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# Consumer experiences of copycat websites

**Ipsos MORI**

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# **Chapter 1: Executive Summary**



# 1 Executive Summary

## 1.1 Background and methodology

The ASA is the UK's independent regulator for advertising across media, including online advertising. Their remit covers paid for space online and marketing on companies' own websites.

Following a series of complaints, the ASA wanted to investigate the impact of 'copycat websites' on the public. Copycat websites offer access to government services but are not the official channel, and often charge a substantial premium for their services. At the time the research was commissioned, there were a large number of copycat sites accessible for a wide range of government services.

The overall objectives for this research were:

- to find out how people apply for official services online;
- to explore their expectations of the services offered by official websites; and,
- to find out whether and how they might be misled by non-official services as they access government services online.

A mixed methodological approach was used to meet the research objectives and help address the challenges associated with replicating real consumer experience as closely as possible. Qualitative in-depth in-home and eye-tracking interviews were conducted with people from a range of ages and backgrounds who use the internet, along with a nationally representative sample survey of online adults across Great Britain.

## 1.2 Key findings

### How do people apply for official services online?

The survey shows that most online consumers have accessed government services using the internet, and a large majority feel confident doing so.

However, the qualitative research suggests that accessing official services remains unfamiliar for many. This is partly because of the infrequent need to access some government services, and because online options have been introduced relatively recently.

Almost all participants also recognised the risks when accessing information and services (including official or government services) online. They seemed particularly careful when giving their personal details or making payments online.

Participants nearly always relied on search engines to find services, including when applying for official services. In many cases they made quick decisions about which site to visit because the official site seemed obvious in the search results, or because they had previous experience of doing something similar.

The ways participants searched and navigated online often acted to reduce their likelihood of coming across copycat sites. Common techniques included:

- Doing research on a number of sites before deciding how to proceed
- Ignoring sponsored ads
- Looking for the right tone
- Using trusted portals and official brands
- Relying on anti-virus warnings

Participants can be grouped in terms of searching behaviour, confidence and ability when applying for official services online:

- 1 GOV.UK loyalists:** Went straight to the GOV.UK site or looked for it in search results.
- 2 Careful checkers:** Actively looking for signs to verify origin and nature of sites. Likely to check for logos, disclaimers, and contact us pages.
- 3 Experienced browsers:** Rely more on intuition and base judgements on 'look and feel', of sites. Still checked for some features but less thoroughly.
- 4 Inexperienced checkers:** Similar to the careful checkers but with less confidence. Dubious of online services and/or lacking confidence in their ability to choose the right site and complete an application.
- 5 Exposed browsers:** Some experience using the internet but low levels of online literacy. Likely to click several sites, including ads, trying to gauge which to trust. Unaware of how to avoid online risks.

Participants in groups further down this list were more likely to navigate to or use copycat websites. Further research would be required to unpick the behaviour and attitudes of each group, or to determine how large these groups are in the population.

## What do people expect from online government services?

Participants typically thought government would have a central website that redirected people to a range of official services. Some were familiar with GOV.UK, usually those who accessed government services more often. Others could remember using this type of website in the past.

Many participants were confused by the range of different government websites, and pointed out that the individual sites sometimes had a distinct look and feel. This meant many were more open to the idea that there could be several ways to access official services online.

Expectations of what an official site would look like varied. In general, clarity, simplicity and few images were seen as reassuring features. Bright colours and complex designs were usually considered an indicator that the site might not be official, as they gave the site a 'glossy' commercial look.

Few participants were aware of copycat websites, and what little experience there was had come through friends and family. Participants were not surprised that counterfeit sites existed, but they were less familiar with the idea of legitimate businesses charging a premium for official services online.

## Were people misled by copycat sites?

As discussed above, many of their usual online practises helped participants avoid copycat sites at the searching stage. This searching behaviour offers significant protection, provided copycat sites are not permitted to closely replicate the way official sites appear when searched for online.

In this context, understanding and use of online ads was particularly important. Those who were aware of ads in search results tended to avoid them when searching for official services. Those who were unaware were more likely to visit copycat websites because ads for these sites often appeared above the official site in search results.

Participants were also asked to assess examples of official and copycat sites. They often relied on their first impressions, relying on subjective criteria that depended on their expectations of official sites. There were many examples of qualitative research participants getting their assessments wrong.

For example, many focused on the overall look and feel, including colour scheme, amount and tone of text, images and general site navigation. This was how younger, more confident participants generally made their decisions. Logos were an important feature participants looked out for, and they were reassured if they saw a logo that seemed official. This also meant that logos could mislead if they were similar to those used on official sites.

A few participants were more cautious and reviewed content carefully before deciding whether or not a site was official. This included features like detailed text or comparison tables, as well as any disclaimers. Comparison tables tended to confuse participants. Disclaimers were often missed, and overall had limited influence on participants' interpretations of copycat sites.

In the quantitative research, most online consumers were confident they could tell the difference between official and commercial websites. Even so, large proportions of respondents incorrectly identified screenshots of example official and copycat sites.

### How should copycat sites be regulated?

Participants wanted copycat sites to be clearer about the services they offer. However, they struggled to come up with specific ideas for how regulation might work in practice. They did not want to prevent legitimate businesses from operating, and were also unclear whether anything could be done to address their concerns.

Some consistent suggestions were made, including clearer and better-placed disclaimers, avoiding 'official' language, and more distinctive branding for copycat sites. They also thought government websites could communicate their official status more clearly.

## 1.3 Conclusions

Despite their confidence, many people have limited experience of interacting with government services online. While general searching behaviour tends to protect people from coming across copycat sites, some groups did seem to be more at risk:

- People with less confidence and ability online, particularly some older people and those who are not aware of online ads.
- People with less experience of accessing government services generally (including some young people), as their expectations of official sites may be incorrect.

A consideration for future regulation of copycat websites is whether relying on personal coping strategies is sufficient, or whether there is a need for further rules governing paid ads for, and marketing on, these sites.

There were many examples of participants being misled by copycat sites when asked to assess them during the research. In particular, the following features seemed to cause people to think they were using official sites when they were not:

- Overall designs and colour schemes that closely mimicked the look and feel of official sites.

- Using images directly relevant to the application process (e.g. the card or certificate being applied for or the application form).
- Using simplified crown logos similar to the GOV.UK and other government logos.
- Using language in site names, URLs, search result descriptions or ads that – implicitly or explicitly – suggest the site is official (e.g. the word ‘official’ in descriptions or ‘gov’ in URLs).
- Placing clear disclaimers in plain sight, but with other website features drawing attention away from them.

Ensuring that websites are not permitted to use these techniques would further reduce the risk of misleading consumers, as would making ads even more obvious in search results.

Participants also suggested that government sites should make it clearer that they are the only official channels.

# **Chapter 2: Background and methodology**

## 2 Background and methodology

### 2.1 Background

The ASA is the UK's independent regulator for advertising across media, including online advertising. The ASA's regulatory remit includes adverts that appear in paid for space online (such as paid search) as well as marketing on companies' own websites.

Following a series of complaints, the ASA wanted to investigate the impact of 'copycat websites' on the public. Copycat websites offer access to government services but are not the official channel, and often charge a substantial premium for their services. In some cases, copycat sites offer additional services, while others provide little, or no, tangible benefit to the consumer when compared with the official channel.

While it is not necessarily illegal for a business to offer paid-for access to official Government services, the ASA is concerned that the site content and the way in which the businesses are advertised online may mislead or cause confusion to consumers. This could happen if people believe that they are on a government website and/or pay for a service that they are not aware they could otherwise receive for free or at a lower cost through official channels or could hand over data unwittingly.

The ASA has already taken action to amend problem advertising. They have been working with the Government Digital Service and search engine providers to limit the activity of websites that advertise their services in potentially misleading ways<sup>1</sup> and to warn the public to be vigilant.

At the time the research was commissioned, there were a large number of copycat sites accessible online. Some offered services identical to official Government sites at a premium rate, while others charged for additional services. During the course of fieldwork some copycat sites were removed completely, and there were changes in the way some sites were advertised.<sup>2</sup>

### 2.2 Objectives

The overall objective for this research was to find out how people apply for official services online; their expectations of the services offered by official

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<sup>1</sup> ASA: <http://www.asa.org.uk/News-resources/Media-Centre/2014/Copycat-websites.aspx>

<sup>2</sup> While the research was in progress, Google blocked sponsored ads for copycat sites for some of the most commonly used government services. Some copycat sites that received negative press coverage either removed their service or improved the disclaimer to make it clearer that they were not an official government site.

websites; and whether and how they might be misled by non-official services during their application journey.

There are several questions which the research set out to answer:

- How do consumers come across copycat sites? What makes them more or less likely to do so?
- To what extent are consumers confused about the nature of these services? Do they think they are on an official government site?
  - If so, what is it about the websites that is misleading?
  - What effect does wording and imagery have? What sorts of wording or imagery cause confusion? What sort is perceived as 'official'?
- What are consumer perceptions and expectations of advertising for these websites?
- Which, if any, websites cause less confusion? What is it that makes them clearer to understand?
- How far do consumers notice disclaimers?

## 2.3 Methodology

A mixed methodological approach was used as the best way to fully answer the research objectives and to help address the challenges associated with replicating real consumer experience as closely as was possible.

Qualitative in-depth in-home and eye-tracking interviews were conducted with people from a range of ages and backgrounds who use the internet, along with a nationally representative sample survey of online adults across Great Britain.

The full research design was as follows:

### Scoping Stage

The scoping stage included desk research and four pilot depth interviews. The pilot findings informed the development of the qualitative discussion guides and the design of the quantitative questionnaire.

### Qualitative research

In-home depth interviews were conducted in order to observe how people use the internet in their home environment. The interviews were carried out in Swansea (9<sup>th</sup> April), Sheffield (7<sup>th</sup>/8<sup>th</sup> April) and London 2<sup>nd</sup> April – 11<sup>th</sup> April. In total 15 interviews were conducted, each lasting approximately an hour. Eight additional eye-tracking interviews were conducted at a viewing facility in London on the 4<sup>th</sup> of April 2014. Again, the interviews lasted approximately an hour.



The comparatively small sample size is customary for qualitative research where the objective is to understand people's attitudes and behaviours in depth rather than gather a broad and representative evidence base. Fifteen in-home interviews and eight eye-tracking interviews was therefore a good number for a qualitative study of this nature.

Both the in-home and eye-tracking interviews followed a similar structure, with some differences at the end of the interview. The first section of the interview involved a 'warm-up' process, with participants asked about their general internet use, including how frequently they used the internet and what for, their favourite sites, and their preferred search engine.

The second section involved the participants carrying out tasks set by the interviewer. These included more general activities, such as looking up the weather forecast or searching for a holiday, as well as finding and applying for official services like driving licences, passports and replacement birth certificates.

The final section of the eye-tracking interviews involved playing back the recording to participants and asking questions about specific actions and choices they had made during the interview. During the in-home depth interviews, participants were asked for their views on regulating copycat sites at the end of the discussion.

## Quantitative research

As a follow-up to the qualitative research, a short online survey was carried out to explore similar issues. Questions covered familiarity and confidence applying for government services online, as well as asking respondents to identify copycat and official websites from website landing pages.

## 2.4 Sample

### Qualitative

For both in-home depth and eye-tracking interviews, participants were recruited by specialist qualitative Ipsos MORI recruiters. Soft quotas were set based on gender, age, work status, and ethnic groups to ensure the qualitative sample reflected a range of people from different backgrounds. People were not included in the qualitative sample if they:

- Were participants in a research group or interview in the last 12 months
- Worked in media, government agencies or the civil service, market research, politics, IT (particularly web design), online retail/services, or advertising.

These exclusions were set in order to understand the 'average consumer' which, in this context, excludes individuals in these industries.

## Quantitative

Questions for the quantitative survey were added to Ipsos MORI's online omnibus survey of 1,004 British adults aged 16-75 carried out between 11<sup>th</sup>-14<sup>th</sup> April 2014. The survey was weighted to be nationally representative by gender, age, household compositions, work status, ethnicity and region.

### 2.5 Interpretation of findings

It is important to note that qualitative research approaches are used to shed light on why people hold particular views, rather than how many people hold those views. This element of the research is intended to be illustrative rather than statistically reliable and, as such, does not permit conclusions to be drawn about the extent to which something is happening. Where it is necessary for proper interpretation to indicate a common or outlier view, we have used indicative language like 'many' and 'a handful'. As this is qualitative research, these proportions should be considered indicative.

Throughout the report, verbatim comments have been included to illustrate particular viewpoints. Where this is the case, it is important to remember that the views expressed do not always represent the views of all participants. In general, however, verbatim comments have been included to illustrate where there was a particular strength of feeling about a particular topic.

# **Chapter 3: Context - online confidence and searching behaviour**

## 3 Context: online literacy and searching behaviour

### Key findings

Participants' ability to search online had a significant influence on whether or not they came across and visited copycat sites. Those with lower levels of online literacy and confidence were more likely to visit copycat sites without realising.

Understanding and use of online ads was particularly important. Most participants were aware of ads in search results and avoided them. Those who were unaware were more likely to visit copycat sites.

Many of the ways participants searched online protected them from coming across copycat sites, even if they were unaware that copycat sites existed.

At the start of the qualitative interviews participants were asked to carry out various online tasks. These were designed to replicate (as closely as was possible) the things they might do when using the internet themselves. This included accessing government services relevant to the scope of the research, but also other tasks like finding holidays, looking at the weather forecast, or searching for things to do in their local area. Interviewers observed participants' behaviour and kept questioning to a minimum.

The tasks highlighted the important role both online literacy and searching behaviour played in influencing the likelihood that participants would come across and visit a copycat site. General searching behaviour is therefore important context for understanding experiences of copycat sites, and is outlined in more detail in this chapter. Later chapters will discuss how participants evaluated specific websites in order to decide whether or not they would use them, and whether or not they were copycat sites.

### 3.1 The importance of online literacy

Participants' general ability to search and sift content online had a significant influence on their likelihood to navigate to copycat sites. Those

who were most able online seldom reached copycat sites (although a few did), even if they were confused or misled by these sites when they were shown them later in the interview. Conversely, those with lower levels of online literacy were more likely to navigate to copycat sites.

In general, those with lower ability also lacked confidence online and were aware of their limitations. However, a handful of participants had more confidence in their ability online than their observed behaviour suggested they perhaps should have. These participants had experience of searching but did not use some of the techniques others relied on to help them navigate safely online (see section 3.2 for more details). This meant that were more likely to come across and visit copycat sites.

### 3.1.1 Online literacy

In many cases, participants talked about using 'intuition' and trusting their 'gut sense' when searching the internet. If a task was unfamiliar they relied on trial and error, conducting searches and taking in information from a number of sources before deciding how to proceed.

***"I'm in auto mode when I'm online, not thinking just doing..."***

35-45 year old, Sheffield

Participants had different levels of online confidence, ranging from those who were very confident to those who were much more wary of using the internet. The most confident and able participants often found it hard to explain their behaviour, because they were so familiar with using the internet in different contexts. These participants said they had extensive experience of finding trustworthy sites. They saw making judgments about which sites to use as being a normal part of using the internet to access products, services and information.

***"I've never had any problems with doing things online, so I suppose I've got into a way of doing things I don't really think about."***

45-54 year old, Swansea

While there were some common themes in the techniques participants used to search (outlined in section 3.2), individuals often had their own ways of doing things. Their behaviour seemed to be based on previous experiences and shortcuts they had developed through trial and error (rather than learned from others) to find what they needed online.

However, other participants were much less confident and more careful about how they searched online. If they were familiar with a particular website for accessing a service then they used it. Otherwise, they actively sought out information to confirm whether a search result (or a website) was trustworthy, reading content carefully before deciding whether or not to go ahead. They were often more sceptical about using the internet for official

services, and said they preferred using alternative access routes (such as the Post Office or local council) if they felt unsure about going ahead.

***“I’m I bit scared of getting it wrong and something bad happening. I prefer doing things the way I’ve always done them.”***

55-74 year old, Swansea

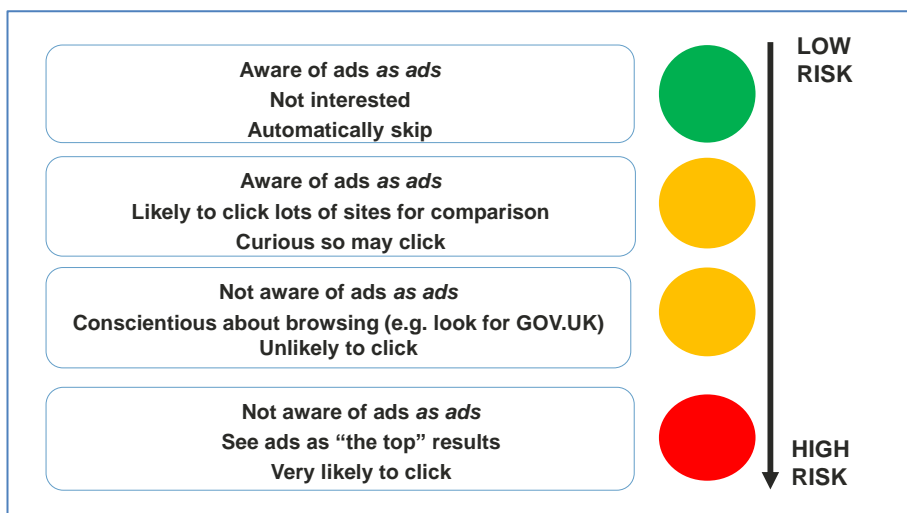
It is also worth emphasising that almost all participants seemed aware that there were risks when accessing information and services (including official or government services) online. Even the most confident were careful when giving their personal details or making payments online. Participants were much less wary when carrying out simpler tasks like checking the weather.

### 3.1.2 Interaction with online ads

A particularly important aspect of online literacy was participants’ understanding and use of online ads. This is important because online ads were by far the most common way participants navigated to copycat sites.

Almost all said they paid little or no attention to ads that appeared on the right hand side of search results, and this was confirmed by the eye-tracking research. But there were more mixed perceptions and experiences of ads appearing at the top of results pages.

The chart below outlines four types of understanding and use of ads observed during the research. These findings suggest that some people would be more at risk from copycat sites if they appear in paid search ads.



#### Automatic skippers

Many participants went straight to search results that appeared below any sponsored ads. They said they were aware of the difference between paid for ads and the natural search listing below. A few of these participants said they might use ads in other contexts, but not for accessing official services as they would not expect these to be advertised.

***“I don’t even pay any attention to the ads, and definitely not for a government service”***

16-24 year old, Swansea

These participants were very unlikely to navigate to or click on paid search ads for copycat sites as they searched. Their attention was immediately focused on the natural search results, where the top results tended to be for official channels.

#### Curious clickers

Some participants were aware that what appeared at the top of the search results were often ads. However, their usual searching behaviour meant they were accustomed to clicking on different sites as a way of making comparisons before finding the service or product they were looking for. They were usually those who would use paid ads in other circumstances, for example when searching for a holiday or looking for a restaurant.

Their greater openness to sponsored ads meant these participants were more likely to navigate to copycat sites, although that did not mean they always trusted the sites enough to use them.

#### Conscientious browsers

Consumers who looked for specific features in search results for official services (such as ‘GOV.UK’ or ‘gov’ in the site URL) were also more likely to ignore sponsored ads. However, this was not because they were necessarily aware of the ads as paid for ads, but because the ads did not include the features they expected.

***“That doesn’t look quite right to me... seems too commercial. So I’d look further down to find the official one.”***

55-74 year old, London

There were some examples of conscientious browsers navigating to copycat sites if the features they looked for were present in ads. For example, if an ad included ‘gov’ in its URL or ‘official’ in the site name or description, they were more likely to try the site.

#### Unaware clickers

Some participants treated ads as the most relevant ‘top’ search results. When probed on the distinction between the ads and results further down the page, they saw no difference.

These consumers were the most likely to navigate to copycat sites. They tended to be older and have lower levels of online literacy, which also made them more susceptible to misinterpret the copycat sites themselves.

***“I didn’t know those ones at the top are any different.”***

55-75 year old, London

### **3.2 General searching behaviour**

Participants almost always relied on search engines as their starting point for navigating online – usually Google, although Bing was used by a few. For straightforward or low risk searches, most either visited familiar sites or relied on trial and error, reviewing several sites before deciding on their preferred choice. Looking at a few websites that appeared at or near the top of the search results was almost always seen as being sufficient. In many cases, participants made quick decisions because the site they were looking for was obvious in the search results, or when they had previous experience of doing something similar.

***“I guess you always go for the ones at the top (of your search) for quickness.”***

45-54 year old, Sheffield

If tasks were unfamiliar or seen as risky, participants tended to take a different approach. They visited several sites and sometimes explored information from variety of sources (for example, different websites that claimed to offer the service, related media articles, and consumer forums or blogs) before deciding how to proceed.

Younger and more confident participants seemed to do this out of habit, quickly sorting content into good or bad – and useful or irrelevant – without giving much thought as to how they did so. Some older participants compared several sites and correctly identified the official site, but said they would not normally be confident enough in their judgment to go ahead.

Many of the searching strategies participants used acted to protect them against the risk of coming across and using copycat sites, even if this was not their intention. Typically, participants were unaware of the existence of copycat sites, but still took care to ensure they accessed services from a site they trusted.

This suggests that copycat sites may not present as great a consumer risk as the other findings in this report might indicate. For example, the quantitative research on whether people could correctly differentiate copycat and government sites shows that many were unable to do so (and this was reflected in the qualitative research).

However, the way people search online would mean that many of them avoid copycat sites, provided these sites are not permitted to closely replicate the way official sites appear in search results. A consideration for future regulation of copycat websites is whether relying on personal coping



strategies is sufficient, or whether there is a need for further rules governing paid ads and marketing on these sites.

The table overleaf outlines some of the main strategies participants used when searching online, particularly for official services. These techniques were often used together, further reducing the chances of navigating to copycat sites.

Table 1: Examples of searching strategies

Type	Behaviour	Examples
Doing research	<p>Many participants looked at the descriptions for a number of sites before deciding how to proceed, particularly with unfamiliar tasks. They sometimes clicked through several to do a quick review of how they seemed before settling on the one they wanted to use.</p> <p>This was particularly the case for confident internet users, who were often (but not always) younger. More internet savvy participants talked about “reading around” a subject if they remained unsure, checking out different sources of information online before getting to a point where they would go further. They explained the process they would apply as being similar to online shopping – reading consumer reviews, visiting a trusted website, consumer internet forums and blogs – before they committed themselves to going ahead.</p>	<i>“I would never get [to this copycat site] though; I’d have done my homework beforehand.”</i>
Ignoring sponsored ads	<p>Participants often ignored the sponsored ads, particularly when searching for official services. The eye-tracking footage supports this, showing that participants tended to focus quickly on the search results immediately under the sponsored ads.</p> <p>Even so, not all participants were clear that ads can appear above the search results.</p>	<i>“I never click on ads.”</i>
Looking for the right tone	<p>The tone of the website description (appearing under the name and URL) was important for many. Those that described in clear, factual terms what the service was reassured participants that they were likely to be trustworthy. By contrast, descriptions that highlighted the price of the service or special offers were seen as a sign that sites were commercially-run and unlikely to be official.</p> <p>A few participants liked sites that presented information about prices or discounts in the search results. This was because they expected to pay for some services, and saw this as a sign of transparency, making them comfortable clicking to find out more.</p>	<i>“That doesn’t sound quite right to me.”</i>
Using trusted portals and official brands	<p>Some consumers actively sought out trusted portals, using search terms such as ‘Post Office’, DVLA or (in a small number of cases) ‘GOV.UK’. Others would type the service that they were looking for e.g. ‘Renewing my passport’ and look down the search results for an official brand that they recognised.</p> <p>This shows that some participants think first about how they would access the service offline. For example, local Post Offices were seen as places providing helpful information and advice about official services and to make paper applications.</p>	<i>“I’d look out for GOV.UK or I might type it into the search bar.”</i>
Anti-virus warnings	<p>A few participants relied heavily on their anti-virus software in deciding whether or not to trust individual websites. If the search result was marked as safe (e.g. with a green tick) this made them much more likely to at least click through.</p>	<i>“If my anti-virus doesn’t put a tick next to the search result, I’m not clicking on it.”</i>

# **Chapter 4: Accessing government services online**

## 4 Accessing government services online

### Key findings

Most online consumers have accessed government services using the internet. However, the qualitative research shows the details are often unfamiliar because participants only used services infrequently.

Participants generally expected that government would have a central website that redirected people to a range of official services. Some were familiar with GOV.UK, usually those who accessed government services more often.

Confusion about government branding meant many participants were unsure if there were different routes for accessing official services. This made them more open to the idea that several organisations might legitimately offer these services online.

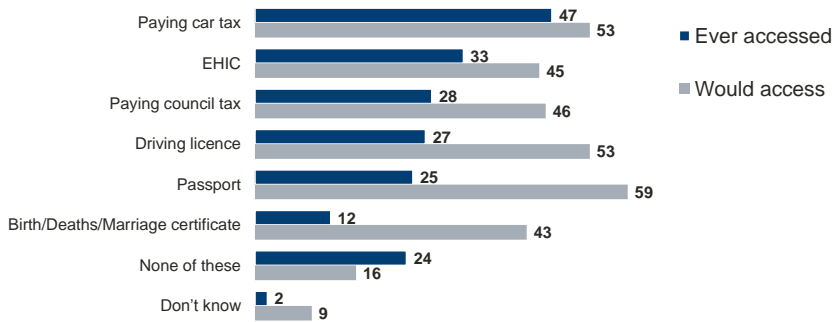
Few participants were aware of copycat websites. They were not surprised that counterfeit sites existed, but they were less familiar with the idea that legitimate businesses might charge a premium for official services online.

### 4.1 Experience of online government services

Three quarters (74%) of online consumers have used the internet to access at least one of the government services asked about in the quantitative survey. An even larger proportion (84%) would be interested in doing so in the future. For specific services, fewer than half had accessed each of these online, but more would be interested in doing so in future.

Q Which, if any, of these government services have you ever accessed using the internet?

Q Which, if any, of these government services would you be interested in accessing using the internet in future?

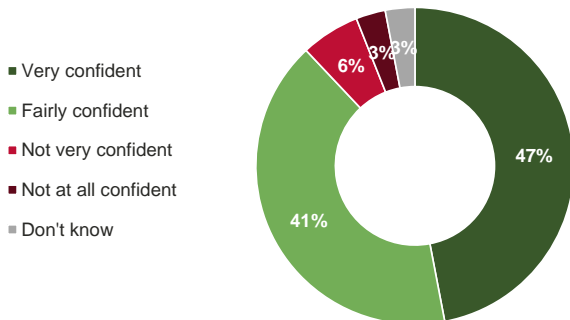


Base: Online survey of 1,004 adults, aged 16-75 across Great Britain

Source: Ipsos MORI

A large majority (88%) of online consumers said they felt confident about the internet to access government services. Young people were also confident, but slightly less so than those over 35 (82% and 91% said they were confident respectively).

Overall, how confident, if at all, would you say you are in your ability to use the internet to access government services?



Base: Online survey of 1,004 adults, aged 16-75 across Great Britain

Source: Ipsos MORI

Younger people were less likely to have experience of applying for official services online. The quantitative research shows that around two in five (41%) of 16-24 year olds had never accessed any of these services online (compared with 24% overall). From the qualitative research, young people's more limited experience was because they had either not needed to access services (online or offline), or because their parents had done so for them.

Despite the generally high levels of confidence, the qualitative research suggests that using the internet to access government services remains unfamiliar to many online consumers, even if they have done so occasionally. In part this is due to the nature of some of these services (which may only be accessed infrequently), or because the option to do so online has been introduced relatively recently. Many participants were also content with the ways they had accessed these services in the past, and saw little need to do so online.

Some older participants in particular said they did not feel confident accessing official services online. Several commented that they preferred face-to-face contact when they were doing something so important. For example, a few favoured their local Post Office as they felt reassured that their application would be submitted successfully.

***“I much prefer going somewhere where I can speak to someone. I don’t really like using the internet for this kind of thing.”***

55-74 year old, Swansea

## 4.2 Government websites and branding

Most participants expected that government would have a central website that redirected people to a range of official services. Some could remember using this type of website in the past. However, many said they were confused because there seemed to be different government sites and that the individual sites often had a distinct look and feel.

***“NI direct, is that government? Sounds like a business.”***

45-54 year old, London

***“That site’s not part of the NHS is it?”***

16-24 year old, Sheffield

This meant that some participants thought government offered multiple routes for accessing official services. For instance, when searching for driving licence application services a number navigated to both a GOV.UK landing page and the DVLA’s website. This suggested to these participants that several organisations might legitimately offer these services online.

There was also some confusion caused by the differences between Directgov and the new GOV.UK design. Because many participants only had to access government services infrequently the new site was different from their previous experience.

On the other hand, some participants knew about GOV.UK and actively looked for it in search results (particularly the URLs). They tended to be those who engaged frequently with government services for professional or other reasons. For example, one participant worked as a community organiser and was very familiar making government funding applications. Others had interacted extensively with particular services for personal reasons, such as applying for unemployment or health benefits. These participants were less likely to navigate to copycat sites, although in part this may be because they were generally more confident online.

***“I’d usually go for the government site. For security – feels safer. I’d look out for GOV.UK or I might type it into the search bar.”***

25-34 year old, London

A handful of these participants would *only* use GOV.UK, and ignored all other websites. However, even among those with some awareness of GOV.UK, this was usually just one consideration when sifting searches and deciding which site to use. This was because they thought other websites could also be legitimate ways to access services.

### 4.3 The meaning of 'official'

To some, use of the term 'official' clearly denoted being affiliated to government. For them, seeing the word appear in search engine results (or in the website name or URL) signalled that it was a government site. A few were more sceptical, treating with caution any sites which seemed to need to advertise the fact they were 'official' too obviously.

***"It must say 'official' in the title/search; if it doesn't I'm just not interested."***

25-34 year old, London

***"I'd probably go to the GOV one – sounds a lot more official even than the one showing 'official site' that's in the top box (one of the sponsored ads)."***

25-34 year old, Sheffield

However, many participants understood 'official' to mean something more like 'legitimate'. Some thought legitimate sites could use this language without being *the* government site for a particular service.

The more cautious were keen to ensure that they used the official site, and would not go ahead without being sure it was. But most participants approached applying for services differently: they were concerned about whether they trusted the site as one they could use to access the service. As such, whether or not the site was 'official' was not always their main concern. This seemed to be based on how comfortable they felt, with participants as likely to talk about whether a site was 'good', 'correct', 'real' or 'proper' as to discuss whether it was 'official'.

### 4.4 Awareness and experiences of copycat websites

Few participants were aware of copycat websites and most did not discuss them until prompted. They often expected that counterfeit sites for government services might exist – as they do for other online services – reflecting broader worries about online risks. These were described as fraudulent sites that might take payment without doing anything, or collect personal data in order to misuse the information. For those who were most cautious the risk of counterfeit sites was a significant concern.

***“It doesn’t surprise me – you get all sorts of fake stuff on the internet because it’s very easy to set up.”***

18-24 year old, Swansea

Participants were much less familiar with the idea of legitimate businesses charging a premium for official services online. This low awareness included those who were more confident online, as well as those who were much less confident.

A handful had heard of copycat sites, including through friends and family who had used them and media coverage of these issues. Yet it was rare that participants used the word ‘copycat’, instead referring to ‘lookalike’ or ‘fake’ websites. Only a couple of participants thought they had directly experienced copycat websites, either intentionally or because they were misled.<sup>3</sup> No-one taking part in the research thought they had paid for this kind of service.

***“I’m only aware of these sites after I heard a programme on the radio about them.”***

55-74 year old, Swansea

## **4.5 Typologies for accessing official services online**

Through the in-home and eye-tracking interviews, different types of participant emerged in terms of searching behaviour, confidence and ability online, and likelihood to navigate to copycat sites. The number of interviews conducted means that the summary typologies below should be seen as indicative of the range of participants interviewed. Further research would be required to unpick the behaviour and attitudes of each group, or to determine how large these groups are in the population.

- 1 GOV.UK loyalists:** Went straight to the GOV.UK site directly or looked for it in search results. These participants were very unlikely to trust or use alternative sites, including copycats.
- 2 Careful checkers:** Actively looking for signs to verify origin and nature of sites. Likely to check for logos, disclaimers, and contact us pages. Tended to find the official site but in any case would seek offline alternatives if unsure.
- 3 Experienced browsers:** Comfortable online, visiting sites, blogs and media articles. Often younger and with less experience using government services online. Rely more on intuition and base judgements on ‘look and feel’, of sites. Still checked for some features but less thoroughly.

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<sup>3</sup> One had misidentified the Tax Return Gateway site for HMRC’s and several recounted stories of friends or family being misled.



- 4 Inexperienced checkers:** Similar to the careful checkers but with less confidence. Dubious of online services and/or lacking confidence in their ability to choose the right site and complete the application. If unsure may seek alternatives.
- 5 Exposed browsers:** Some experience using the internet but low levels of online literacy. Likely to click several sites, including ads, trying to gauge which to trust. Unaware of how to avoid online risks. Most likely to visit copycat sites.

In general, the likelihood that participants would navigate to or use a copycat site increases working down this list. The 'GOV.UK loyalists' were very unlikely to be misled by a copycat site, whereas the 'exposed browsers' were much more likely to.

# **Chapter 5: Interactions with official and copycat sites**

## 5 Interactions with official and copycat sites

### Key findings

Participants often relied on their first impressions when assessing official and copycat sites. This was based on subjective criteria that depended on their expectations of official sites. There were many examples of qualitative participants getting their assessments wrong.

For example, many focused on the overall look and feel, including colour scheme, amount and tone of text, images and logos, and general site navigation. This was how more confident participants generally made their decisions.

A few participants were more cautious and reviewed content carefully before deciding whether or not a site was official. This included features like detailed text or comparison tables, as well as any disclaimers.

In the quantitative research, most online consumers were confident they could tell the difference between official and commercial website. Even so, large proportions of respondents incorrectly identified screenshots of example official and copycat sites.

As discussed in Chapter 3, many participants seemed to be protected from risks associated with copycat sites because they would not navigate to these sites in the first place. Furthermore, actions taken by search engine providers and others at the time of this research are also likely to have reduced the risks to consumers.<sup>4</sup>

Both the qualitative and quantitative elements of the research provide evidence that the process of applying for government services online can cause confusion. This suggests that there is potential for consumers to be misled without further changes to how copycat sites are regulated.

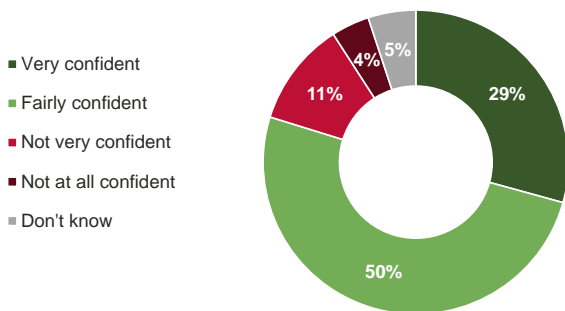
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<sup>4</sup> While the research was in progress, Google blocked sponsored ads for copycat sites for some of the most commonly used government services. Some copycat sites that received negative press coverage either removed their service or improved the disclaimer to make it clearer that they were not an official government site.

## 5.1 Confidence distinguishing official and copycat sites

The survey findings show that a large majority of online consumers (79%) were confident in their ability to distinguish between government websites and commercial websites offering similar services.

*Overall, how confident, if at all, would you say you are in your ability to tell the difference between official government websites and commercial websites offering a similar service?*



Base: Online survey of 1,004 adults, aged 16-75 across Great Britain

Source: Ipsos MORI

Levels of confidence were high across demographic groups. Those aged 55-75 were more likely to say they lacked confidence (8% said they were 'not at all confident' compared with 2% among 16-34 year olds), although even among this group most were confident (79%). The youngest age group were more likely to say they did not know whether they could tell the difference between government and commercial sites (12% compared with 5% overall). This is likely to reflect their more limited experience of applying for official services.

**Table 2 – Confidence of different age groups in telling the difference between official and commercial sites**

Age	16-24	25-34	35-44	45-54	55-75
Unweighted base size	153	181	186	186	298
Confident	74%	80%	80%	84%	79%
Not confident	14%	15%	16%	13%	18%
Don't know	12%	6%	5%	3%	3%

## 5.2 Qualitative assessment of official and copycat websites

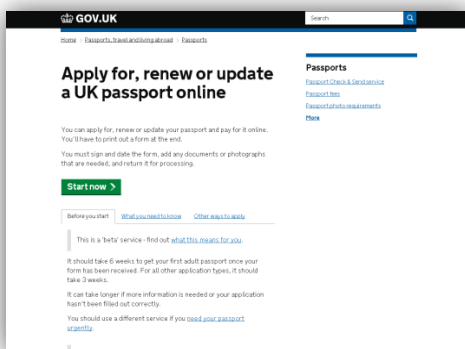
Initially, participants were tasked with imagining they were applying for different official services, and then observed as they did so. How they

searched for and evaluated different websites is important evidence underpinning the overall findings.

Later in the interview, participants were asked to visit pairs of websites offering similar services, one for a commercial company and the official or government site. This was done using specific URLs provided by the interviewer. Using this simulated process meant that the research could capture views of copycat sites and official sites, irrespective of whether participants would have navigated to these sites themselves.<sup>5</sup> After a few minutes on each site they gave their initial impressions and thoughts. Participants discussed how comfortable they were, whether sites looked user-friendly and whether they could envisage using them. In some cases they started the application process by entering mock personal details.

The following sections outline what qualitative participants paid attention to and remarked on as they completed the tasks and browsed official and copycat sites. They usually considered several features when deciding whether a site was official or not.

These findings are based on participant comments, interviewer observations and analysis of the eye-tracking video footage. While there was considerable variation in participants' preferences and expectations, there were some clear themes that emerged.



### 5.2.1 First impressions

Participants often referred to their *first impressions* of a site as they explained whether or not they would use it. These were usually crucial to how much they

trusted sites, and some said they would find it hard to get past these initial perceptions. Overall, this suggests that good design is often a shortcut – albeit a subjective one – for deciding whether a site is legitimate and trustworthy.

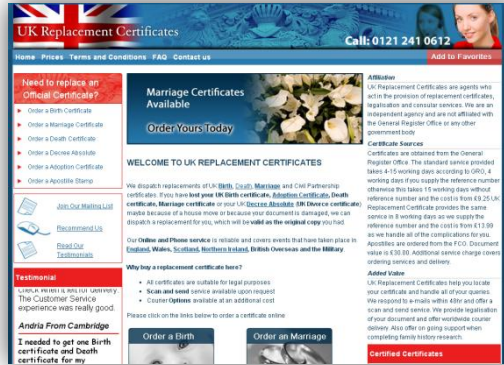
The language consumers used to describe their impressions highlighted the subjective nature of the criteria they used. Many talked about the 'general design' or 'look and feel' of a site, and the idea that they 'just know' whether it is official, or at least one they saw as legitimate.

<sup>5</sup> At this stage, almost all had worked out that they were looking at some official and some copycat sites.

***"I trust the information on most sites if it generally looks official.  
It's only really if I am entering details that I might stop and think."***

35-45 year old, London

Expectations of what an official site would look like varied. In general, clarity and simplicity were seen as reassuring, as was a design with few images and other 'unnecessary' features. Bright colours and complex designs were usually considered an indicator that the site might not be official, as they gave the site a 'glossy' commercial look (see right for an example). More muted tones and a reliance on text were seen as markers of official sites.



There were some website features that consumers commented on more than when discussing their first impressions: colour scheme, amount and tone of text, the type of images and general site navigation. The eye-tracking research suggests that much of the more in depth content, including disclaimers or any detailed text, was ignored by many participants. They often made up their minds about whether they would go ahead with the application without reviewing the detail.

## 5.2.2 Images

Sites with large numbers of images were generally concerning to participants. This was particularly the case when sites included images that were not directly related to the service or to government, as these seemed out of place (e.g. of models posing or generic business images). More commercial images did not fit with their expectations of an official site, which they assumed would rely more heavily on text and a simple design.

But some images did help increase trust. For example, several participants said that seeing an image of the relevant application form, or the card or certificate they were trying to apply for, grabbed their attention and signalled to them that they were on a legitimate website. These images helped them envisage the process and led them to believe that they could quickly complete it there and then. The use of images directly related to the application process caused several participants to think they were using an official site when they were not.

***"The image of the card is reassuring – makes me think I'm on the right site."***

45-54 year old, Swansea



### 5.2.3 Design

Many valued a clean and uncluttered site design, where text was kept to the essentials and the application process was clearly sign-posted. Participants often made quick judgments about whether the sites looked 'clear and simple' or were 'straight to the point'. This reassured them and made them feel more comfortable about continuing with application process.

Densely packed text made the site content hard to digest and suggested to some that the site had been badly designed. This made it harder for them to believe that a 'serious' organisation could be behind it.

***"This site is too busy for me, too much info packed onto one page."***

25-34 year old, London

There was no evidence to suggest that participants considered a particular font as 'official'. Fonts and other design features were rarely commented on in detail by participants. Instead, they relied on their perceptions of the 'look and feel' of sites overall. The eye-tracking supports this, showing that participants often looked at different aspects of sites quickly to evaluate the site overall, rather than focusing on specific features in detail.

This perception of ease and simplicity was often an important driver of misinterpretation of copycats. If a site was considered well designed it led many to overlook specific information that might change their view of the site (including explicit disclaimers).

***"I just want something that is presented clearly, with straight-forward instructions. Is that so much to ask?"***

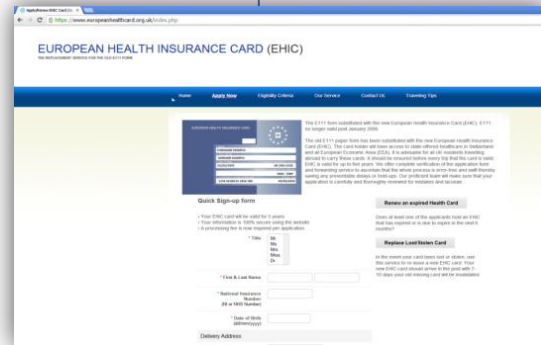
35-45 year old, Sheffield

### The attraction of simplicity

This European Health Insurance Card (EHIC) copycat site was an example of one that seemed simple and easy-to-follow compared with the official government site. As such, several participants thought this site was the official one and said they would use it.

The straightforward design of the site, the image of the EHIC card and the ability to immediately begin applying seemed to reassure participants, often to the extent that they missed other aspects such as disclaimers that explicitly said there would be a charge for the service.

By contrast, the official NHS choices website was seen by many as cluttered and hard to follow. Several participants were unclear whether the site was the right place to make an application or just a page supplying information about the EHIC card.

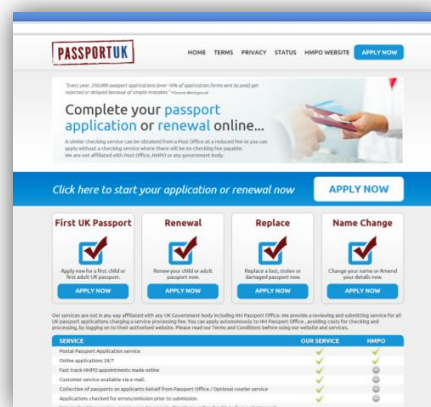


### 5.2.4 Text and other detailed content

A few participants read the detailed text more carefully. Those who did tended to be older and less confident online, but were often more familiar with government services generally. They expected official sites to be simple to follow and to make the requirements and next steps clear. Where language was over the top and seemed to be trying to sell the service they were less likely to continue with the application.

Participants rarely commented on tables present on several copycat sites. These showed a checklist of differences between the copycat and the official government service. If properly understood, the information in the tables usually made it clear that this was not the official site and that there would be an additional charge for the service. Eye-tracking data further shows that participants did not spend long reviewing these tables, suggesting that the information they provide is being overlooked.

As one participant highlighted, the column showing the official government service was sometimes not clearly labelled on these







### 5.2.6 Logos and crowns

Logos were an important feature participants looked out for, and they were reassured if they saw a logo that seemed 'official-looking'. Some would not use a site unless it had a logo. As such, logos had a significant influence on participants' trust in different sites.



***“An official site without a logo is like giving me a ten pound note without the Queen’s face on and trying to convince me it’s a tenner.”***

25-34, Sheffield

However, some participants said they would use sites even if there was no logo. They did not expect that all government sites would have one, particularly as they had often come across official sites with very different branding and designs. Provided other site features were as expected they thought they could be on a legitimate site.

The logos most likely to mislead participants were those that mimicked official logos, particularly any which resembled a simplified crown. For example, the crown logo used by the UK Official Services website often confused people, because the strong association of this type of crown with government, and the close resemblance to the GOV.UK logo. Many struggled to work out whether the UK Official Services logo was different or not, even when comparing it side by side with an official logo.



By contrast, logos that appeared more commercial (including those with lots of bright colour, the UK flag or other crests) were much less reassuring. These tended to put participants off, suggesting to them that it was a copycat site.

### 5.2.7 Use of the word 'official'

Participants reacted differently to the use of the word 'official' in the website name or in elsewhere in the text (as discussed in section 4.3). Some believed it authenticated sites because they would 'not be allowed' to say they were official if they were not. Others were more suspicious and questioned why an official site would explicitly advertise itself as such. There were several examples where the use of the word official resulted in participants misidentifying sites as connected to government.

The UK Official Services site was a clear example of this, with many consumers saying the site name made them think it was official. Indeed even when shown the official government site (run by HM Passport Office)

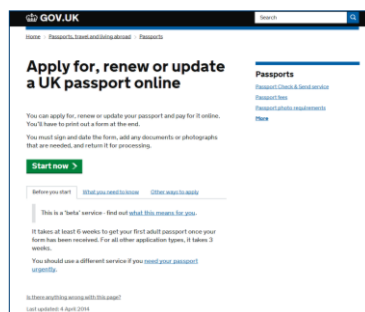
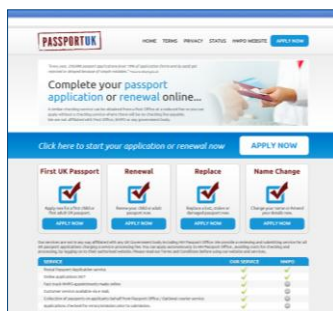
and asked to compare the two, some participants stood by their perception that the UK Official Services site was the official one.

### 5.3 Quantitative assessment of official and copycat websites

Survey respondents were shown screenshot images of the landing pages of different example websites. In total six examples were tested in pairs, three official and three copycat. Respondents were asked about a random selection of three sites in different orders.<sup>6</sup> These websites were some of those used as examples in the qualitative research. Relevant findings from the in-depth interviews are also included below as context.

#### 5.3.1 Passport application

The official and example copycat passport application sites were the most likely to be correctly identified.<sup>7</sup> More than four in five online consumers were right for both the copycat and official sites (83% and 82% respectively).



<b>9% ...an official website</b>	<b>✘</b>	<b>82% ...an official website</b>	<b>✔</b>
<b>83% ...a commercial website</b>	<b>✔</b>	<b>11% ...a commercial website</b>	<b>✘</b>
<b>8% ...don't know</b>	<b>?</b>	<b>7% ...don't know</b>	<b>?</b>

Base: Online survey of 1,004 adults, aged 16-75 across Great Britain (c.500 per website)

Young people aged 16-24 were more likely to identify the copycat site correctly (95% compared with 83% overall). Similarly, young people were also better at identifying the official site (91% among 16-24 year olds, compared with 76% of 55-75 year olds).

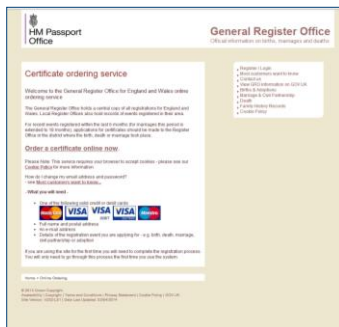
In the qualitative interviews, many participants thought that the copycat site had a design much more likely to be a commercial company. For example, the logo was very different from participants' expectations of an official logo.

<sup>6</sup> Participants were shown screenshots which were larger versions of the images included in this report. This meant they could not navigate the sites in the same way as qualitative participants. Therefore, these findings give an indication of the relatively likelihood that different websites would be interpreted correctly, at least based on first impressions.

<sup>7</sup> [www.passports-uk.co.uk](http://www.passports-uk.co.uk) and <https://www.gov.uk/apply-renew-passport>

### 5.3.2 Replacement birth, death and marriage certificates

The example copycat site for replacing birth, death and marriage certificates caused more problems.<sup>8</sup> Around two in five were wrong (38%), with half (50%) rightly saying it was a copycat. The official site caused confusion too, with one in five (20%) wrongly saying this was commercial.



**38%** ...an official website ❌  
**50%** ...a commercial website ✅  
**13%** ...don't know ?

**67%** ...an official website ✅  
**20%** ...a commercial website ❌  
**13%** ...don't know ?

Base: Online survey of 1,004 adults, aged 16-75 across Great Britain (c.500 per website)

In this case, young people aged 16-24 were less likely to identify the copycat site correctly (35% compared with 50% overall), whereas those aged 55-75 were more likely to be correct (61%). This reverses how well these age groups fared on the passport copycat site, suggesting that younger and older consumers may be misled by different features of sites.

### 5.3.3 European Health Insurance Card (EHIC) application

The copycat EHIC website was incorrectly identified by more online consumers (47%) than those who were correct (36%).<sup>9</sup> Online consumers were better at identifying the official site (74% were correct).



**47%** ...an official website ❌  
**36%** ...a commercial website ✅  
**17%** ...don't know ?

**74%** ...an official website ✅  
**16%** ...a commercial website ❌  
**10%** ...don't know ?

Base: Online survey of 1,004 adults, aged 16-75 across Great Britain (c.500 per website)

<sup>8</sup> <https://www.gro.gov.uk/gro/content/certificates/default.asp>

<sup>9</sup> [www.europeanhealthcard.org.uk](http://www.europeanhealthcard.org.uk) and <https://www.ehic.org.uk/>

There were no significant differences across different demographic groups when it came to identifying the EHIC copycat site. Those aged 25-34 were more successful in identifying the official site correctly (85% compared with 74% overall).

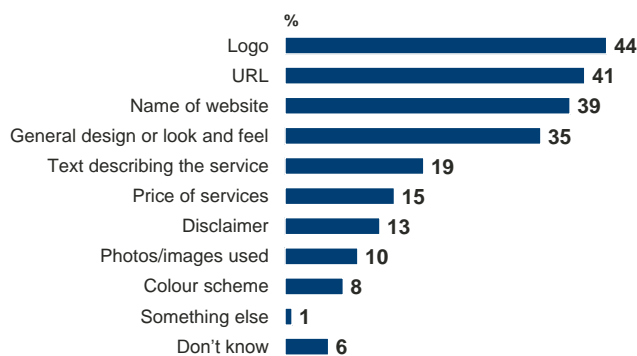
The example EHIC copycat site also misled several qualitative participants. The simple uncluttered design, image of the EHIC card, and ability to begin the application process quickly all helped convince participants that it was an official site. In addition, the fact that EHIC cards were not expected to be provided by a UK government service meant that those who relied on familiar logos or using GOV.UK were unable to do so in this case.

While logos were often important features that helped consumers identify a site as official, this example of an EHIC copycat site did not include a logo. This highlights the influence of other site features (uncluttered design, image of EHIC card and fast-track application process) on consumer perceptions.

#### 5.3.4 Features perceived to help decisions

Logos, the URL and the website name were perceived as the most important features in helping online consumers in the quantitative survey determine whether a website was official or not.

*Overall, which, if any, of the following features were most important in helping you decide whether or not these were official government websites?*



Base: Online survey of 1,004 adults, aged 16-75 across Great Britain

Source: Ipsos MORI

There were some differences between age groups, with younger people more likely to cite general look and feel, and older people placing more weight on the text. This is consistent with the findings from the qualitative research.

# Chapter 6: Regulating copycat sites

## 6 Regulating copycat sites

### Key findings

Participants wanted copycat sites to be clearer about the services they offer. However, they struggled to come up with specific ideas for how regulation might work in practice. They did not want to prevent legitimate businesses from operating, and were also unclear whether anything could be done to address their concerns.

Some consistent suggestions were made, including clearer and better-placed disclaimers, avoiding 'official' language, and more distinctive branding for copycat sites. They also thought government websites could communicate their official status more clearly.

At the end of the qualitative interviews participants were asked for their views of copycat websites more explicitly. This included the interviewer explaining whether or not they had correctly identified official and copycat sites, and asking for their views on regulation.

### 6.1 Regulating copycat sites

Participants were taken aback that some of the copycat sites they had visited were so convincing, often mimicking the features of official sites (or at least what they expected from official sites). Even so, they struggled to come up with many ideas for regulating copycat sites. This was partly because they could see that going too far could prevent legitimate businesses from operating. They were also unclear who was responsible for regulation, particularly when it came to copycat site content.

As such, most participants did not think copycat sites should be banned. They could understand why different providers might be permitted for official application processes; often because they had come across sites they felt could be legitimate during their searching.

They expected that 'legitimate' copycat sites would offer additional services beyond those available through the official channels. Copycat sites that simply charged for something that should otherwise be free (or cheaper) were generally deemed unacceptable.

While there was some openness to 'legitimate' copycat sites being permitted, participants emphasised the need for greater clarity about the

services they offer. They wanted better signposting, both in search results and on the sites themselves, to make it obvious that sites are not affiliated to government and that they offer different services at an extra cost.

***“It should be really clear. If it’s a legitimate business that should be fine for them.”***

45-54 year old, Swansea

***“I’m quite happy with the disclaimer... but it should be bigger.”***

55-74 year old, Swansea

Some of the most common suggestions for regulating the content of copycat sites are outlined below.

Dos	DON'Ts
<b>Well-placed disclaimers</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Close to top of webpage or description of the site as possible, so they are not overlooked</li> </ul>	<b>‘GOV’ or ‘gov’ in URL</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• References to government in URLs are an immediate risk as many see this as reassurance that they are visiting an official site</li> </ul>
<b>Well-formatted disclaimers</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Font size and formatting easy to read against a contrasting background</li> </ul>	<b>Use the word ‘official’</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Avoid the word ‘official’ in the name of the third party site and any information that appears in search results / sponsored ads</li> </ul>
<b>Distinct logos and branding</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Logos , branding and design should be significantly different from government equivalents</li> </ul>	<b>Use names that confuse</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Names should not give an impression that it is a government site, even if ‘official’ language is avoided</li> </ul>

***“It’s really naughty them using GOV in the address...I wouldn’t know the difference.”***

55-74 year old, London

Most participants were already aware of sponsored ads in search results, and felt that signposting was clear. Among those with less confidence there was some appetite to make the signposting even clearer, particularly at the top of search engine results. Suggestions included presenting the ads against a more obviously different-coloured background or enlarging the text that says ‘sponsored ad’. They also wanted similar rules to apply to the text in search results and URLs as suggested above, making it clear that sites were not official.

While many knew that these were ads and treated them as such (either automatically skipping them or clicking on them but aware of what they were doing), there were a few participants who treated them as if they were simply the top search results.



## 6.2 Improving government sites

Participants had expectations of government websites, which many thought could communicate their official status more clearly. Some consumers highlighted the existence of multiple government brands as a potential issue as it led to confusion surrounding official sites. They suggested awareness-raising campaigns and better signposting in search results, as well as ensuring consistent branding and look and feel across official sites themselves, making them easier to recognise.

***“Official sites could say so and mention that there are other websites which are not official and that they charge. That sort of thing should be at the top so that you know where you are.”***

55-74 year old, London

***“Government’s stamp, the crown, should be used more widely so you recognise it when you see it.””***

35-45 year old, Sheffield

Some also suggested that government sites could be more user friendly and present information clearly and succinctly in a way that obviously guided the user through the application process. The fact several copycat sites were able to attract consumers by doing this underlines the importance that government sites do the same.

# Appendices

## 7 Appendices

### QUANTITATIVE TOPLINE RESULTS April 2014

- Results for the **nationally representative sample** of the online population are based on 1, 004 online interviews with British adults aged 16-75.
  - Fieldwork dates 11th – 14th April, 2014.
- The survey was weighted to be nationally representative by gender, age, household compositions, work status, ethnicity and region.
- Where results do not sum to 100%, this may be due to multiple responses, computer rounding, the exclusion of don't knows/not stated or weighting.
- Results are based on all respondents unless otherwise stated.
- Please note that data have been weighted to the known profile of the survey population.

Q1. Which, if any, of these government services have you ever accessed using the internet (e.g. through a website or via a smartphone app)?

MULTICODE

	%
Paying car tax	47
Applying for a European Health Insurance Card (EHIC)	33
Applying for or renewing your passport	25
Applying for or renewing your driving licence	27
Paying council tax	28
Ordering a copy of a birth, death or marriage certificate	12
None of these	24
Don't know	2

Q2. Which, if any, of these [government] services would you be interested in accessing using the internet in future (e.g. through a website or via a smartphone app)?

MULTICODE

Paying car tax	53
Applying for a European Health Insurance Card (EHIC)	45
Applying for or renewing your passport	59
Applying for or renewing your driving licence	53
Paying council tax	46
Ordering a copy of a birth, death or marriage certificate	43
None of these	16
Don't know	9

Q3. Overall, how confident, if at all, would you say you are in your ability to use the internet to access government services?

	%
Very confident	47
Fairly confident	41
Not very confident	6
Not at all confident	3
Don't know	3

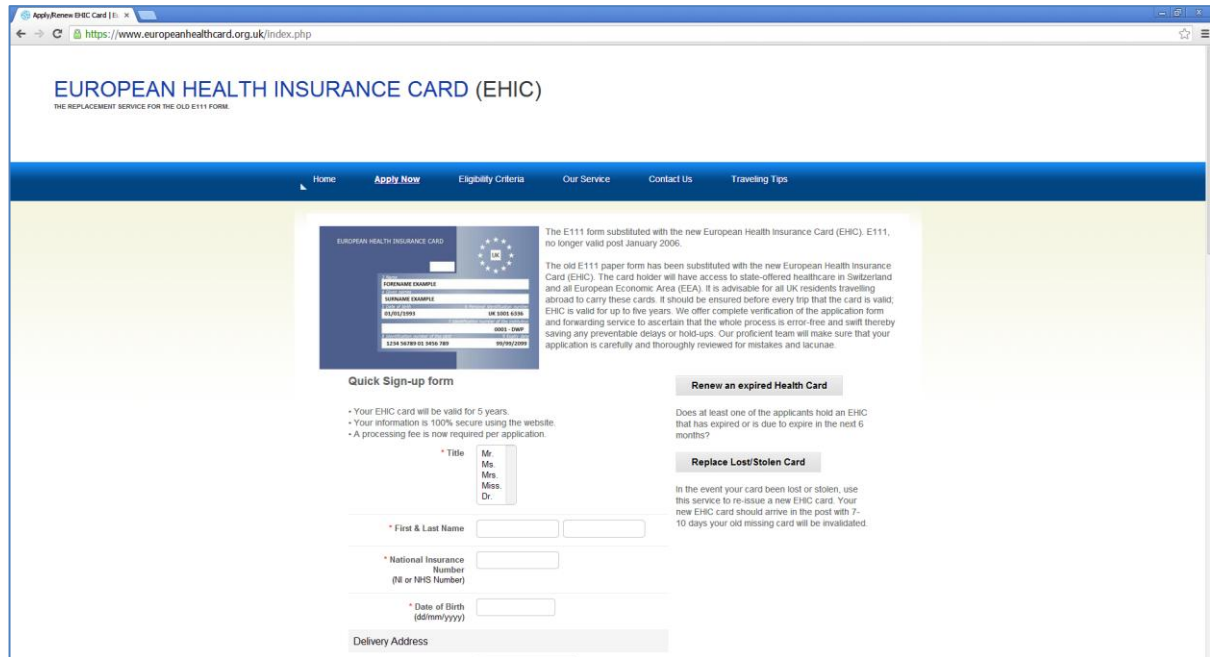
Q4. Many government services can be accessed online, including renewing a passport, paying car tax or ordering a copy of a birth, death or marriage certificate. When accessing these services online you might find that there are other commercial websites available that offer the service, as well as the government's official website.

How confident, if at all, would you say you are in your ability to tell the difference between official government websites and commercial websites offering a similar service?

	%
Very confident	29
Fairly confident	50
Not very confident	11
Not at all confident	4
Don't know	5

Q5. Now I want you to look at the following websites (. For each, please tell me whether you think it is an official government website, or a commercial website offering a similar service. This is not a test – please give your honest opinion. [Each respondent was shown a random selection of three examples in a random order.]

a) Example 1  
Base: 502



Do you think this is...?  
SINGLE CODE

	%
...an official government website	47
...a commercial website offering a similar service	36
Don't know	17

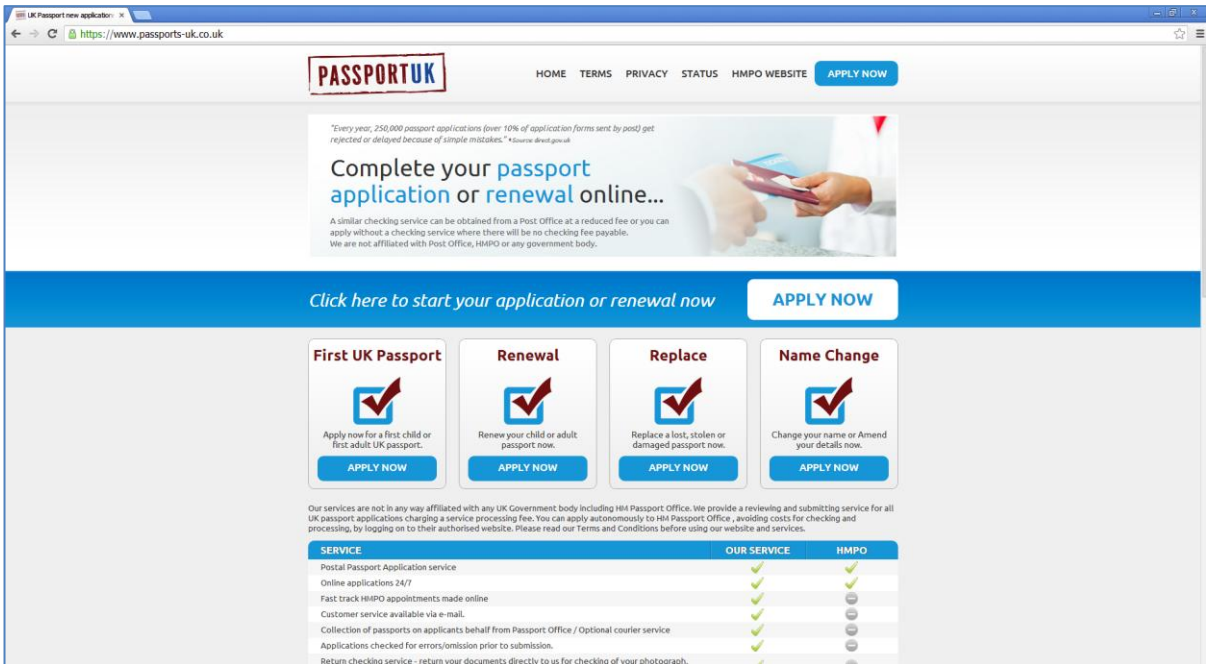
b) Example 2:  
Base: 501



Do you think this is...?  
SINGLE CODE

	%
...an official government website	74
...a commercial website offering a similar service	16
Don't know	10

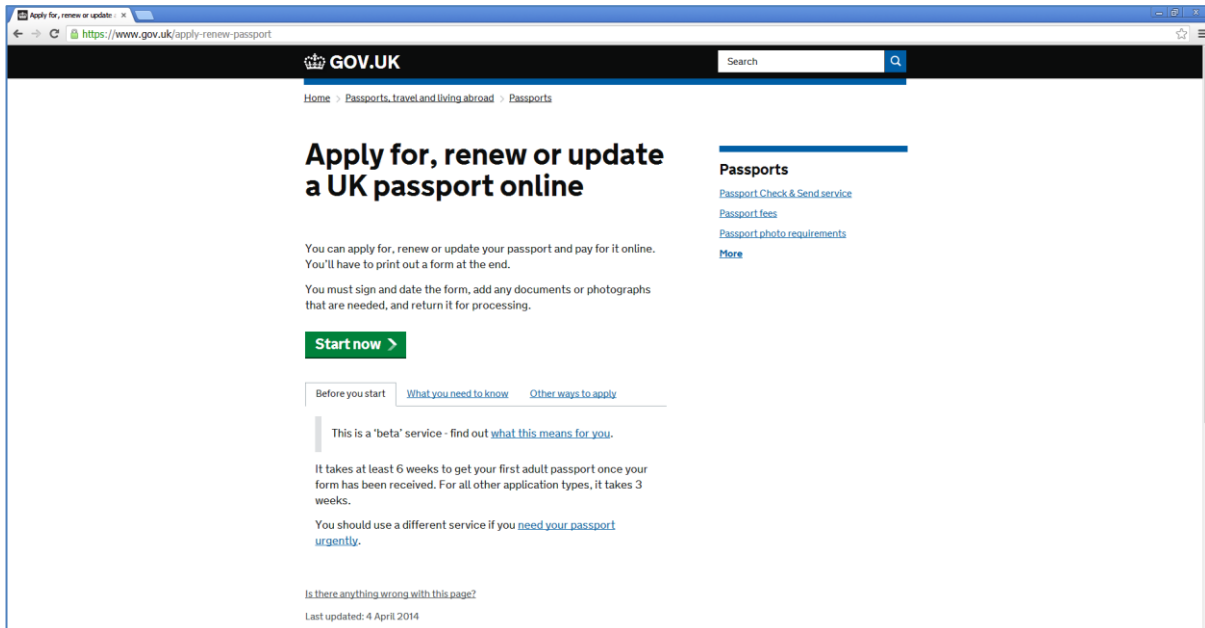
c) Example 3:  
Base: 502



Do you think this is...?  
SINGLE CODE

	%
...an official government website	9
...a commercial website offering a similar service	83
Don't know	8

d) Example 4:  
Base: 504

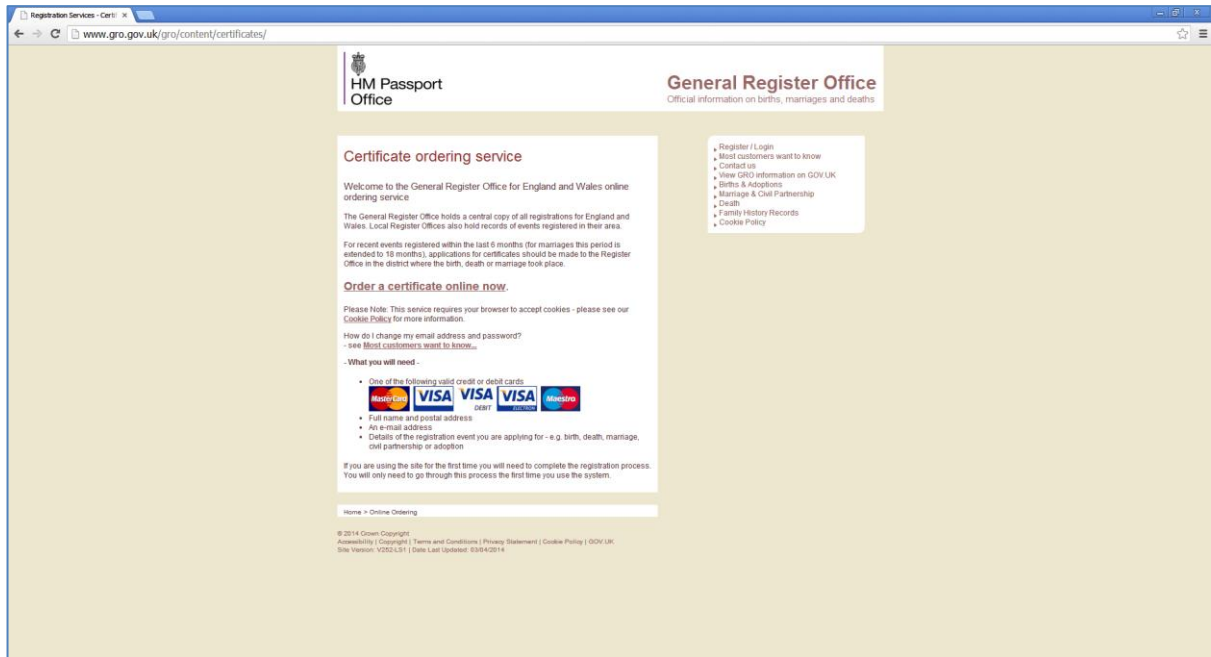


Do you think this is...?  
SINGLE CODE

	%
...an official government website	82
...a commercial website offering a similar service	11
Don't know	7



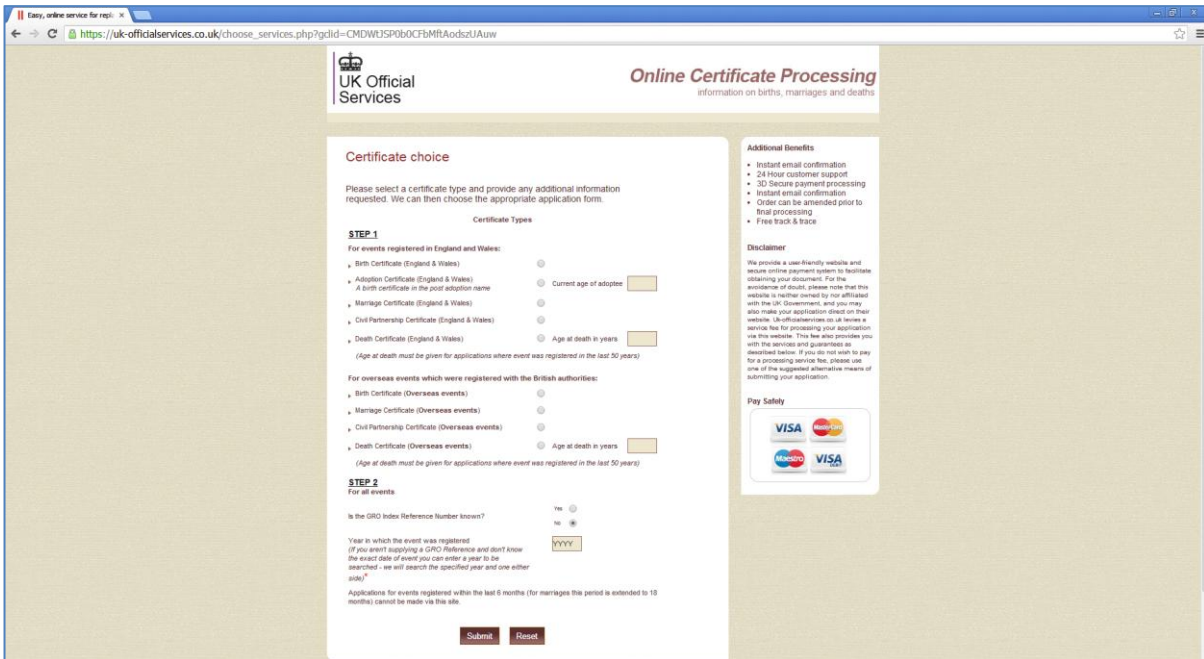
e) Example 5:  
Base: 503



Do you think this is...?  
SINGLE CODE

	%
...an official government website	67
...a commercial website offering a similar service	20
Don't know	13

f) Example 6:  
Base: 502



Do you think this is...?  
SINGLE CODE

	%
...an official government website	38
...a commercial website offering a similar service	50
Don't know	13

Q6. Overall, which, if any, of the following features were most important in helping you decide whether or not these were official government websites? Please choose up to three.

MULTICODE UP TO THREE

	%
Logo	44
Website address (URL)	41
Name of the website	39
Text describing the service	19
Disclaimer text	13
Price of services	15
General design or look and feel	35
Colour scheme	8
Photos/images used	10
Something else (please specify)	1
Don't know	6

## ASA Websites Depth interview discussion guide FINAL

Guide	Timings
<p><b><u>Key questions the research seeks to answer are:</u></b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• To what extent are consumers confused about the nature of these services? Do they think they are on an official Government site?</li> <li>• If yes, what is it about the websites that is misleading? What effect does wording and imagery have? What sorts of wording or imagery cause confusion? What sort is perceived as 'official'?</li> <li>• What are consumer perceptions and expectations of advertising for these websites (e.g. on search engine ads)?</li> <li>• Which, if any, websites cause less confusion? What is it that makes them clearer to understand?</li> <li>• How far, if at all, do consumers notice disclaimers?</li> </ul> <p><b><u>Introduction:</u></b></p> <p><i>AIMS: Intro for participant and interviewer. Set context of research into online behaviour without mentioning exact nature of research.</i></p> <p><b><u>Section 1: Scene setting and warm-up</u></b></p> <p><i>AIMS: To gauge levels of online activity and expectations of online world</i></p> <p><b><u>Section 2: Online searching Behaviour</u></b></p> <p><i>AIMS: To understand online searching habits</i></p>	<p><u>5 min</u></p> <p><u>5 mins</u></p> <p><u>15 min</u></p>

<p><b><u>Section 3: Experience of C sites</u></b>  <i>AIMS: To explore perceptions of copycat sites and extent to which people understand the nature of the site and service</i></p> <p><b><u>Section 4: Evaluating 'look and feel' of sites</u></b>  <i>AIMS: To explore similarities and differences between C sites and official government sites by using a compare and contrast exercise</i></p> <p><b><u>Section 5: Best practice activity</u></b>  <i>AIMS: To explore suggestions for best practice and develop a checklist of dos and don'ts for C sites (to ensure they are understood as C sites), for the regulator (to produce effective guidance for C sites) and for official government sites (to ensure people can distinguish an official and a non-official site)</i></p> <p><b><u>Round Up</u></b>  NB: C used throughout in case participant sees the guide</p>	<p><u>25 min</u></p> <p><u>20 min</u></p> <p><u>15 min</u></p> <p><u>5 min</u></p> <p><b><u>TOTAL: 90 min</u></b></p>
<p><b><u>Introduction</u></b>  Intro self and Ipsos MORI as indpt research company. Thank participants for taking part.</p> <p>Explain confidentiality and MRS code of conduct</p> <p>Permission to audio record</p> <p>Explain timings – 1.5 hours doing various tasks using the laptop and chatting.</p>	<p>5 min</p>

<p>Intro the project vaguely – ‘Today is about looking at websites and how you navigate and behave on a variety of sites – from shopping to government services and reading news to searching for holidays’</p> <p><b>Participant introductions:</b> First names, how much you use the internet, favourite site?</p> <p><b>Moderator note:</b> Don’t mention ASA and that we are looking at Csites.</p>	
<p><b>Section 1: Warm Up</b></p> <p><b>What do you use the internet for?</b></p> <p>Thinking about using the internet for personal use,...</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Social Media?</li><li>• Researching things/news</li><li>• Govt services</li><li>• Shopping – Groceries?</li><li>• Official forms/applications?</li><li>• What else?</li></ul> <p>- How much of your Christmas shopping did you do online?</p> <p>- Do you have a homepage? What? Why that?</p>	5 min

<p>Moderator – probe around questions to get a good idea of participant’s online literacy</p> <p>What do you find easy/ difficult to do online? Why? PROBE EXAMPLES</p>	
<p><b>Section 2: Searching Behaviour</b></p> <p><b>Moderator:</b> This section involves a variety of short tasks asking participant to search and find things on the internet. Use Google/Bing and ask them to search for the following things. Observe how easily these things were done, any mistakes/wrong turnings that were taken, how the participant searched for the things and follow task with a short chat about how they went about it. Try to avoid probing as they go along. But allow them to describe what they are doing if they volunteer it naturally.</p> <p>MODERATOR OBSERVE AND TAKE NOTES</p> <p>‘Take 2-3 minutes can you show me how you would use a search engine to.....’</p> <p>(Mod: don’t specify but we want people acting fairly quickly like they would at home – look to spend max ten mins searching 5 mins chatting after),</p> <p>(Mod note: Go as far as necessary to establish which site participant would def have used before moving on).</p> <p>SELECT 4-5 SITES</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• find a weather forecast for London</li></ul>	15 min

- find a weather forecast for Garberville, California, USA.
- find something to do in Central London this Friday
- apply for a passport
- buy the book 'Thinking Fast and Slow' by Daniel Kahneman
- buy congestion charge for London tomorrow
- find what music gigs are on in Liverpool next Saturday
- fill out a tax return
- Apply for a driving license
- Buy mobile phone insurance

Whilst searching Moderator observe and note the process and discuss for 5 minutes now:

**Following whole search activity**

**Tell me about what you just did**

**PROBES**

**How easy/difficult did you find it? Were some sites easier than others? Why?**

<p>'Can you tell me why you clicked that result'</p> <p>'What were you looking for in that particular search?'</p> <p>Do you think you were getting the best sites to find out what you wanted to know?</p> <p>Were the sites you were using official or unofficial?</p>	
<p><b><u>Section 3: Interpretation and understanding of C sites</u></b></p> <p><b>Moderator – section will be explored in more depth during eye-tracking interviews</b></p> <p>This section involves presenting participants with a mixture of sites – official and C – and covers a variety of services and 'quality' of C sites (i.e. those that look more and less official)</p> <p>Using the stimuli (Print outs/ websites provided) talk through participant's impressions....</p> <p>Tell me the first thing that comes into your mind when you see this site. Why?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• First impressions (quickly) – what do they notice first? Talk through their thought process.....</li></ul> <p>PROBES:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• What is the website for?</li><li>• Who runs or owns the website?</li><li>• Is the website well presented?</li><li>• Is the website clear?</li></ul>	20 min



<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Is the website official?</li> </ul> <p><b>MODERATOR:</b> When have sites on computer screen: 'now, imagine you are using this website. Talk me through your thoughts as you go through using it'. Trying to establish how well they notice the disclaimers/ what they think of the checklists etc.</p> <p>REPEAT WITH 4-5 SITES</p>	
<p><b><u>Section 4: Spot the difference – explicitly comparing and contrasting government sites with copycat sites</u></b></p> <p><i>Now I'm going to ask you to compare and contrast some specific examples. I want you to tell me everything that comes to mind – anything you like I don't like – find confusing/clear – remember there are no rights or wrongs</i></p> <p>TAKE THREE EXAMPLES OF A C SITE AND CORRESPONDING OFFICIAL SITE AND COMPARE AND CONTRAST</p> <p>ASK PARTICIPANT TO MAKE COMPARISONS ACROSS THEM ALL</p>	20 min
<p><b><u>Section 5: Best practice activity</u></b></p> <p><i>AIMS: Develop suggestions on best practice</i></p> <p><b>Moderator: We can give the game away now – put the participant in the shoes of the copycat website owners and then ASA the regulator....</b></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Imagine you are the owner of a legitimate business offering a service to assist with official applications/tax returns etc. In 5 minute can you draft a design for a website that fits the ideal guidelines to ensure that consumers are not misled.</li> </ol>	15 min

<p>2. Imagine you are the ASA, a regulatory body responsible to ensure consumers are not being misled by advertising and company claims. In 5 minutes can you make a checklist for companies to follow to ensure no-one is misled</p> <p><b>Moderator</b> Probe – how prominent would that have to be? How would you make sure it was that prominent? How would you make it clear which websites were official and which weren't?</p> <p>3. In 5 minutes, coming at it from 'the other side' (i.e. what can govt do?), create a checklist for how government sites can make sure that they are obviously the official site</p> <p><b>Moderator:</b> Probe – how could these measures be made as foolproof as possible?</p>	
<p><u>Wrap up:</u></p> <p>REQUEST TO REPEAT COMMENT MADE EARLIER IN SESSION (If participant said something that gave interesting perspective on an area:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>▪ You mentioned xxx earlier, can you please try to tell me about this again?</li></ul> <p>Thank and close. Administer incentive.</p>	5 min

## ASA Websites Eye-Tracking Discussion guide FINAL

Guide	Timings
<p><b><u>Key questions the research seeks to answer are:</u></b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• To what extent are consumers confused about the nature of these services? Do they think they are on an official Government site?</li> <li>• If not, what is it about the websites that is misleading? What effect does wording and imagery have? What sorts of wording or imagery cause confusion? What sort is perceived as 'official'?</li> <li>• What are consumer perceptions and expectations of advertising for these websites (e.g. on search engine ads)?</li> <li>• Which, if any, websites cause less confusion? What is it that makes them clearer to understand?</li> <li>• How far, if at all, do consumers notice disclaimers?</li> </ul> <p><b><u>Introduction</u></b></p> <p><b><u>(Section i): - DONE BEFORE ENTERING EYE-TRACKING ROOM</u></b></p> <p><i>AIMS: Intro for participant and interviewer. Set context of online without mentioning exact nature of research.</i></p> <p><b><u>Section ii: Warm up – DONE BEFORE ENTERING EYE-TRACKING ROOM</u></b></p> <p><i>AIMS: Set context of looking at online activity and behaviour</i></p> <p><b><u>Section 1: Searching behaviour</u></b></p> <p><i>AIMS: Establish common practice/habits in searching online and take notes to inform what questions to ask during playback interview</i></p>	<p></p> <p><u>5 min</u></p> <p><u>5 min</u></p> <p><u>15 min</u></p>

<p><b><u>Section 2: Interpretation and understanding of sites</u></b>  <i>AIMS: Observe participant engaging with government and c sites and take notes to inform what questions to ask during playback interview</i></p> <p><b><u>Section 3: Playback interview</u></b>  <i>AIMS: Using the footage from the eye-tracking, this interview allows for discussion on what the participant actually looked at (rather than what they say they looked at). Notes made earlier during sections 1 and 2 will be used to inform this.</i></p> <p><b><u>Round up</u></b></p>	<p><u>15 min</u></p> <p><u>20 min</u></p> <p><u>5 min</u></p> <p><u>TOTAL: 60 min</u></p>
<p><b><u>Introduction (i)- PRE-EYE-TRACKING SET UP</u></b>  Intro self and Ipsos MORI as independent research company. Thank participants for taking part.</p> <p>Explain confidentiality and MRS code of conduct</p> <p>Permission to audio record</p> <p>Explain timings – 1hour doing various tasks on a computer</p> <p>Intro the project vaguely – ‘Today is about looking at websites and how you use a variety of sites – from shopping to government services, reading news and searching for holidays’</p>	<p>5 min</p>

<p><b>Participant introductions:</b> First names, how much you use the internet, favourite site?</p> <p><b>Moderator note:</b> Don't mention ASA and that we are looking at copycat sites</p>	
<p><b><u>Section (ii): Warm up – PRE EYE TRACKING SET UP</u></b></p> <p><i>AIM: Set context of looking at online activity and behaviour</i></p> <p><b>Moderator:</b> Thinking about using the internet for personal use, do you use the internet for.....</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Social Media?</li> <li>• Researching things/news</li> <li>• Govt services</li> <li>• Shopping – Groceries? What else?</li> <li>• Official forms/applications?</li> </ul> <p>What is your homepage?</p> <p><b>Moderator – probe around questions to get a good idea of participant's online literacy – do they find anything more difficult online? Are some sites going to be more pertinent and relevant to participant?</b></p>	5 min
<p><b><u>Section 1: Searching behaviour</u></b></p> <p><i>AIMS: Establish common practice/habits in searching online and take notes to inform what questions to ask during playback interview</i></p> <p><b>MOD NOTE:</b> This section involves a series of short tasks asking participant to search and find things on the internet. Set up eye-tracking equipment and ask participant to use Google/Bing to search for the following things. Leave the room/sit away and observe how easily these things are done, any</p>	15-20 min

mistakes/wrong turnings that were taken, how the participant searched for the things and follow task with a short chat about how they went about it.

Let participant know you are not going to ask much as they do this, you are just going to watch and then ask questions at the end

Avoid asking questions to prevent participant turning to look at moderator as this will make it harder to get a true sense from the eye-tracking footage of what they would have focused on if they were at home (i.e. limit research effect as far as possible)

*I'd like you to spend the next 5-10 minutes just looking for a few different sorts of things*

Leave participant with list of what they should look for while

Choose 2 government services tasks and 2 'casual' tasks per participant from this list:

- find a weather forecast for London (Casual)
- find something to do in Central London this Friday (Casual)
- apply for a passport (Govt)
- buy congestion charge for London tomorrow (Govt)
- arrange a holiday in Cornwall (Casual)
- apply for a driving license (Govt)

Whilst searching Moderator observe and note the process – these notes should then inform what questions to ask during 'playback interview' at the end of the discussion and which parts of the video to play back to the participant

**Section 2: Interpretation and understanding of sites**

30 min

*AIMS: Observe participant engaging with government and c sites and take notes to inform what questions to ask during playback interview*

*Intro – Now I'd like you to look at some specific sites that offer government services. Some of these you might have just been to others you might have never seen before. I'd like you to imagine that you are trying to apply for the service that is being offered. If it feels completely irrelevant to you then we can change what site you're on. But don't worry if it is something you are a bit unfamiliar with, you don't need have any particular past experience of these sites to do this part of the interview.*

Give participant two websites to visit (take a pair of sites from the list below – one government site, one non)

Ask participant to spend time on the site as though they were going to make an application for a Visa, Passport, Congestion Charge payment etc.

Let participant know you are not going to ask much as they do this, you are just going to watch and then ask questions at the end

Avoid asking questions to prevent participant turning to look at moderator as this will make it harder to get a true sense from the eye-tracking footage of what they would have focused on if they were at home (i.e. limit research effect as far as possible)

*Sites to use (provided on bookmarks):*

[www.europeanhealthcard.org.uk](http://www.europeanhealthcard.org.uk) vs <https://www.ehic.org.uk/>

[www.driving-licence-application.co.uk](http://www.driving-licence-application.co.uk) vs <https://www.gov.uk/browse/driving/driving-licences>

[www.londoncongestion.com](http://www.londoncongestion.com) vs <http://www.tfl.gov.uk/modes/driving/congestion-charge>

[www.nationalinsurance.co.uk](http://www.nationalinsurance.co.uk) vs <https://www.gov.uk/apply-national-insurance-number>

[www.passports-uk.co.uk](http://www.passports-uk.co.uk) vs <https://www.gov.uk/apply-renew-passport>

*Repeat for second pair of websites (N.B. Try to cover at least 2 sets of sites per participant and ensure the full range is covered across the*

*interviews)*

**MOD NOTE:** observe participant's eye-tracking footage and make notes to inform playback discussion

**Section 3: Playback interview**

*AIMS: Using the footage from the eye-tracking, this interview allows for discussion on what the participant actually looked at (rather than what they say they looked at). Notes made earlier during sections 1 and 2 will be used to inform this.*

USING LAPTOP, PLAY BACK RELEVANT FOOTAGE FROM SECTION 1 and use probes below to discuss participant's general online searching behaviour/use of search engines/search engine ads etc.

PROBES:

At this point we can see you were focusing on XXX, can you remember what you were thinking at that point?

Why were you paying attention to that in particular?

What were you looking for?

Can you tell me why you clicked that result?

PLAY BACK RELEVANT FOOTAGE FROM SECTION 2 and use probes below to discuss participant's perceptions of government and c sites

- Tell me what your first thoughts were when you arrived on here.

PROBES:



<p>At this point we can see you were focusing on XXX, can you remember what you were thinking at that point?</p> <p>Why were you paying attention to that in particular?</p> <p>What were you looking for?</p> <p>Can you tell me why you clicked that result?</p> <p>PROBES:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Would you use this site?</li><li>• What is the website for?</li><li>• Who runs or owns the website?</li><li>• Is the website well presented?</li><li>• Is the website clear?</li><li>• Is the website official?</li><li>• What makes it look good/bad</li></ul>	
<p><b>Wrap up:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>▪ Final thoughts</li></ul> <p>MOD NOTE: clarify what is / is not a government site if participant still unclear by end of interview.</p> <p>Thank and close. Administer incentive.</p>	5 min

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### **About Ipsos MORI's Social Research Institute**

The Social Research Institute works closely with national government, local public services and the not-for-profit sector. Its 200 research staff focus on public service and policy issues. Each has expertise in a particular part of the public sector, ensuring we have a detailed understanding of specific sectors and policy challenges. This, combined with our methodological and communications expertise, ensures that our research makes a difference for decision makers and communities.