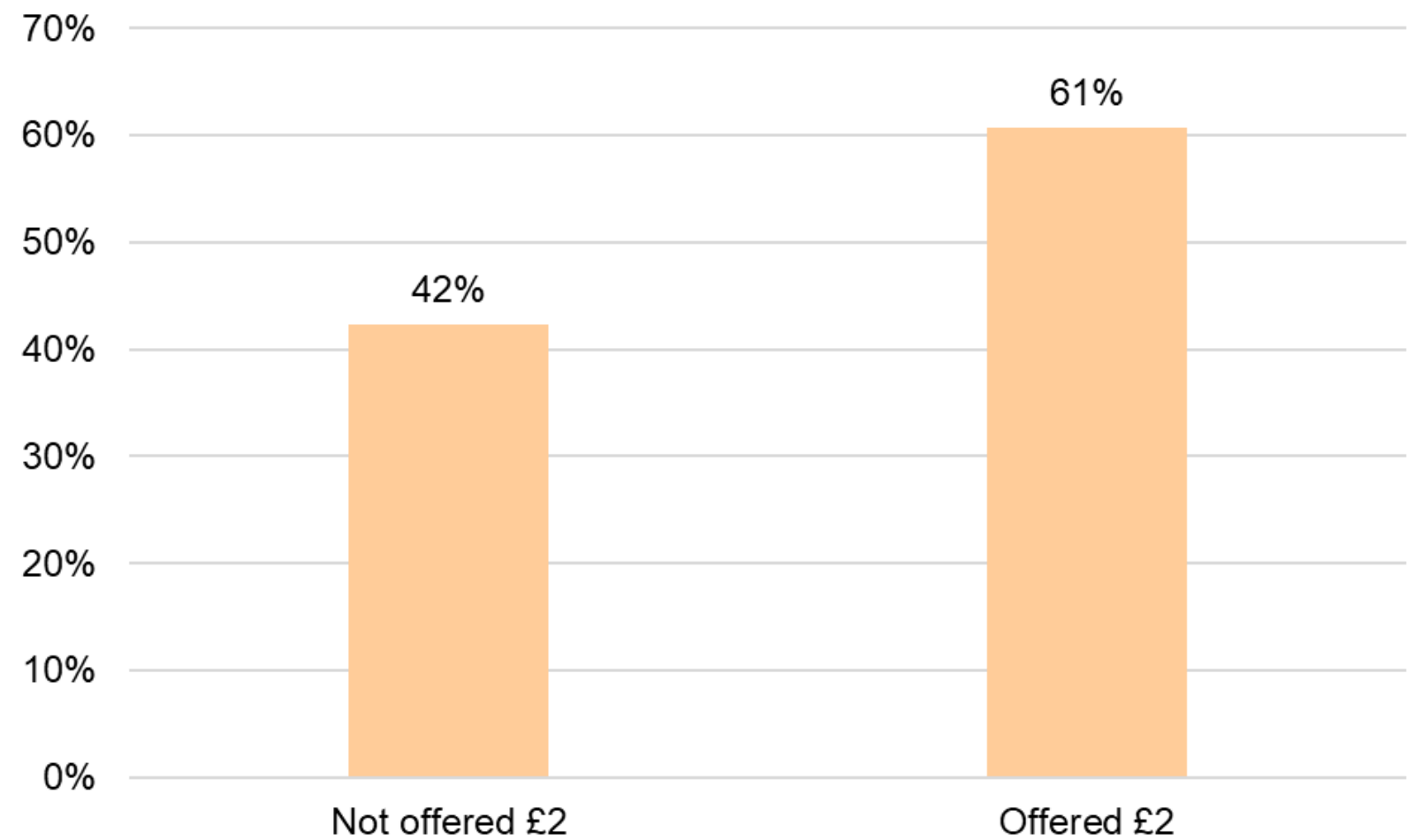
Incentive experiment

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

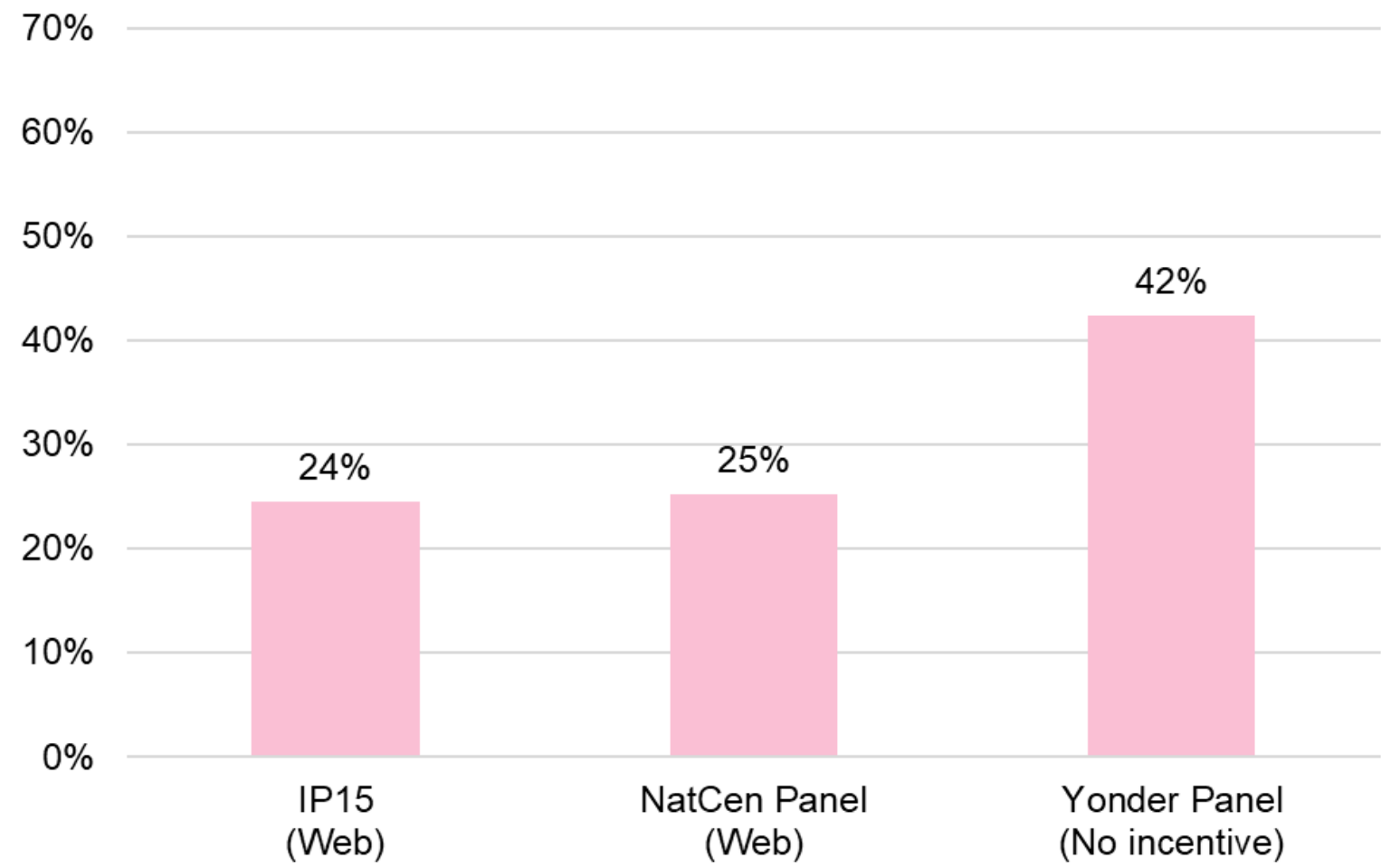


Source: Yonder Panel; Base: UK adults (18+) with a Twitter account: Not offered £2 (1,960); Offered £2 (1,968)

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

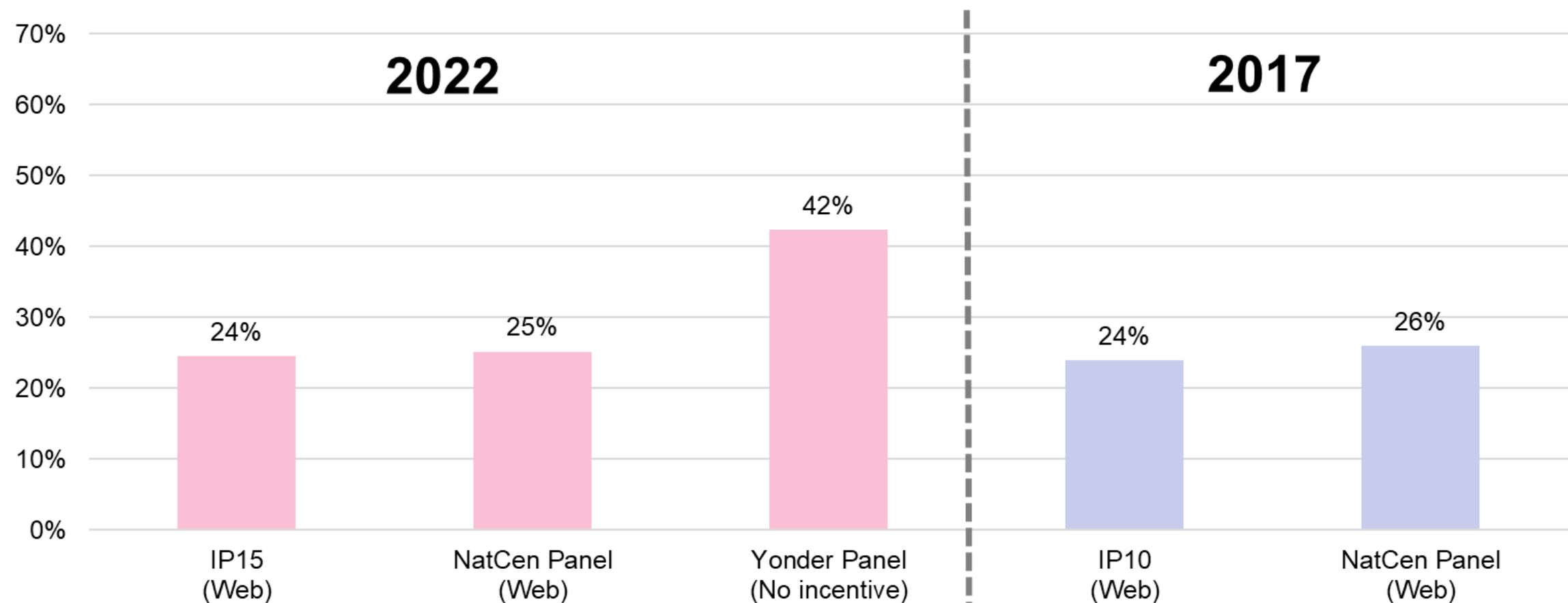
	Not offered £2	Offered £2
Number of survey completes	2,361	1,647
Survey incentive costs	£7,084	£4,941
Consent rate	42%	61%
Number of consenters	1,000	1,000
Consent incentive costs	£0	£2,000
TOTAL incentive costs	£7,084	£6,941

Consent to link survey & Twitter data by sample source



Base: Adults with a Twitter account completing online and not offered an incentive: IP15 (GB, 16+) (552); NatCen Panel (UK, 18+) (620); Yonder Panel (UK, 18+) (1,960)

Consent to link survey & Twitter data by sample source

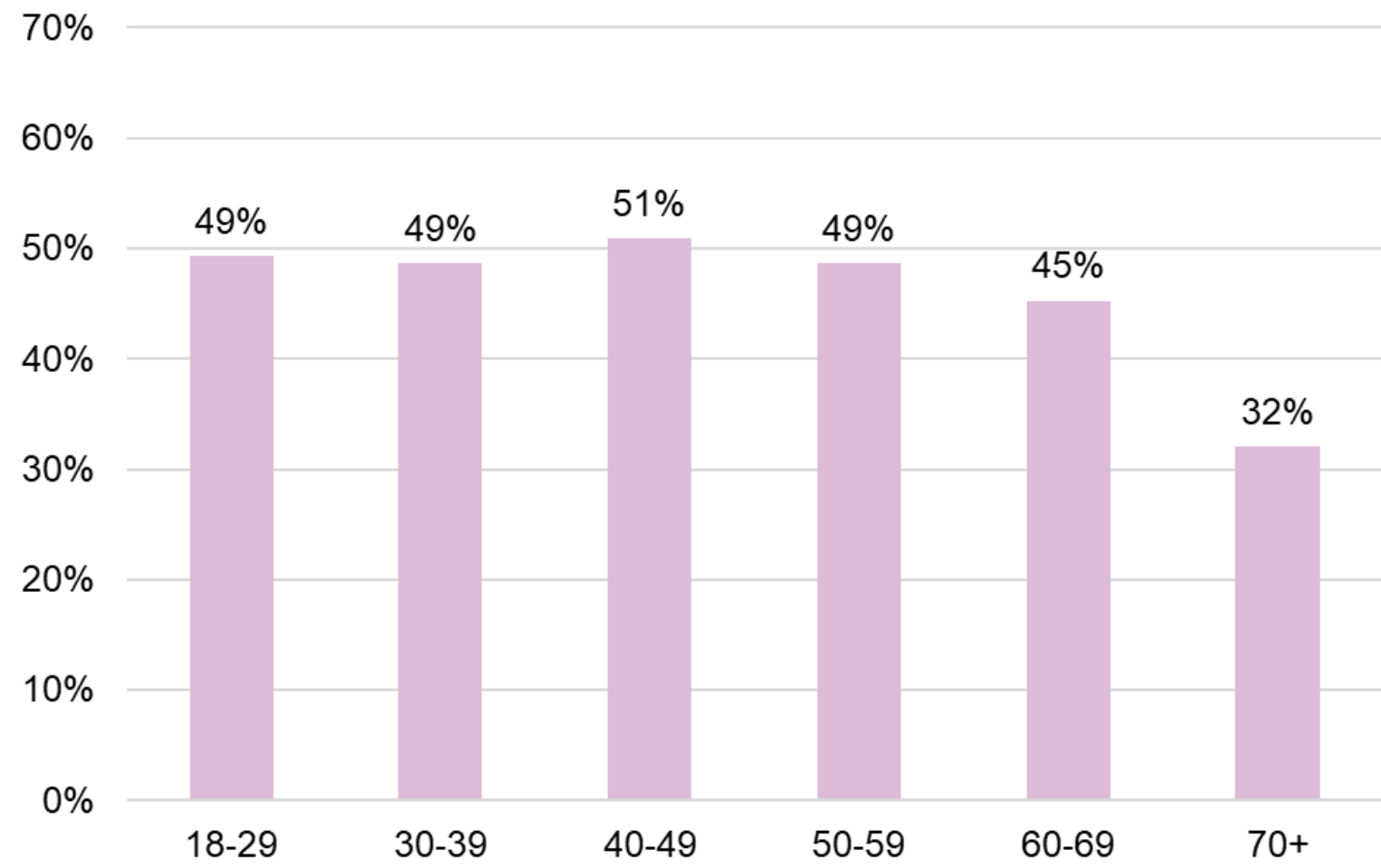


Is consent to link survey and Twitter data associated with reported Twitter behaviour?

Demographics: groups less 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 age group

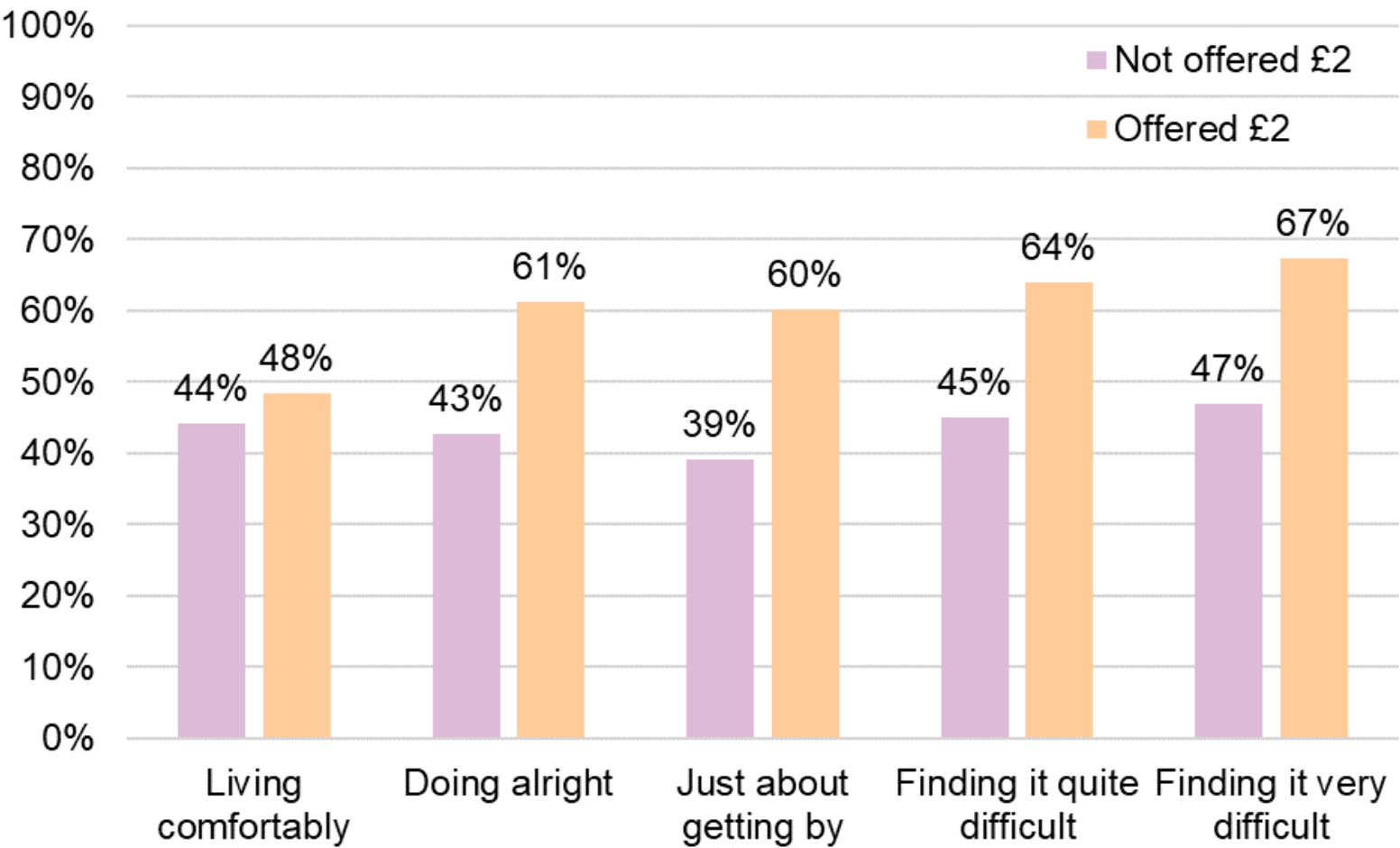


Source: NatCen Panel + Yonder Panel; Base: UK adults (18+) with a Twitter account: 18-29 (1,006); 30-39 (1,124); 40-49 (895); 50-59 (791); 60-69 (497); 70+ (259)

Demographics: groups less likely to consent

	IP10	NCPanel (Jul17)	NCPanel (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

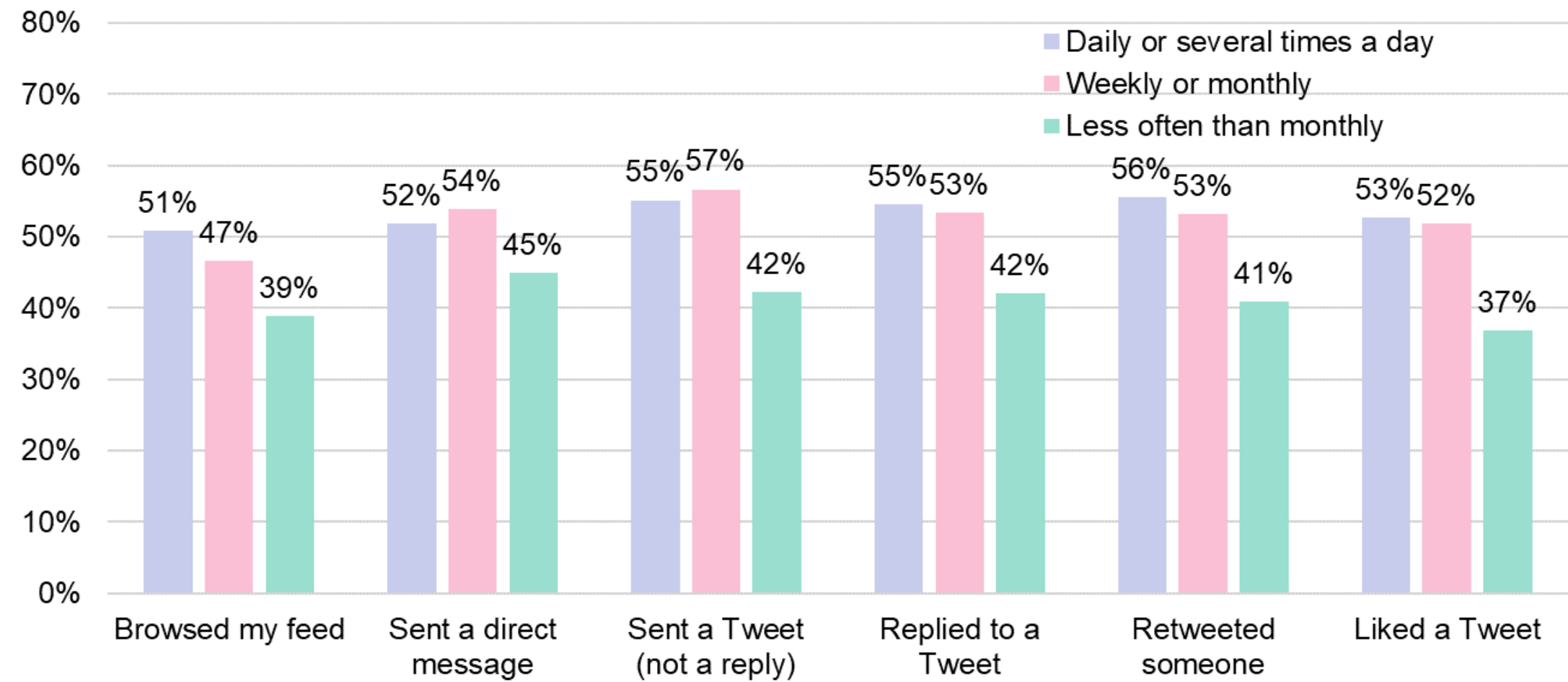
Consent rates by financial circumstances and whether or not offered £2 incentive



Demographics: groups less likely to consent

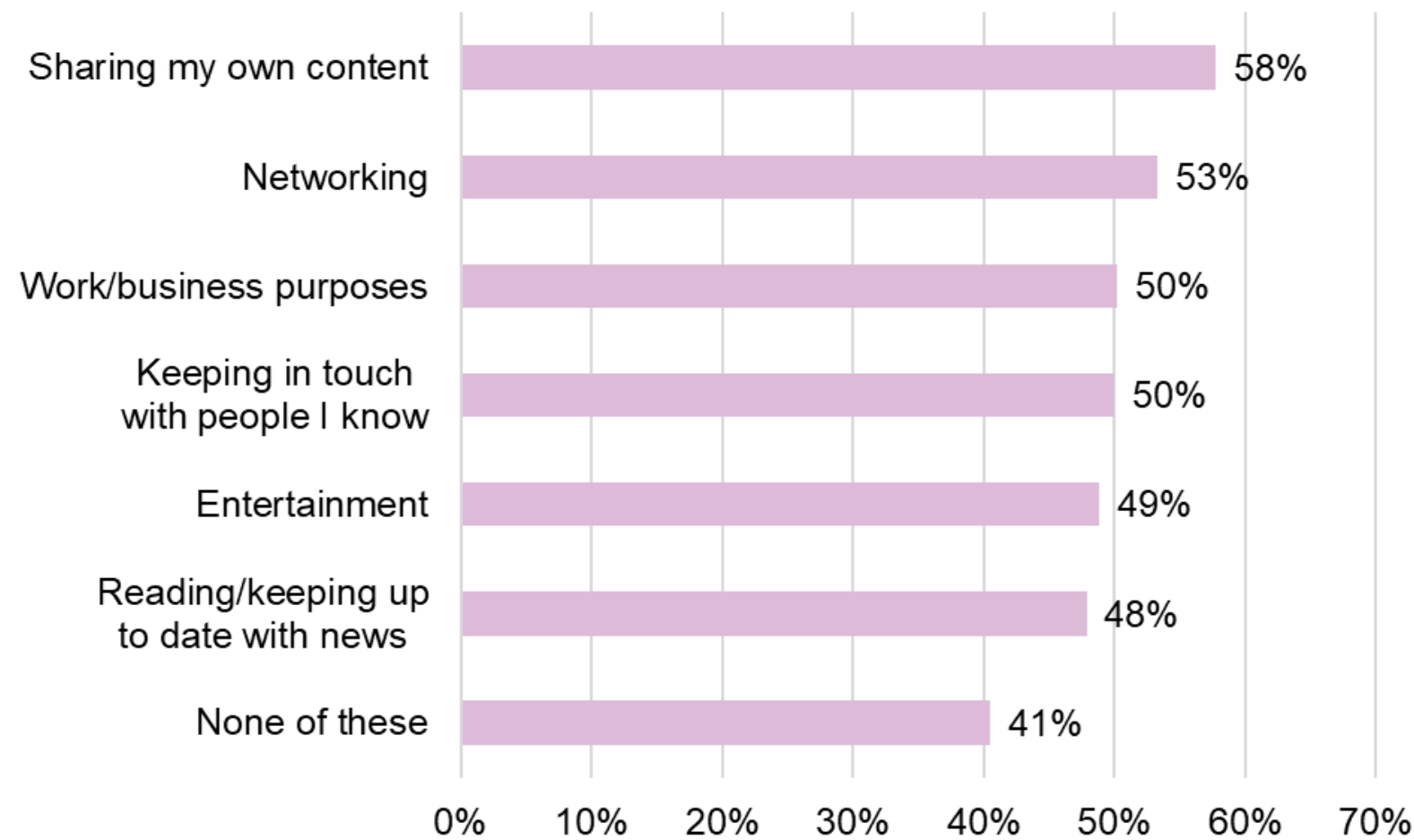
	IP10	NCPanel (Jul17)	NCPanel (Nov22)	Yonder Panel
Sex	Not sig.	Women	Not sig.	Not sig.
Age	Not sig.	Older participants	Not sig.	Older participants
Education	Not sig.	Not sig.	Fewer qualifications	Not sig.
Financial circumstances	Not sig.	Not sig.	Not sig.	Better off*
Political party supported	-	-	Not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

Consent rates by self-reported frequency of Twitter activity

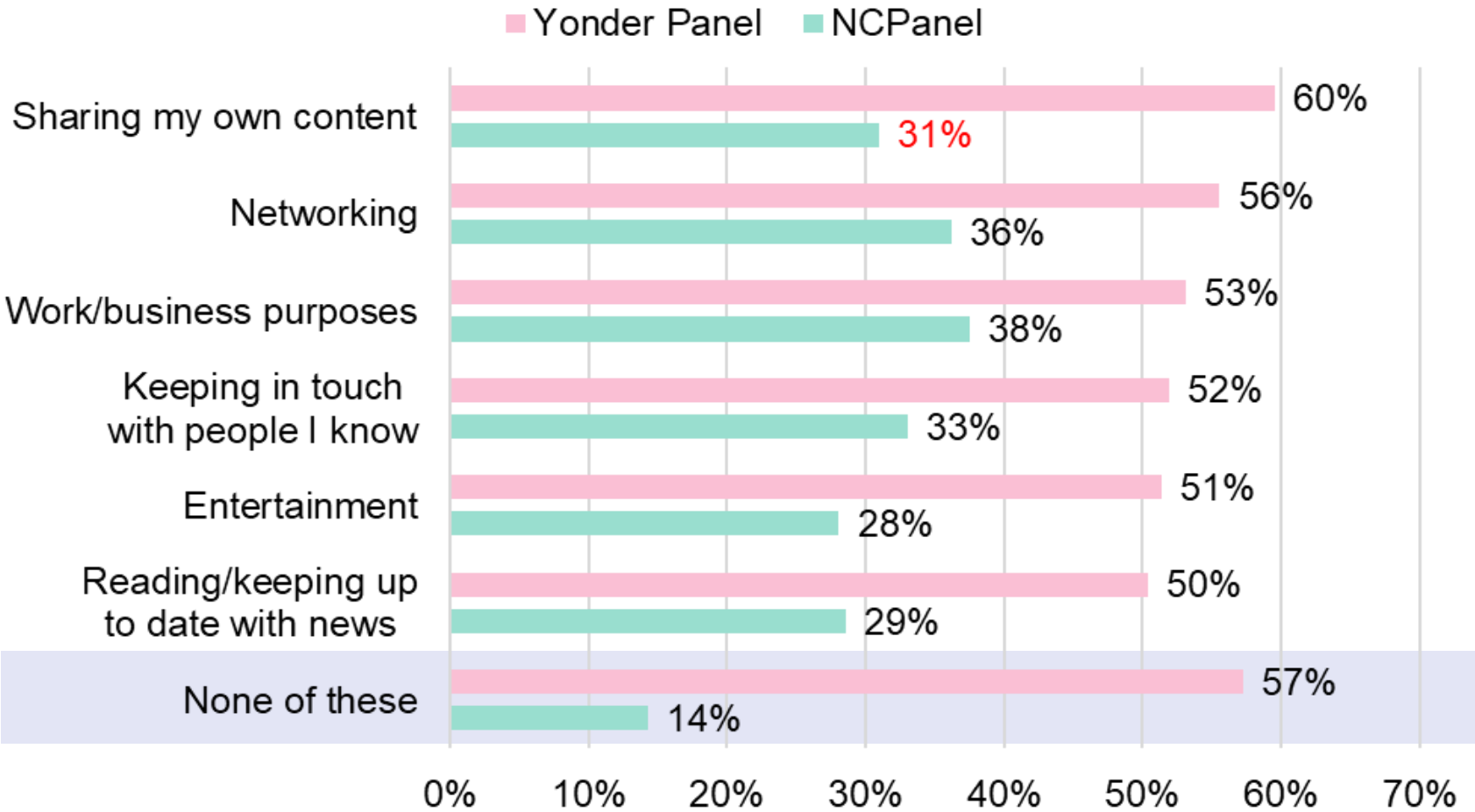


Source: NatCen Panel + Yonder Panel; Base: UK adults (18+) with a Twitter account. Unweighted sample sizes 538 to 2,891.

Consent rates by main purpose of Twitter use



Consent rates by main purpose of Twitter use and sample source



Summary & reflections

Summary & reflections (1)

- 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.
 - Consent wording is still long, is a more dramatic change needed? Or would it continue to make no difference?
- Incentivising consent to data linkage may help improve response rates in a cost-effective manner
 - How will it work outside of non-probability web panel context?
 - Ethical considerations?

Summary & reflections (2)

- Participants in non-probability panels appear to be more willing to consent
 - Characteristics of panel members? Nature of relationship?
- 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
- Moving beyond Twitter...

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.
- 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.

Questions?

Curtis Jessop

Director of Attitudinal Surveys & the
NatCen Panel

E: Curtis.Jessop@natcen.ac.uk

@CurtisJessop