Socio-political Influencers

Who they are and why they matter

Bobby Duffy
Anna Pierce

Contents

Ipsos MORI

1. Executive Summary

> *…Over the next 10 years, Government should take further steps to empower citizens to shape services around them. Specifically, this means providing the tools, the information and the mechanisms necessary for citizens to exercise effective influence over services so that they change to meet their needs.*
>
> HM Government, Policy Review[1]

This report contains the key findings of a research study carried out by Ipsos MORI's Participation Unit to explore theories of influence and consequently to identify a more meaningful Socio-political Influencer group. It brings together our wealth of data on political activism and places it in the broader context of literature exploring the role of influence in the private and public sectors, in order to understand how a small group of people may have a vital impact on public policy.

The need to understand influencers

As private sector products and services are becoming more personalised, consumers are becoming more demanding not only of the private sector, but also of public services. Where previously a one-size-fits-all approach could have been acceptable, there is now general agreement across all political parties that choice, voice and empowerment are vital elements of successful public services.

At the same time, there has been a decline in trust in and deference to experts and traditional institutions – for example, our trends show a significant drop in the belief that the government acts in the people's interest and that it uses information honestly.   In parallel with this, we have seen a huge increase in the sources of information available to people on social and political issues, making it more difficult to decide which to believe.

It is perhaps not surprising then that we have seen a rise in the importance of personal contact and recommendations in people's decisions and views; for example, the proportion identifying word-of-mouth as their best source of ideas and information has increased from 67% in 1977 to 92% in 2005.

In this context, it is vital for public services and those designing public policy to understand the mechanisms by which people influence others.   And this is likely to become ever more important, as government considers how to use a more diverse mix of approaches to encourage "good" and discourage "bad" behaviours. This is already seen in the growing use of "social marketing", which uses traditional communications approaches and direct incentives and sanctions – but also the influence of family, friends and other personal contacts to encourage behaviour or culture change.

---

[1] HM Government, Policy Review, (2007), *Building on Progress: Public Services*

Ipsos MORI

Traditionally, influence in the public sector has been characterised mainly as efforts to influence 'upwards' (i.e. attempts to impact on those in power), and the emphasis has been strongly on formal mechanisms (letter writing, protest groups, joining political parties etc) rather than informal mechanisms of influence such as discussing issues with friends.

In contrast, in the private sector it has been recognised that using informal opportunities to influence opinion can be vital in the success or failure of a new product or service – for example, "buzz" and "viral" marketing are now widely accepted elements of communications strategies. As the public sector starts to encourage the public to take advantage of the choice available to them, this paper suggests that there are a group of people – the Socio-political Influencers – who may provide clues to how the wider public will react and future trends.

Who are the Socio-political influencers?

Our definition of Socio-political Influencers has drawn on a wide range of studies in the private and public sector, and is based on four main characteristics:

- **they are gregarious/outgoing:** in order to influence widely an influential individual will have to share their views with many people and not be shy about expressing an opinion;

- **they are part of a number of networks:** equally, the evidence suggests that attempts to influence are far more effective when the Influencer is known to those being influenced. Therefore, the number of networks an Influencer belongs to and the number of friends and acquaintances an Influencer has will both impact on how far their message spreads;

- **they are well-informed/have expertise:** they also need to be seen as a source of expertise on a subject if their views are to be seen as credible;

- **they have a high level of activism:** they are also much more likely to be involved in more traditional, formal approaches to influencing social and political issues – being involved in local/other groups, writing to politicians etc.

Our definition also requires them to think they have influenced others on social or political issues – which is clearly based only on their own perception, but has been shown in other studies to be an important indicator of actual influence. Overall, around **8%** are Socio-political Influencers – one in twelve of the population.

Demographically, the Socio-political Influencers are spread fairly evenly throughout the population: they tend to be slightly older and educated to a higher level than the public as a whole, but not greatly so. Their incomes are slightly higher than average and they are more likely to be professionals rather than manual workers – but again the differences are not that large (which is similar to the patterns seen in other work on influence in the US).

Ipsos MORI

Interestingly the Socio-political Influencers also have very similar political views to the general public as a whole. They are considerably more likely to vote, but their votes are cast in more or less the same proportions as the public as a whole. However, they have more confidence in Government policy, both in terms of its impact on public services and on the British economy – which is encouraging for the Government, given this group are better informed than average.

They are, however, no more convinced about the benefits of choice in public services – or even their own ability to make well informed choices. This is worrying – if this confident, informed group are concerned about making choices on public services it is likely that others will struggle a great deal more.

Our Socio-political Influencers do display some significantly different behaviours to the general public. They are, for example, significantly more likely to be members of Public and Patient Involvement Forums, Tenants Associations, Parent and Teacher Associations. They are also much more likely to have taken part in focus groups and other forms of consultation – another way in which they will exert their influence.

What use are socio-political influencers?

There are three main reasons it is vital for government and public services to understand Influencers.

Firstly, of course we need to understand their views as they are likely to influence others. For example, 52% of them say that they have changed someone's mind about an important issue compared with 20% among the general public. And, even more markedly, 44% say someone has used a different public service or complained about a service because of something they've said, compared with 14% among the general public. They are the people who start conversations and express strong and committed views from a well informed perspective – understanding how best to communicate with this group could be vital to getting messages out to the wider public.

Secondly, their relatively high knowledge and understanding of the issues means they could provide some insight into how policy is likely to be received by the public once they are given more information. They will therefore be a vital source of information for those developing policy and approaches to service provision – in a similar way to how "leading-edge" consumers or "early adopters" are used in the private sector.

Finally, although no better than the public at estimating current public opinion, Socio-political Influencers were much better at anticipating *future* public opinion when asked to predict satisfaction with the Government in six months time. Although more work needs to be done to establish the predictive power of influencers, instinctively it makes sense that this group of people, with their high levels of knowledge and access to a wide network of people are able to not only influence, but also to anticipate public opinion. A very simple example of this was seen in the 1990s, where the proportion of letters MPs received about immigration more than tripled between 1990 and 2000 – while our regular tracking surveys showed that hardly anyone in the general population was raising it as an important issue. Public concern about immigration has shot up since 2000, so that it is now consistently one of the top issues in the

Ipsos MORI

country – something that we may have been able to predict quicker if we had been monitoring these more active, influential groups.

But there is much more to do to understand and verify the importance of this new group. We have now developed a panel of over 4,000 Socio-political Influencers with whom we will be conducting further research over the coming months.

Bobby Duffy, Deputy Managing Director

Anna Pierce, Associate Director

2. Introduction

This report contains the key findings of a research study carried out by Ipsos MORI's Participation Unit. The purpose of the research was to explore theories of influence and consequently to identify a more meaningful Socio-political Influencer group.

The paper examines in detail the following areas:

- What is influence?

- Why is influence important?

- Are activists the most influential people in the UK?

- How do activists and influencers differ from the general public and each other?

- When should we consult Socio-political Influencers?

Methodology

Ipsos MORI undertook two phases of research for this study:

- Desk research to refine the scope of the project and gather the findings of existing research on the subject;

- Quantitative research using an online access panel.

To place the findings from the quantitative phase in context, a review of research conducted to date, both by Ipsos MORI and other organisations, was carried out. These findings are referenced throughout the paper.

The quantitative research involved an online survey of 2,008 members of the public in Great Britain. Quotas were set on age, gender, social class, work status, tenure, region and number of cars in household. Weights were applied to the data to help ensure it is as representative as possible of the general public. However, online approaches to general public studies need to be interpreted with some caution, as a significant proportion of the population still do not have access to the internet (around 37%[2]) and therefore cannot be included in the study. Further, online access panels (such as that used here) draw only from those who have signed up, which again is likely to introduce biases into the available

---

[2] Data from 'Individuals accessing the Internet' – National Statistics Omnibus Survey: proportion of adults who have accessed the internet in the previous 3 months (data from Feb 2006)

Ipsos MORI

sample. While quota controls and weighting can help with these issues, there are still likely to be biases in the sample achieved on variables not included in quotas and weights.

However, these limitations are acceptable in an exploratory study such as this, where further work is planned to verify the findings. Also, there is evidence that the groups we are particularly interested in (activists and Socio-political Influencers) are more likely to be online than the general public as a whole[3] and also are more likely to sign up to things, give their opinions and so on. Therefore, we believe an access panel is a justifiable and appropriate way to identify and reach the target audiences.

The fieldwork was between Friday 19th May and Wednesday 24th May 2006.

A note on definitions

In the literature on influence a number of terms are used frequently but with various meanings. In particular the term 'opinion leader' has been used in two distinct forms: the term was introduced by Katz and Lazarsfeld[4] to refer to the people that they believe act as interpreters of the mass media and communicators to the general public.

> *Opinion Leaders are not necessarily traditional leaders in society, such as politicians and clergy and the like (although they can be). Rather, they are perceived experts in particular domains.[5]*

Griswold[6] adds that "opinion leaders seem evenly distributed among the social, economical and education levels within their community…"

In more recent usage, the term opinion leader has also been applied more explicitly to just include the more traditional leaders referred to above. In this report where we refer to Opinion Leaders we are referring to the wider definition which includes non-traditional leaders unless otherwise specified.

Additionally, the term Influentials has been used by Roper for a number of years. The Influentials appear to sit somewhere between the two definitions of opinion leadership. While there are no explicit conditions expecting an influential to work in a position of authority, it has been widely noted that they are more often from higher social classes, with higher than average incomes and education levels.

---

[3] 82% of Roper's 'Influentials' have internet access

[4] Katz, E and Lazarsfeld, P.., (1955), *Personal Influence, The Part Played by People in the Flow of Mass Communications*. Free Press, Glencoe, IL

[5] *Katz and Lazarsfeld and the Two-Step flow,* www.ciadvertising.org

[6] Griswold, S., (1999), *The Two-Step Flow of Communication Theory,* http://www.ciadvertising.org/studies/student/99_spring/theory/griswold/twostep.html

3. What is Influence?

> *"…the mass do not now take their opinions from dignitaries in Church or State, from ostensible leaders, or from books. Their thinking is done for them by men much like themselves, addressing them or speaking in their name, on the spur of the moment, through the newspapers."*
>
> JS Mill[7]

The concept of influence is not new - but it is constantly evolving. That is why we decided to bring together current thinking on influence from a wide range of sources and data from a new Ipsos MORI study, in order to understand the implications for Government and the public sector.

Given increased choice, a decline in deference and trust and the increasing use of word-of-mouth communications approaches, it is vital for public services and those designing public policy to understand the mechanisms by which people influence others. And this is likely to become ever more important, as government considers how to use a more diverse mix of approaches to encourage "good" and discourage "bad" behaviours. This is already happening in the growing use of "social marketing" approaches, which combine traditional communications approaches with direct incentives and sanctions – but also use the influence of friends, families and other personal contacts.

Traditionally, influence in the public sector has been characterised mainly as efforts to influence 'upwards' (i.e. attempts to impact on those in power), and the emphasis has been strongly on formal mechanisms (letter writing, protest groups, joining political parties etc) rather than informal mechanisms of influence such as discussing issues with friends.

In this chapter we take a more systematic look at this, and discuss a number of the theoretical considerations when creating a model of influence, focussing on two main approaches - spheres and axes of influence. These factors can be combined in different ways to achieve different profiles of influence depending on the issue.

---

[7] Mill, J.S., (1859), *On Liberty*

Ipsos MORI

3.1. Axes of influence

Practically speaking, there are two possible axes of influence: vertical and horizontal. Furthermore, vertical influence can be split into two key subsets – upwards and downwards influence, as shown below.
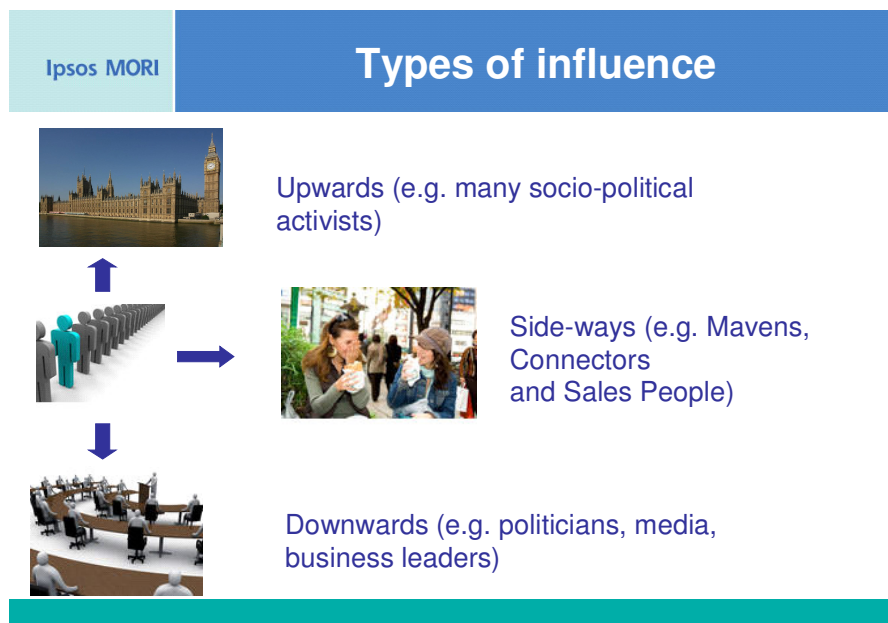
3.2. Vertical Influence (Upwards)

Ipsos MORI have been tracking this type of influence in the UK for over 30 years through a number of items included in our socio-political activism question and scale.

In order to be classified as a political activist a respondent must tick at least five of the following activities.

Which, if any of the things on this list have you done in the last two or three years? Please tick all the things that apply.

- Presented my views to a local councillor or MP
- Written a letter to an editor
- Urged someone outside my family to vote
- Urged someone to get in touch with a local councillor or MP
- Made a speech before an organised group
- Been an officer of an organisation or club
- Stood for public office
- Taken an active part in a political campaign
- Helped on fund raising drives
- Voted in last general election
(- Signed a petition)*

* Signed a petition is included in the list that is given to respondents so that they 'have something to tick' but is not included in the definition of activist.

Of the activities above, the majority are examples of vertical influence. Some are horizontal - e.g. urging someone to vote or contact their MP - although in these two examples the focus is on encouraging others to engage in vertical influence.

Models such as Keller and Berry's Influentials[8] also focus predominantly on vertical influence: taking part in activities designed to impact on the attitudes or behaviours of political decision-makers.

These 'upward' influencers can be considered influential because they take action to try to bring about the outcome they desire. However, there is relatively limited evidence about whether or not this is the best way to achieve change. Views of what mechanisms for upwards influence are effective vary depending on perspective. In particular, we know councillors say the most effective way to influence is through meetings with them (over 90% agree)[9] - perhaps unsurprising as this is the official way to contact councillors and is also the one likely to cause them least disruption. Far fewer councillors agreed that more disruptive mechanisms, such as demonstrations (26% agree), occupying council buildings (10% agree) and disrupting council meetings (6% agree) are effective.
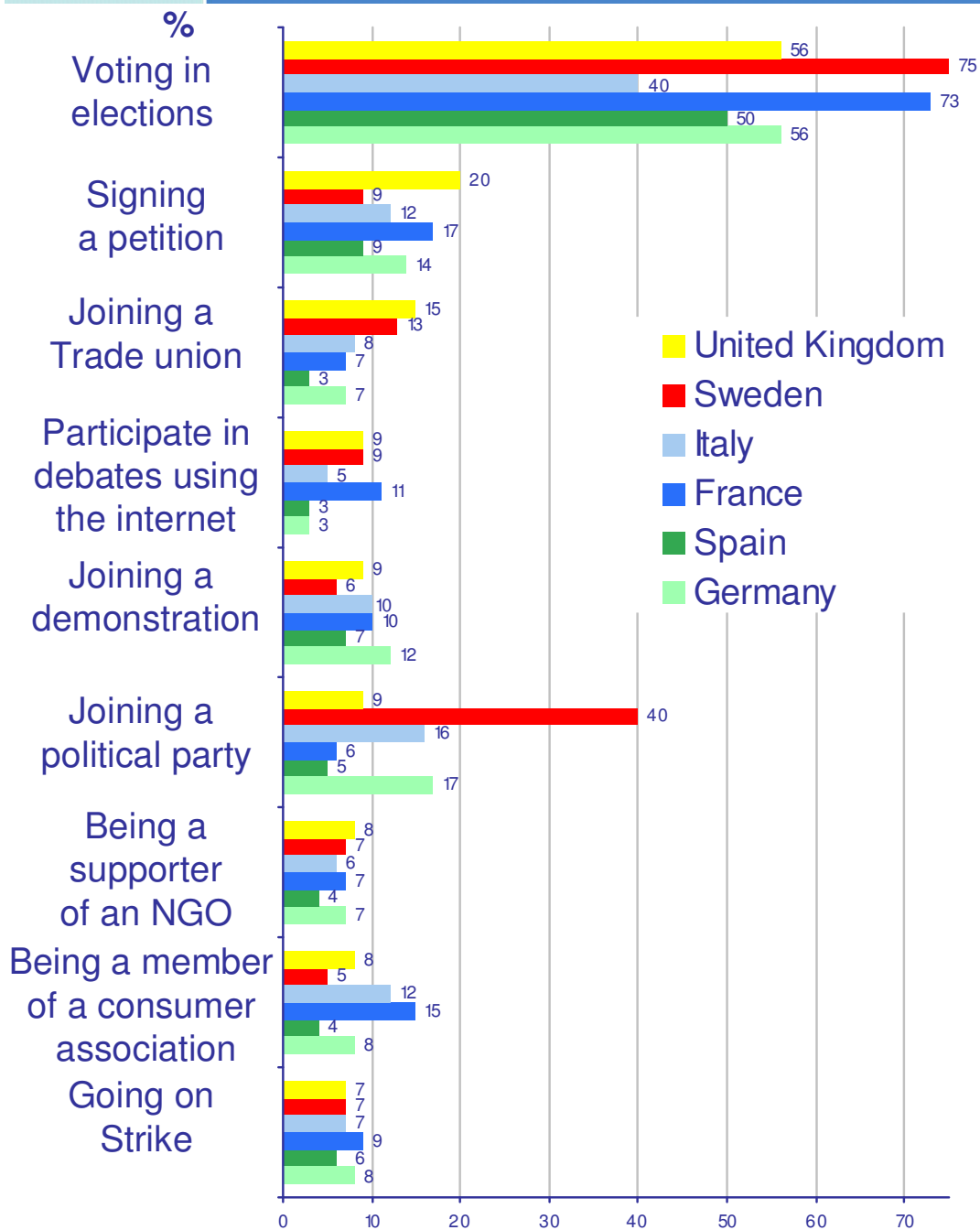
When the public are asked a similar question[10], the most frequently cited way to ensure one's voice is heard is perceived to be elections (56%): although people are generally not sure about the effectiveness of voting this is still seen to be significantly more effective than other actions. The second most commonly cited mechanism is signing petitions although it is only mentioned by one in five people (20%). The public view appears therefore to favour those mechanisms that are most readily accessible to them, with joining trade unions or political parties only being seen as effective by approximately one in ten people apiece. As can be seen in the chart below, people in the UK are more likely than other European countries to think petitions and joining Trade Unions are a good way to get their voice heard, and are significantly less likely than those in France and Sweden to believe that they exert influence by voting.

---

[8] Keller, E., Berry, J., (2003), *The Influentials,* The Free Press: New York

[9] Copus, C. (2006) The Local Political Elite: Developing perspectives on public engagement in politics, PSA Annual Conference Paper: Reading. Accessed online 25.05.06 http://www.psa.ac.uk/2006/pps/Copus1.pdf

[10] EuroBarometer – The Future of Europe, May 2006

Ipsos MORI

Which two of the following do you think are the best ways of ensuring one's voice is heard by decision-makers?

%

Voting in elections
- United Kingdom: 56
- Sweden: 75
- Italy: 40
- France: 73
- Spain: 50
- Germany: 56

Signing a petition
- United Kingdom: 20
- Sweden: 9
- Italy: 12
- France: 17
- Spain: 9
- Germany: 14

Joining a Trade union
- United Kingdom: 15
- Sweden: 13
- Italy: 8
- France: 7
- Spain: 3
- Germany: 7

Participate in debates using the internet
- United Kingdom: 9
- Sweden: 9
- Italy: 5
- France: 11
- Spain: 3
- Germany: 3

Joining a demonstration
- United Kingdom: 9
- Sweden: 6
- Italy: 10
- France: 10
- Spain: 7
- Germany: 12

Joining a political party
- United Kingdom: 9
- Sweden: 40
- Italy: 16
- France: 6
- Spain: 5
- Germany: 17

Being a supporter of an NGO
- United Kingdom: 8
- Sweden: 7
- Italy: 6
- France: 7
- Spain: 4
- Germany: 7

Being a member of a consumer association
- United Kingdom: 8
- Sweden: 5
- Italy: 12
- France: 15
- Spain: 4
- Germany: 8

Going on Strike
- United Kingdom: 7
- Sweden: 7
- Italy: 7
- France: 9
- Spain: 6
- Germany: 8

Legend:
- United Kingdom
- Sweden
- Italy
- France
- Spain
- Germany

Base: European Social Survey 2006

Ipsos MORI

10

While the effectiveness of upwards influence through protest is debated, as we saw above with the councillor data, it is also interesting to look at the impact such protests may have on the general public as a whole. Three of the four major dips in satisfaction with Government over the past 20 years are closely linked with national protests on issues. Although it is difficult to establish causation, as can be seen in the chart below, in two of these instances (the Fuel Crisis protests[11] in 2000 and the Iraq war protests[12] in 2003) the protests came just before the lowest point in satisfaction, suggesting that those planning and leading the protests effectively impacted on public satisfaction. However, looking further back, in 1990 the poll tax riots[13] followed rather than preceded the lowest point in satisfaction – suggesting, as we might expect, that the relationship between protest and satisfaction runs both ways.
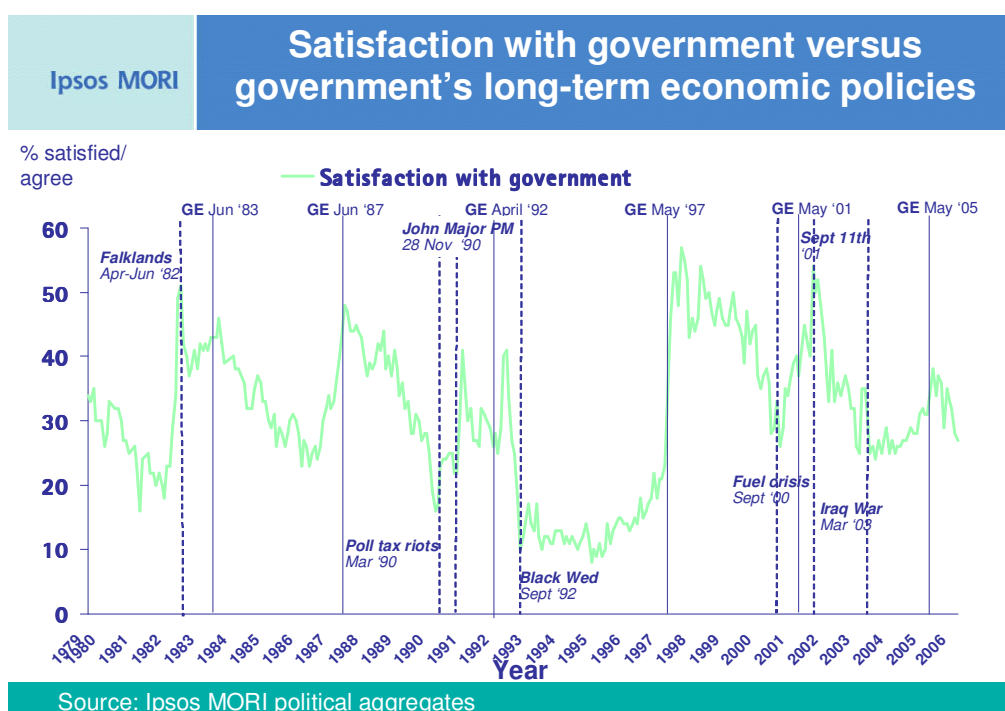
3.3. Vertical Influence (Downwards)

Influencing downwards is generally from those in positions of power or what are often called "opinion leaders". At Ipsos MORI we have been researching these people for a number of years under our Key Audience Research (KAR) programme. Key Audiences can include politicians, the media, business leaders, NGOs and so on.

Clearly these 'Opinion Leaders' will often have direct control over decisions being made as, by definition, they hold senior roles in organisations or the community. However, what we are also interested in here is their influence over opinion – in particular, how the positions that they hold enable them to impact on public opinion. This impact is clear in the case of some figures, but less obvious for others.

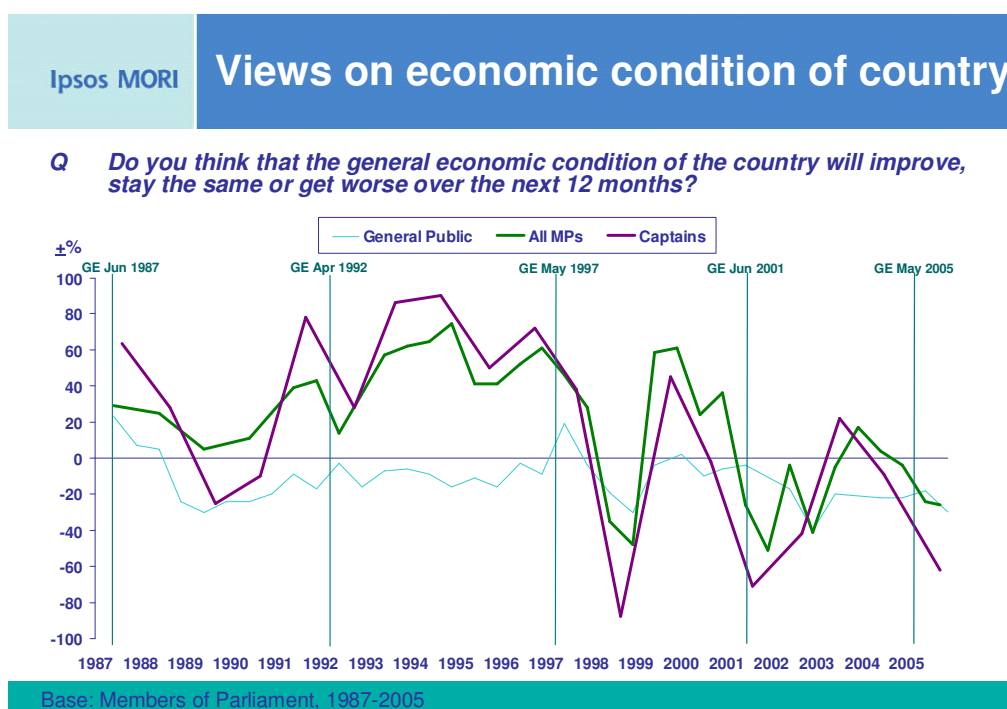
[11] Fuel Crisis – early Sept 00: Low point of satisfaction – 21-26 Sept 00
[12] Largest Iraq war protest – 15 Feb 03: Low point of satisfaction – 20-25 Feb
[13] Poll Tax Riots – 31 March 90: Low point of satisfaction – 15-20 March 90

Ipsos MORI

We have been tracking the views of these audiences on a number of key issues since the early 80s and our reports – The Changing Views of Big Business[14] and most recently, The Reputation of Business in Westminster[15] look at how the views of these important audiences have changed over time.

The views of Captains of Industry and MPs are often similar to, but more exaggerated than, the views of the public as a whole – they tend to be more extreme in their views either positive or negative. Also, there is some evidence to suggest that, particularly on economic measures, Captains tend to peak in their optimism or pessimism slightly before both MPs and the general public. This could be because they are better informed and therefore ahead of the curve, or could be because they are creating the curve

Ipsos MORI **Views on economic condition of country**

Q **Do you think that the general economic condition of the country will improve, stay the same or get worse over the next 12 months?**

Base: Members of Parliament, 1987-2005

However, it is now generally believed that the power these audiences have over public opinion is in decline, widely referred to as the 'decline in deference'[16] (see next section for more information). But it is important not to overplay this - there are many examples of significant influence. For example, despite low levels of trust, people do recognise that the media have huge influence on their views – as the chart below shows, although the media is the least trusted source of information on exams, it is the most frequently mentioned influencer of people's opinions on this subject.

[14] Bollen, A. and Lee, J. (2003), *The Changing Views of Big Business: an analysis of MORI's Captains of Industry Trend Data 1981 – 2003,* Ipsos MORI, London
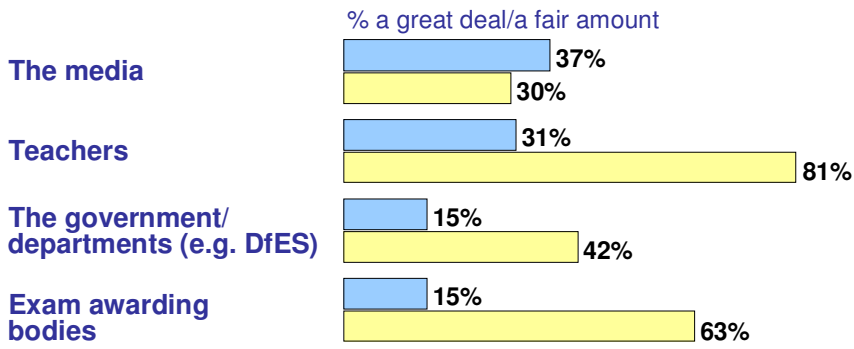
[15] Bollen, A and Emes, C. (2006), *The Reputaiton of Bueiness in Westminster: an analysis of Ipsos MORI's MPs Trend Data 1976 – 2005,* Ipsos MORI, London

[16] Duffy, B., Downing, P. and Skinner, G., (2003), *Exploring Trust in Public Institutions,* Ipsos MORI report for Audit Commission

Ipsos MORI

Trust and influence on exams

Q *How much, if at all, do you trust each as a source of information about exams?*

Q *What or who has had some influence on your opinion about the standards of exams today?*
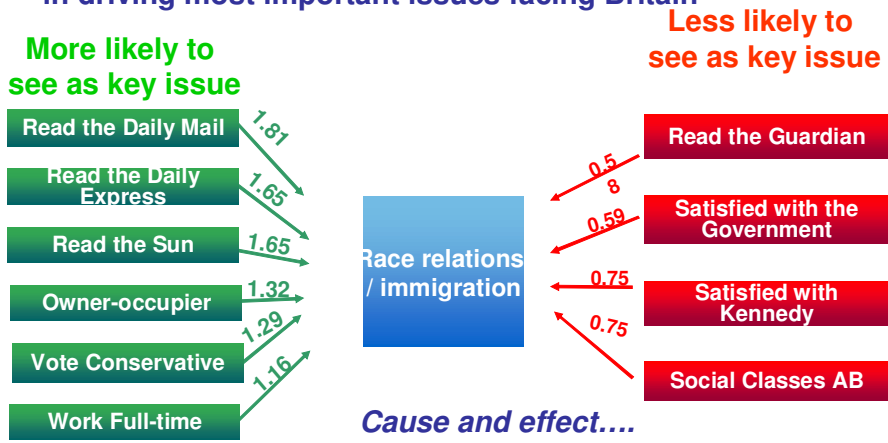
■ Influence   ■ Trust

% a great deal/a fair amount

The media
37%
30%

Teachers
31%
81%

The government/ departments (e.g. DfES)
15%
42%

Exam awarding bodies
15%
63%

What newspaper you read also appears to have an important impact on views – for example, it is the best predictor of whether think race/immigration is one of most important issues in country. Of course it is difficult to prove cause and effect (as people clearly choose papers that reflect their already formed views), but longitudinal data looking at how views develop do suggest that readers of papers which focus on immigration as an issue do seem to be ahead of the curve in rising concerns[17].

Ipsos MORI

Race relations/immigration serious issue

■ **Newspaper Readership report – role of newspapers in driving most important issues facing Britain**

More likely to see as key issue

Less likely to see as key issue

Read the Daily Mail — 1.81
Read the Daily Express — 1.65
Read the Sun — 1.65
Owner-occupier — 1.32
Vote Conservative — 1.29
Work Full-time — 1.16

Race relations / immigration

Read the Guardian — 0.58
Satisfied with the Government — 0.59
Satisfied with Kennedy — 0.75
Social Classes AB — 0.75

Cause and effect….

---

[17] Duffy, B. and Rowden, L. (2005), *You are what you read? How newspaper readership is related to views,* Ipsos MORI, London

Ipsos MORI

This gives us relatively strong evidence for a point that is widely accepted: the information people have or are given about a subject can impact on their views. It is worth noting at this point that the perceived source of the information is seen to be very important in this process. In particular, if people are presented with a fact that is surprising and challenges their opinion, and it comes from sources that are seen to be trustworthy, then they are more likely to be willing to change their mind.

A good example of the importance of the source of information is an experiment that Ipsos MORI conducted with Prospect magazine where we showed that the public are significantly more likely to change their opinion on whether public services are improving if they are told the data they are being given is from an independent source, rather than from the Government[18]. Interestingly, in qualitative research we went on to show that the public are not necessarily that discerning about who the 'independent' source is and why they are publishing the information i.e. they would generally place similar levels of faith in data from the Kings Fund or MigrationWatch (despite the latter having more of a campaigning agenda).

Therefore, although some argue there has been a decline in the impact of 'downwards' influence it remains significant. But, rather than being considered in isolation it is becoming increasingly important to monitor how it interacts with horizontal influences.

---

[18] Quoted in Duffy, B., Hall, S. and Williams, M., (2005), *Who do you believe? Trust in Government Information,* MORI Social Research Institute

3.4. Horizontal Influence

Finally there are models such as Gladwell's[19] 'Mavens', 'Connectors' and 'Sales People' which are focussed on horizontal influence (i.e. influence over peers). The issue here is not direct influence over policy or policy-makers but rather influence over the attitudes and behaviours of individuals.

Gladwell's model is based on three underlying tenets:

- The law of the few: there are a few people in society who are responsible for identifying and spreading behavioural 'epidemics'.

- The stickiness factor: the speed and distance at which the epidemic spreads depends not only on the messengers but also on the 'stickiness' of the message (i.e. whether it is memorable, relevant, etc).

- The power of context: the environment in which the message is being spread will also impact on its take-up.

Here we are most interested in the law of the few i.e. the people who influence other people. 'Mavens' are the information gatherers – they are the kind of people who read consumer magazines such as 'Which?' avidly, who always know what the best product in a particular market is, and where to get it at the best price. 'Connectors' are the people who bring people together – they are always networking and not only have access to a wide range of contacts but also take pleasure in actively linking people together. Finally, 'Sales-People' are the people who are able to persuade people around to their point of view.

Much of the work on horizontal influence is centred on more commercial applications such as the implications for "Word of Mouth" advertising in the private sector[20]. However, there are potentially equally valuable lessons to be learned in the public sector, most obviously in the areas of reputation and social marketing,[21] and more generally how to bring about culture or behaviour change.

Our work for a number of public sector organisations has shown how vital advocacy is to the public sector– particularly as advertising is not as prevalent as in the private sector and PR and communications are arguably less developed – consequently what people say is key to how an organisation is perceived.

---

[19] Gladwell, M., (2002), *The Tipping Point: How Little Things Can Make a Big Difference,* Back Bay Books

[20] Keller, E., (2006), *Is WOM Just a Buzz?*, presented at the Market Research Society Annual Conference;

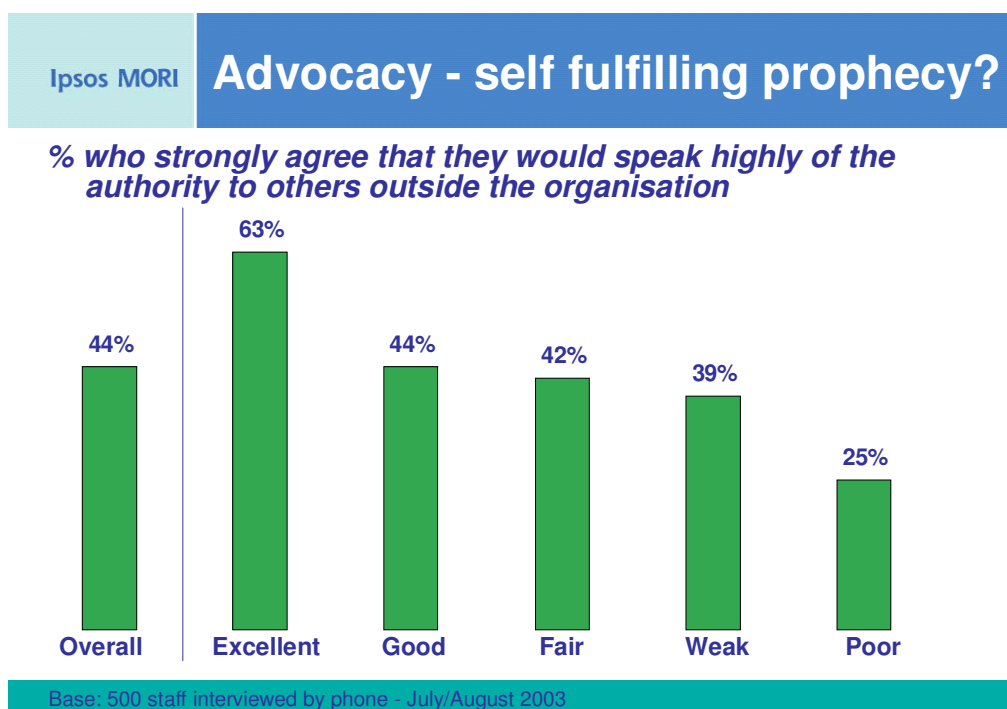Marsden, P., (2006), *Measuring the Success of Word of Mouth,* presented at the Market Research Society Annual Conference;

Jaffe, J., (2003), *Viral Marketing,* www.imediaconnection.com ;

Frost, R., (2004), *Gaining Influence Through Word of Mouth,* www.brandchannel.com

[21] See for example Breeze, J., Rose, J., (forthcoming), *The Impact of Information Provision on Behaviour Change,* EnergyWatch

Evidence of the importance of staff advocacy appears in lots of our public sector work, for example, in our work for local councils. As can be seen in the chart below, the percentage of staff who would speak highly of their authority to people outside of the organisation is significantly higher in councils rated Excellent than in those rated Poor. Again, it is hard to distinguish cause and effect here but based on qualitative evidence on the importance of what people working for public sector organisations say, we believe staff views have a significant effect.

Ipsos MORI **Advocacy - self fulfilling prophecy?**

% who strongly agree that they would speak highly of the authority to others outside the organisation

Overall	Excellent	Good	Fair	Weak	Poor
44%	63%	44%	42%	39%	25%

Base: 500 staff interviewed by phone - July/August 2003

The concept of horizontal influence overlaps with theories about social networks and group theory, which centre on how the groups we belong to influence our actions. For example, in an experiment to understand how membership of groups influences voting behaviour, Krebs[22] found that group membership can have a large impact on turnout, and can also, to a lesser extent, impact on which candidate is supported. A particularly interesting finding was that:

> *"Unless they are public figures, strangers do not influence. Instead of having strangers call voters, or knock on doors, the campaign should find well-connected supporters and have them go out into their clusters [small groups of people with similar views, opinions, sentiments etc]."*[23]

Krebs particularly focuses on voting behaviour: his main point is that if a group member expresses an intention to act (i.e. vote) to their group this will encourage other group members to act (vote) also, particularly if intending to act becomes a majority view. In terms of influence this means that if a person is a member of many groups and within those groups

---

[22] Krebs, V., (2004), *It's the Conversations, Stupid! The Link between Social Interation and Political Choice.* Accessed on 26.05.06 http://www.extremedemocracy.com/chapters/Chapter%20Nine-Krebs.pdf
[23] Ibid p.9

he/she expresses an intention to act, this is likely to lead to behaviour change in all the groups they are a member of.

However, Krebs also argues that the way that people act as a result of the call to action is less clear cut. In particular, which candidate each group member votes for will be largely dependent on personal preference; as long as at least one other group member has expressed an intention to vote for that candidate. In terms of influence, again, if a person supporting a minority candidate is a member of a number of groups, and if they express their intention to vote for that candidate in their groups Krebs' work suggests it could lead to an increased number of votes for the candidate.

The implication for horizontal influencers – who we will call Influencers - is that by being members of different groups and by advocating a particular position this can potentially make that viewpoint acceptable in the group. Extrapolating from these findings, it seems that Influencers are able to impact not only on the opinions but also on the behaviour of others. This is particularly important if Influencers are to play a role in social marketing.

It is important to understand different levels and directions of influence – these theories help to do this. Later in this paper we will look in more detail at how the different levels and directions interact and at the types of people who have these different types of influence.

3.5. Spheres of Influence

There are numerous articles, papers and discussions about how far an influential person's influence extends. In particular to what extent an influencer is only influential with respect to a particular topic, product or issue, or to what extent generalist Influencers have influence across a spectrum.

In most instances, it is concluded that people do specialise in particular areas of influence, rather than being influential across the board. The reason for specialisms can range from having a particular interest in an issue or product and therefore knowing it well, actually owning a product or using a service to working in a related field and consequently having professional knowledge. Blades and Phillips[24] identified six reasons for purchasers to talk to Influencers:

- They know about (category): Category Expert

- They know where to look to find out about (category): Researcher

- I trust their decision: Role Model

- They own that (brand): Owner/advocate

---

[24] Blades, F., Phillips, S. , (2005), *Decision Watch UK – how a new methodology focussing on the purchase decision helped uncover a segmentation of Catalysts to harness the power of word-of-mouth,* presented at the Market Research Society Annual Conference

Ipsos MORI

- They work in the (category): Professional

- They understand what's right for me: Reassurer

Three of these are overtly connected with the service or product (category expert, owner/advocate and professional), and a further two of which are likely to have a connection (researcher and role model).

While conceived of for the private sector, all these can be transferred to the public sector and are important to understand if looking at the drivers of reputation of public services or government. They are also potentially important in understanding how decisions about which services to use are made, and are becoming increasingly important in public services given the current focus of the choice agenda.

There are many other examples of segmentations of Influencers by area of interest, including the Ipsos MORI consumer Influencers' segmentation which is due to be released later this year[25].

However, the fact that Influencers tend to have experience or knowledge of the categories in which they are influential does not necessarily prohibit them having influence in multiple categories. For example, Keller and Berry[26] have shown that their influentials (which are similar to our 'political activists') are approached for advice and opinion on Government and politics more than the public (55% compared to 16%), but are also significantly more likely to be approached for advice and opinion on a wide range of topics from restaurants (54% compared to 31%) to how to invest (35% compared to 15%), to how to handle children and teenagers (43% and 36% compared to 26% and 18% respectively).

However, what Keller and Barry do not go on to do is explore whether there are people who are even more likely to be consulted on each of these 'specialist' matters than the generalist political activists. As discussed later in this paper, in the UK it appears that although political activists are indeed more influential than the public as a whole, our new Socio-political Influencers are more influential still.

One area where data are currently lacking is the spheres of influence *within* the public sector. For example, it would be plausible to assume that parents are more influential than non-parents in discussions on schools and education, and equally that most people will have specialist interests within the public sector rather than being interested in everything. This is as vital to understand in the public sector as it is in the private sector – just as there is little point sending technology Influencers direct mail about gardening products it is equally likely that not all public sector Influencers will embrace each and every public sector message.

---

[25] Knight, R., Dawkins, J. (forthcoming) *Influence in corporate reputation*, Ipsos MORI
[26] Keller, E., Berry, J., (2003), *The Influentials,* The Free Press: New York

4. Why is influence important?

As outlined in the previous section, there are a number of reasons why influence is important to a wide range of organisations – from large multinational companies to local authorities and Government departments.

We believe there are two key trends in society that are making it increasingly important for public sector organisations to follow the private sector in seeking out and talking to 'Socio-political Influencers' – namely:

- The decline in deference;

- The rise of word of mouth.

In this section we explore both these reasons in turn and discuss the implications for public sector organisations.

4.1. The decline in deference

The decline in deference has been widely discussed in recent years[27]. The theory states that increasingly authority figures such as politicians, scientists and other 'experts' are being portrayed as fallible. As a result, the public views information from these sources in a different light, and are less likely to take it on face value and are consequently turning to other sources of information in order to make decisions.

For example, in the Power Enquiry (an independent review into democracy in Britain) one of the conclusions was that there has been a rise of new citizens to which the democratic system must adjust. In particular it states

> *The 'cultural revolution' experienced by Western nations in the sixties partly came about because of the gradual shift to a post-industrial economy. This revolution enhanced the emphasis on individual self-worth and self-determination and greatly reduced popular deference towards established authority. Indeed, it could be argued that the decline of deference and the 'cultural revolution' have created a citizen who automatically exhibits scepticism or even cynicism towards those in authority.[28]*

[27] Duffy, B., Hall, S. and Williams, M., (2005), *Who do you believe? Trust in Government Information,* MORI Social Research Institute
Duffy, B., Downing, P. and Skinner, G., (2003), *Exploring Trust in Public Institutions,* Ipsos MORI report for Audit Commission
[28] (2006), *Power to the People,* Published by The Power Enquiry, http://www.powerinquiry.org/report/

Ipsos MORI

It is interesting that despite the recognised 'decline in deference' the generic 'trustworthiness' of individuals in different professions has remained relatively consistent since the early '80s when MORI started collecting data on trust. The chart below shows some of the key audiences and the % of the population who trust them to tell the truth. Politicians generally and Government Ministers have consistently been the least trusted professions, along with journalists.
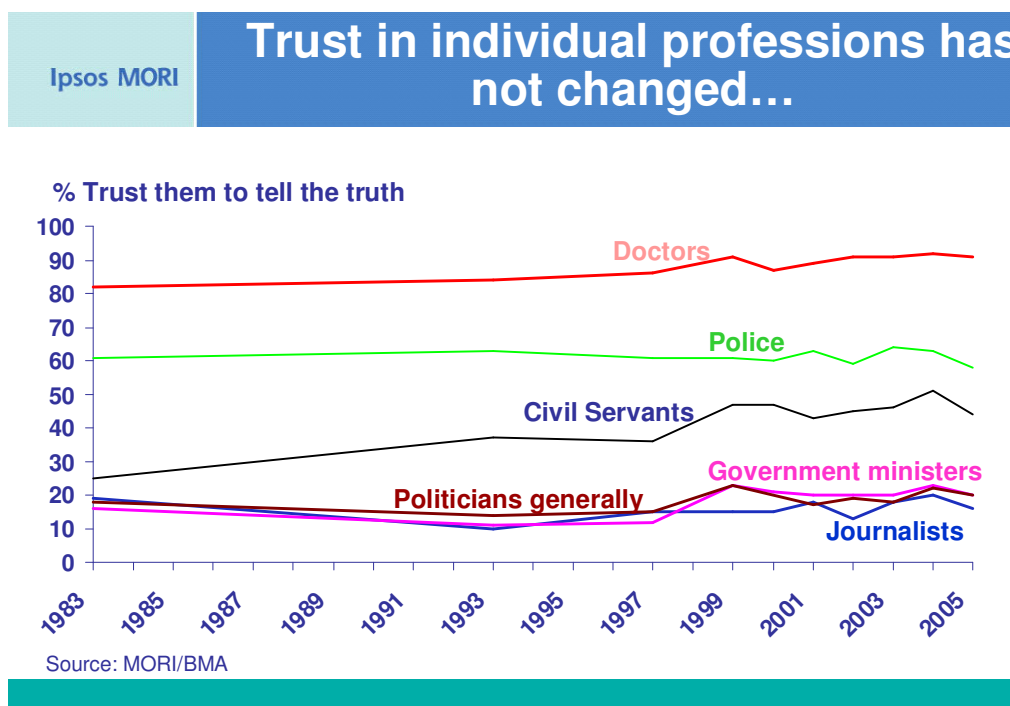
However, when probing trust with more specific questions both qualitatively and quantitatively, the evidence shows that there is indeed a decline in trust with respect to particular aspects. For example, trust in the government to put the interests of country before interests of party most or all of the time has fallen dramatically from around two in five (38% in 1986) to just one in (18% in 2003).

The assertion that trust in official sources is currently low is further corroborated by a recent ONS study[29], which showed that over two thirds of the general public (68%) believe that official figures are changed to support whatever argument people want them to and a similar proportion (59%) disagree that the government uses official figures honestly when talking about its policies. Increasingly in qualitative research we are hearing quotes such as the one shown below which exemplifies many people's views on official information sources.

> *Everything – there's spin on it. Even when you don't think it has got spin, it's got spin on it.*

---

[29] Jones, F., Kelly, M., (2004), *Omnibus Survey: initial findings on public confidence in Official Statistics,* Office of National Statistics

This evidence of a decline in trust of official sources, linked with the wider acceptance of a decline in deference leads to the conclusion that people are more likely to want to make their own decisions than to defer to the opinion of people in senior positions. In particular, it has been shown that they are more likely to turn to 'informed' friends or family when making important decisions, as we discuss in more detail below.

4.2. The rise of word of mouth

The two-step model of influence[30], whereby opinion leaders (i.e. close personal friends or family who pass on and distil information from the media) act as an intermediary between the media and the mass population, was developed in the 1940s and '50s. Therefore, even before the 'decline in deference' the role of 'downwards' Influencers was only part of the story.

There are many examples which are commonly cited as proof of the decline in deference and rise of word of mouth. One example cited is the public response to the MMR vaccine. In 1998 Dr Andrew Wakefield released findings that suggested the combined measles mumps and rubella vaccine led to an increased chance of autism or bowel disease in young children. This evidence was discounted by many other studies but a notable decrease in the uptake of the MMR vaccine was recorded. This has been attributed not only to Dr Wakefield's research (which should only have carried the same weight as any other report) but also to the power of word of mouth – because parents would heed anecdotal evidence from friends and family about the medical implications of giving children the MMR vaccine and then, despite strong advice to the contrary from almost all leading doctors and government officials, decided not to give their child the vaccine[31].

This rise in reliance on word-of-mouth is clearly not only a public sector phenomenon. For example, Keller[32] has shown that since 1977 there has been a significant increase in the proportion of people identifying word-of-mouth as their best source of ideas and information (67% in 1977, 92% in 2005). This has led to the development of marketing techniques designed to encourage word of mouth about particular products or services. There are many methods which can be considered to fall into this category. Some of the most common ones are discussed in the table below.

---

[30] Katz, E and Lazarsfeld, P.., (1955), *Personal Influence, The Part Played by People in the Flow of Mass Communications.* Free Press, Glencoe, IL

[31] Trayner, G. (2006) *Open Source Thinking: From Passive Consumers to Active Creators,* MRS Conference Paper presented at Research 2006

[32] Keller, E., (2005), *The State of WOM, 2005, The Consumer Perspective,* presented to the Word of Mouth Marketing Association, March 2005

Ipsos MORI

Buzz Marketing:	Using high-profile entertainment or news to get people to talk about your brand.
Viral Marketing:	Creating entertaining or informative messages that are designed to be passed along in an exponential fashion, often electronically or by email.
Community Marketing:	Forming or supporting niche communities that are likely to share interests about the brand (such as user groups, fan clubs, and discussion forums); providing tools, content, and information to support those communities.
Grassroots Marketing:	Organizing and motivating volunteers to engage in personal or local outreach.
Product Seeding:	Placing the right product into the right hands at the right time, providing information or samples to influential individuals.
Cause Marketing:	Supporting social causes to earn respect and support from people who feel strongly about the cause.
Conversation Creation:	Interesting or fun advertising, emails, catch phrases, entertainment, or promotions designed to start word of mouth activity.
Brand Blogging:	Creating blogs and participating in the blogosphere, in the spirit of open, transparent communications; sharing information of value that the blog community may talk about.
Referral Programs:	Creating tools that enable satisfied customers to refer their friends.
Evangelist Marketing:	Cultivating evangelists, advocates, or volunteers who are encouraged to take a leadership role in actively spreading the word on your behalf.
Influencer Marketing:	Identifying key communities and opinion leaders who are likely to talk about products and have the ability to influence the opinions of others.

Source: WOMMA[33]

Clearly influencers and evangelists are specifically mentioned in the last couple of these methods, but in practice influencers have an important role in the success of most of these methods.

---

[33] Word of Mouth Marketing Association http://www.womma.org/wom101b.htm

There are a number of strong reasons why influencers are likely to have a greater impact on public opinion than the media alone. Griswold[34] synopsises four of Lazersfeld's characteristics of personal contact that give the theory more validity:

- **Non-purposiveness/ casualness**: Because conversations about social and political issues can arise spontaneously they are more likely to be listened to than a media report which someone would need to actively make an effort to read or listen to.

- **Flexibility to counter resistance**: In conversation the influencer can make their case and give counter-arguments to any resistance faced – in the case of the media the reader can choose not to read arguments that counter their personal views.

- **Trust:** Personal contact carries more trust than the media – because the influencer is able to establish a rapport and the influenced will be able to read their body language to judge their honesty.

- **Persuasion without conviction:** Whereas the media would be expected to make a strong case in order to persuade someone to take a particular point of view, if an influencer builds a rapport with an individual they may accept their opinion without a full comprehension of the issues.

We propose that it is important for the public sector to know what the people who are being turned to by the public are saying, and what is influencing their opinions. How do they find the evidence with which to support their views and what can be done to provide them with evidence that they are more inclined to believe? It is by targeting this subset of the public, and by providing information in the formats that appeal most to them that the challenges arising from the decline in deference can start to be overcome.

---

[34] Griswold, S., (1999), *The Two-Step Flow of Communication Theory,* http://www.ciadvertising.org/studies/student/99_spring/theory/griswold/twostep.html

Ipsos MORI

4.3. Why are Socio-political Influencers important to the public sector?

There are a number of reasons why Influencers are important. In this section we concentrate particularly on their importance to public sector, although of course their value in the private sector is also widely recognised.

Clearly the main reason for understanding this audience is that they are the ones who are likely to be influencing wider public opinion. They are the people who are most likely to start discussions about the public sector, give others advice on services and also the people most likely get involved in formal structures designed to enable public involvement. As such, Influencers, have always played an important role in shaping public opinion although they have not always explicitly been recognised as doing so.

It is also the case that given the increasing focus by the UK government on both Choice and Voice mechanisms, understanding the Influencer audience is becoming even more important.

Influencers are generally happy to give advice and given their propensity to be well read and keep themselves informed they are often viewed as a trusted source of information. Consequently, as the Choice agenda is rolled out, and an increasing number of people are given the opportunity to make decisions about the way in which they utilise public services, the Influencers are likely to play a vital role in distilling information and acting as a trusted advisor to those who are less au fait with the choices that they have.

Equally, voice mechanisms are likely to be significantly affected by the impact of Socio-political Influencers. By their nature, influencers are the most likely to put themselves forward to be involved in such mechanisms, particularly those such as resident's committees and Patient and Public Involvement Forums which are formal in nature and require an ongoing commitment. This makes it particularly important not only to understand the views of Influencers and how they form them, but also to understand how views of the general public link to those of influencers, so that the value of such mechanisms as ways to represent the 'public' viewpoint can be fully understood.

Finally, we are increasingly seeing public sector organisations recognising the value of achieving and maintaining a strong, positive reputation, and by understanding the views of influencers, it becomes possible to understand the source of the views of the public as a whole[35]. Influencers are likely to have predictive qualities: borrowing from the theories of the Early Adopter and Early Majority, it is relatively likely that people with influence will be the 'trend-setters' in all environments. In the social sector, an example of this would be Influencers identifying issues before they register with the general public.

There is some evidence to support this latter theory. In particular, we have been monitoring what MPs say they have received in their post-bags since the early '80s. The survey shows what the people who write to their MPs think are the biggest issues of the day – by the fact

---

[35] Gladwell, M., (2002), *The Tipping Point: How Little Things Can Make a Big Difference,* Back Bay Books; Keller, E., Berry, J., (2003), *The Influentials,* The Free Press: New York

that they have taken the time to write we can assume that the majority of people writing will be influencers or activists.

As can be seen in the chart below, this active group were increasingly talking to their MPs about immigration as an issue significantly before the wider population started raising it as one of the major issues facing the UK.[36] In particular, between 1988 and 1998 there was a 32 percentage point increase in MPs registering this as an issue while the public's level of concern was unchanged. It seems that it was not until 2000 that the wider public caught on to it as an issue and concern increased sharply. Of course, this data is MP's reporting what people are writing to them about. Therefore it goes through their own filter of things that they think are important at the time. Also it does raise questions about the actual levels of influence of this particular letter writing sub-set of influencers – as it took years for public opinion to catch up.

MP's post bags appear to pre-empt wider public opinion

Ipsos MORI

Q   Which of the subjects on this list, if any, do you receive most letters about in your postbag, or receive most approaches about from individuals in clinics or other ways?

Immigration/Race relations - MPs' Postbags   Immigration/Race relations - General Public

Base: Members of Parliament, 1987-2005
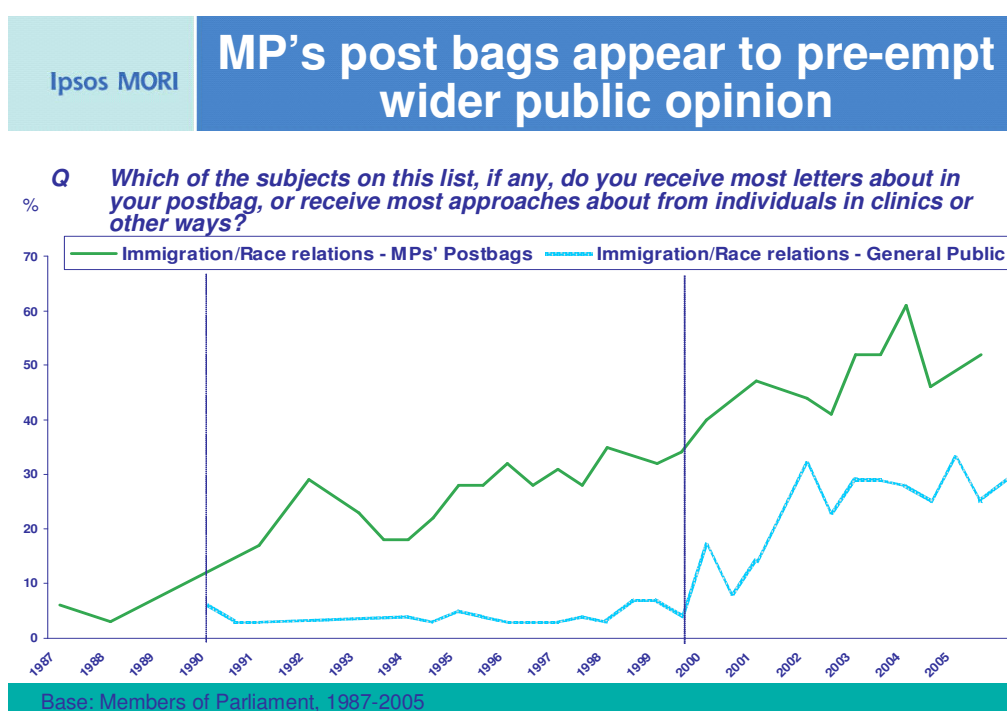
But still, it does suggest that monitoring the views of this group could have important predictive power for more general concerns. However, we do need to be cautious. In particular, this trend is not seen nearly as clearly in the data on other key issues, perhaps because they have all been in the public eye for much longer (e.g. education, health and crime) and therefore we do not have data on them as 'emerging issues'.

---

[36] Emes, C. (forthcoming) *The Reputation of Business in Westminster,* Ipsos MORI

Ipsos MORI

5. So how do we define influence?

As explained above there is a range of attributes which a person is required to possess in order to be considered a Socio-political Influencer. As explained earlier, Ipsos MORI socio-political activists are typified by their attempts to exert political change through a variety of political behaviours. The Influentials, as described by Keller and Barry[37] are identified in a similar way. We believe they are useful but only give us a partial picture – in particular, the political activism scale is rather old-fashioned and while it is still important we also need to consider influence more broadly.

We therefore wanted to explore to what extent political activists fare on other measures of influence drawn from across public and private sector theories. In particular, the political activism measures focus largely on formal mechanisms and attempts to influence upwards. Here we are more interested in the influence that individuals have over their peers.

It is generally agreed that influential people come from a range of backgrounds, are not necessarily differentiated by age or gender or any other demographic characteristics. What does differentiate them is:

- **Being gregarious/outgoing:** the requirement for being gregarious and outgoing stems from the expectation that in order to influence widely an influential individual will have to share their views with many people and not be shy about expressing an opinion.

- **Being part of a number of networks:** Equally, the evidence suggests that attempts to influence are far more effective when the Influencer is known to the 'influencee'. Therefore, the number of networks an Influencer belongs to and the number of friends and acquaintances an Influencer has will both impact on how far their message spreads.

- **Being well-read/having expertise:** Finally, there is a requirement for them to be well-read and be seen as a source of expertise on a subject if their views are to be seen as credible.

A further trait associated with particularly with 'early adopters'[38], is having a higher propensity to take risks. In particular, the act of choosing to buy a product or service before it has come into common usage is seen to be risky behaviour. While this is relatively easy to monitor in the private sector, risk-taking is apparently less relevant when thinking about the public sector. However, we would argue that this is not necessarily the case. In fact, there is a large element of risk in being a socio-political influencer – the risk of voicing an opinion which it transpires is disagreeable to the people you express it to. Therefore, in the context of interpersonal relationships, Socio-political Influencers can be considered risk-takers,

---

[37] Keller, E., Berry, J., (2003), *The Influentials,* The Free Press: New York

[38] Crellin, M., Ware, R., (2002), *Identifying 'Early Adopters' Internationally, Using Three Dimensions,* European Society for Opinion and Marketing Research

Ipsos MORI

particularly as they are willing to openly voice opinions on new subjects and discuss the opinions on existing topics.

5.1. Measuring influence

Based on the above, we have developed an aggregate measure of influence - in order to be considered influential a person must satisfy **all** of the following:

- would start at least one type of socio-political conversation

- frequently influences horizontally (i.e. friends, family and colleagues)

- accesses information through a broad range of media

- member of high number of networks

This model has been designed to encompass the various attributes discussed above namely: gregariousness, being part of multiple networks and being well-informed.

We added into our model a measure of how frequently they feel they influence friends, family and colleagues. Although on the surface this could seem circular we believe that it is useful. After all, it is conceivable that a person may start conversations that falter before they get very far, access information through a wide range of media but not fully understand, interpret or remember it or be able to use it persuasively, and could be a member of many networks but not fully integrate into any. Therefore, it is important to also have a self-assessed measure of horizontal influence in order to help ensure that the person is having an impact on the people they interact with.

However, if this is indeed the case then why not just use the measure for self-identified horizontal influence? Again the answer lies in the fact that although you may feel like you influence friends frequently you may only have a limited number of friends, be influencing them with ungrounded opinions which others would not necessarily find persuasive and the opinion may never spread outside of a close circle of family and friends.

5.2. Limitations to this approach

Clearly the approach above has some limitations. In particular, this method does not allow for objective verification that these people actually are influential. In particular, people may over-state their influence, or may not always realise they have influenced and consequently we may underestimate the influence of some, and overestimate the influence of others.

Research has shown that it is not always the case that a person will realise that they have influenced a decision or opinion. For example, the person they were speaking to may previously not have had an opinion on the topic or may not have expressed it, in which case the activist may never realise they had influenced opinion. Qualitative evidence from Blades

Ipsos MORI

and Phillips[39] which followed the train of influence from a purchase decision to its roots showed that the original trigger did not necessarily realise that they were impacting on others. For example, when a new car purchase led an Influencer to tell their colleague all about the benefits of the car they were unaware that this would then be passed on to someone else who would eventually buy a similar car, partly inspired by the Influencer's glowing review – even though they never met directly.

The most obvious alternative to our proposed methodology would be a two-step process of asking people to refer us to someone who has recently influenced their opinion and surveying those who we are referred to. This would clearly overcome the problems of self-defined influence and it would be possible to use the information we gained from the referral process to estimate each participant's actual level of influence on views or behaviour. However, such a methodology would be very labour intensive, and therefore is not appropriate for a quantitative survey. And in any case, even this approach will not provide a full picture, as in many cases influence may be exerted without the person being influenced recognising it.

As both methods therefore have their limitations we have chosen the methodology discussed above.

5.3. Influencers and activists

When we look at the model of influence described above against the original political activists the results are quite surprising. Despite activists scoring more highly than the general public on all of the measures of influence, they are not necessarily in the top quartiles of these measures or do not consistently come in the top half of respondents and therefore do not fit into our Influencer category. The chart below shows how Influencers and activists overlap. Influencers who are not activists are approximately 8% of the UK population, and activists who are not Influencers are 6% of the population. Two per cent of the population are both Influencers and activists.

In order to find the most influential members of the UK general public (who we call the Socio-political Influencers) we therefore need to develop an aggregate measure which considers both activist and Influencer behaviour. In order to be a socio-political influencer a person must engage in both horizontal and vertical influencing behaviours: they can either be an Influencer who engages in activist behaviour, or an activist who also exerts horizontal influence. However, rather than just allow the 2% of the population who fulfil all the criteria we wanted 'softer' definitions of activism and influence, so that we did not exclude those who are very influential either upwards or horizontally but only have some impact on the other dimension.

The resultant group of Socio-political Influencers are approximately 8% of the population.

---

[39] Blades, F., Phillips, S. , (2005), *Decision Watch UK – how a new methodology focussing on the purchase decision helped uncover a segmentation of Catalysts to harness the power of word-of-mouth,* presented at the Market Research Society Annual Conference

Ipsos MORI

6. Who are the Socio-political Influencers?

In this section we explore in more detail who the Socio-political Influencers are – in particular we look at their demographics and then look at how they fare on a number of measures of influence related to the different measures discussed in the previous chapter, namely gregariousness, part of a number of networks and being well-read or having expertise.

Looking in more detail at the three expectations for influence there is evidence to suggest that activists are more influential than the public as a whole, but that they are not as influential as our new Socio-political Influencer group.

6.1. Demographics

As the table below shows, in most instances the demographics of the Socio-political Influencers are more like Activists than the public. Although, whereas activists tend to be older than average, the age distribution of Socio-political Influencers is broadly similar to that of the population as a whole (apart from being slightly less likely to be aged under 34).

With regard to the other demographics – gender, education, income, SEG and likelihood to vote Socio-political Influencers are very similar to activists and differ significantly from the public. In particular, they tend to be better educated, older and are more likely to be male. Unsurprisingly, they are also significantly more likely to say they are certain to vote than the public as a whole.

Interestingly, although Socio-political Influencers are more likely to willingly express an opinion on how they would vote in an election tomorrow and are less likely to be undecided, the party they would choose is not significantly different from that of the general public (as we will discuss in more detail in the next section).

Ipsos MORI

Demographics of public, activists and Influencers			
	Activist	**Socio-political influencers**	**General Public**
Base: All respondents	*(197)*	*(188)*	*(2008)*
	%	*%*	*%*
Age [40]			
15 – 24 years	4	9	16
25 – 34 years	8	11	16
35 – 44 years	20	25	19
45 – 54 years	15	22	16
55 – 64 years	18	11	14
65 years +	35	23	20
Education			
No qualifications	6	4	10
GCSE or equivalent	17	21	36
A Level or equivalent	30	33	24
BA/BSc or equivalent	35	30	22
Post Graduate study	12	13	8
Gender			
Male	59	59	48
Female	41	42	52
Income (excl refused)			
Less than £7,500	9	9	17
£7,500 - 13,499	15	16	20
£13,500 - 24,499	31	30	31
£25,000 – 49,999	36	35	26
£50,000+	9	10	6
Socio-Economic Group			
A	5	6	3
B	32	30	23
C1	35	36	30
C2	14	12	21
D	14	14	23
E	2	2	2
Intention to vote			
Certain not to vote (1)	4	5	7
Unlikely to vote (2 – 5)	5	7	11
Likely to vote (6 – 9)	15	16	24
Certain to vote (10)	74	72	51

Source: Ipsos MORI

---

[40] NB over the 30 years MORI has been collecting data on activists they have generally been older than the population as a whole. However 35% over 65 is particularly high and may be partly attributable to the online methodology which will only reach older people who have embraced the internet.

Recent research by Nisbet[41] used a similar series of activities to look at the traits of activists in different European countries. Their findings were mostly similar to those above – that in the UK activism is positively correlated with age and education. These findings are also similar to those of Keller and Berry[42] with respect to American 'Influentials' who are identified using a similar political activist scale. However, their evidence did not suggest a significant difference in gender, whereas the data above suggests activists are slightly more likely to be male.

This demographic of activists in particular is to some extent is similar to the characteristics of 'complainers' identified by Crosier[43]. His research suggests that of the people who complain to the Advertising Standards Authority (ASA) *the most over-represented groups… comprise older, well educated, well off career managers of professionals.*

6.2. Gregariousness

The first measure of influence we are using is being gregarious and outgoing. This is because these tend to be the personality traits associated with both being willing to voice an opinion and creating the situations in which to do so. We constructed two key measures for this, in particular, whether a person likes to stand out in a crowd and whether they enjoy meeting new people. As can be seen in the table below Socio-political Influencers rate themselves significantly higher than both activists and the general public.

Please indicate to what extent you agree or disagree with the following statements…	Activist	Socio-political influencer	General Public
Base: All respondents	*(197)*	*(188)*	*(2008)*
	%	%	%
I like to stand out in a crowd			
Agree strongly	8	10	4
Tend to agree	17	27	15
Neither agree nor disagree	43	40	37
Tend to disagree	22	18	31
Disagree strongly	10	5	14
Don't know	0	0	1
I enjoy situations in which I meet a lot of new people			
Agree strongly	22	30	14
Tend to agree	42	40	36
Neither agree nor disagree	23	17	30
Tend to disagree	13	12	17
Disagree strongly	1	2	3
Don't know	0	0	1

Source: Ipsos MORI

---

[41] Nisbet, E.C., (2006), The Engagement Model of Opinion Leadership: Testing Validity Within a European Context, *International Journal of Public Opinion Research 18,* (1) 3-30

[42] Keller, E., Berry, J., (2003), *The Influentials,* The Free Press: New York

[43] Crosier, K. and Erdogan, B.Z., (2000), *How to Avoid Audience Activists,* Published by Admap in October 2000 and accessed online www.warc.com

Ipsos MORI

A further measure of gregariousness is likelihood to start conversations in social situations. Because of our interest in socio-political influence our measures concentrate on starting conversations about government and politics. Again, it can be seen that on this measure the Socio-political Influencers are significantly more gregarious and are the most likely to be starting conversations about a wide range of socio-political topics. In particular they are more gregarious than the activists who in turn are significantly more likely to start conversations than the general public about local or central government, public services or news and current affairs.

In a typical evening with friends, which of the following best describes your participation in the following conversations…? (local or central government, public services or news and current affairs)

	Activist	Socio-political influencer	General Public
Base: All respondents	(197)	(188)	(2008)
	%	%	%
0 topics on which person is likely to start conversation	49	0*	72
1 topics on which person is likely to start conversation	16	38	12
2 topics on which person is likely to start conversation	14	25	8
3 topics on which person is likely to start conversation	7	16	4
4 topics on which person is likely to start conversation	14	21	5

Source: Ipsos MORI

* By definition

Ipsos MORI

6.3. Networking

The second measure of influence is being part of multiple networks. We have looked at two measures here – firstly the self-defined number of friends an individual has, and secondly the number of networks to which they belong. It should be noted that numbers of friends will be estimates only but we believe that in terms of order of magnitude these values should be relatively reliable.

Again, as is shown in the tables below, Socio-political Influencers are members of more networks and estimate they have more friends than the general public and activists are very similar. Interestingly, although it appears the activists have as many friends as the Socio-political Influencers, the Influencers mention knowing people through a wider number of networks. As discussed above, one of the ways a person has most influence is by being a recognised member of a wide number of groups so that their message is widely distributed across groups of people with different perspectives rather than concentrated in just one or two circles of people.

Thinking about the possible ways to meet people listed below, how many friends do you have from each source (if any)? [44]

Some of these ways of meeting people may not be relevant to you – if this is the case please tick not applicable

	Activist	Socio-political influencer	General Public
Base: All respondents	*(197)*	*(188)*	*(2008)*
	%	%	%
2 or less sources of friends	8	3	14
3 sources of friends	4	2	10
4 sources of friends	7	2	17
5 sources of friends	17	18	19
6 sources of friends	23	25	19
7 sources of friends	15	19	11
8 sources of friends	13	15	6
9+ sources of friends	14	16	4
Mean sources of friends	6.0	6.6	4.8

Source: Ipsos MORI

---

[44] Prompts were: *Members of your family, People at your work place, People who live near you in your neighbourhood or district, People you have met online, People you met through a hobby or leisure activities (e.g. film club, book group, pub quiz team), People you met through sports, People you met through attending church, mosque, synagogue or other places of worship, People you have met through your children, School/college/ university friends, People you have met through other organisations such as residents associations, patient forums, PTA, voluntary organisations etc, Other close friends – apart from those mentioned above*

Ipsos MORI

Thinking about the possible ways to meet people listed below, how many friends do you have from each source (if any)? [45]

Some of these ways of meeting people may not be relevant to you – if this is the case please tick not applicable

	Activist	Socio-political influencer	General Public
Base: All respondents	*(197)*	*(188)*	*(2008)*
	%	%	%
Under 15 friends	8	3	20
15-29 friends	13	14	22
30-44 friends	17	15	16
45-59 friends	13	19	12
60-74 friends	12	17	10
75+ friends	37	32	20
Mean number of friends	71	71	49

Source: Ipsos MORI

---

[45] Prompts were: *Members of your family, People at your work place, People who live near you in your neighbourhood or district, People you have met online, People you met through a hobby or leisure activities (e.g. film club, book group, pub quiz team), People you met through sports, People you met through attending church, mosque, synagogue or other places of worship, People you have met through your children, School/college/ university friends, People you have met through other organisations such as residents associations, patient forums, PTA, voluntary organisations etc, Other close friends – apart from those mentioned above*

6.4. Being well informed

It is also important to know whether or not people use a variety of sources to find information. If people want to be influential they should be able to find evidence for their opinions. Consequently they are likely to be heavy consumers of media. Again, it can be seen below that Socio-political Influencers and to a lesser extent the activists are indeed more widely read than the general public, although the differences are less pronounced than the ones discussed above.

Which of these daily newspapers do you read regularly? By regularly, we mean three out of every four issues. AND

Which of these Sunday newspapers do you read regularly? By regularly, we mean three out of every four issues.

		Activist	Socio-political influencer	General Public
Base: respondents	All	(197)	(188)	(2008)
		%	%	%
0 newspapers		26	21	32
1 newspapers		19	12	15
2 newspapers		27	28	30
3 newspapers		9	12	10
4 newspapers		10	15	8
5 + newspapers		11	12	5
Mean number of papers		1.9	2.3	1.6

Source: Ipsos MORI

They are also more likely than the general public to have used multiple media. We asked which activities people had done yesterday and included five different types of media consumption (read newspaper, magazine, watched television, listened to a radio, and used the internet) and found that twice as many socio-political activists and a slightly higher number of influencers had used all five forms of media.

Ipsos MORI

Which of the following activities did you do yesterday? (read newspaper, magazine, watched television, listened to a radio, and used the internet)

	Activist	Socio-political influencer	General Public
Base: All respondents	*(197)*	*(188)*	*(2008)*
	%	*%*	*%*
1 or less activities ticked	3	3	5
2 activities ticked	11	5	14
3 activities ticked	26	25	31
4 activities ticked	32	39	33
All (5) activities ticked	29	28	16
Mean number of activities	3.7	3.8	3.4
			Source: Ipsos MORI

It is also interesting to look at attitudes towards being informed. As can be seen in the table below, the Socio-political Influencers are particularly likely to take pride in being well informed, with activists also rating more highly than the general public on this measure.

Please indicate to what extent you agree or disagree with the following statements… I pride myself on being well informed and up to date

	Activist	Socio-political influencer	General Public
Base: All respondents	*(197)*	*(188)*	*(2008)*
	%	*%*	*%*
Agree strongly	22	34	13
Tend to agree	56	51	47
Neither agree nor disagree	15	10	31
Tend to disagree	6	5	7
Disagree strongly	1	1	1
Don't know	0	0	1
			Source: Ipsos MORI

Ipsos MORI

6.5. Self-defined influence

Finally, it is important to look at how influential the socio-political activists and influencers view themselves to be. It appears that the majority of the activists do indeed believe that they are influential – nearly two thirds can think of an example of a time where a friend has changed their opinion on an important issue *or* made a complaint or used a different public service because of what they have said, and again the Socio-political Influencers are even more likely to be able to identify such examples.

In the last year, can you think of an example where someone you know has …

Base: respondents	All	Activist	Socio-political influencer	General Public
		(197)	(188)	(2008)
		%	%	%
…changed their mind about an important issue, or topic because of something you said?				
Yes		43	52	20
No		29	28	53
Don't know		28	20	27
…used a different public service or complained about a service because of something you have said?				
Yes		43	44	14
No		41	43	66
Don't know		17	14	20

Source: Ipsos MORI

Activists, and to an even greater extent influencers are also more likely than the general public to agree that 'people often come to [them] for advice'.

Ipsos MORI

Please indicate to what extent you agree or disagree with the following statements...

People often come to me for advice

		Activist	Socio-political influencer	General Public
Base: respondents	All	(197)	(188)	(2008)
		%	%	%
Agree strongly		18	25	10
Tend to agree		53	55	41
Neither agree nor disagree		19	13	36
Tend to disagree		11	7	11
Disagree strongly		0	0	2
Don't know		0	0	1

Source: Ipsos MORI

If these three measures are aggregated, only one in six activists do not agree with any of the three measures, in comparison to nearly half of the general public. With Socio-political Influencers the difference is even more pronounced – only one in nine do not agree with any of the measures.

Aggregate score

People often come to me for advice (agree)

Someone changed their mind about an important issue, or topic because of something you said?

Someone used a different public service or complained about a service because of something you have said?

		Activist	Socio-political influencer	General Public
Base: respondents	All	(197)	(188)	(2008)
		%	%	%
None		17	11	43
1 of the three		33	31	36
2 of the three		28	30	15
All three		23	28	6

Source: Ipsos MORI

6.6. Other measures of influence

Finally, it is worth mentioning measures of vertical influence. As would be expected, the political activists are more likely than the Socio-political Influencers to mention being involved in the range of different activities we asked about, but influencers are also significantly more likely than the general public to get involved in these activities.

Which of the following things, if any, have you personally done <u>in the last year</u>?	Activist	Socio-political influencer	General Public
Base: All respondents	*(197)* %	*(188)* %	*(2008)* %
Attended a **council meeting** to give your views about an issue affecting the community	31	20	6
Been a **member of a political party**	19	11	3
Been a **school governor or** active in a **Parent Teacher Association**	12	12	3
Been actively involved in a **tenants' or residents' association**	25	21	7
Been involved in a **Patient and Public Involvement (PPI) forum** or other health service related group	13	8	3
Been involved in any **other group concerned with public services or local issues** (such as a crime reduction or regeneration scheme)	29	26	6
Taken part in a demonstration or protest	14	11	4

Source: Ipsos MORI

Ipsos MORI

As we discussed in the opening chapter, just like in the private sector, we expected to find that Socio-political Influencers also have particular spheres of interest in the public sector, rather than viewing the public sector as one single area of interest. We have qualitative evidence to suggest that these spheres can in fact be very narrow, for example a person may express an interest in the health sector but then actually only really be interested in cancer care because that is an issue that personally affects them[46]. As can be seen in the table below, most activists and influencers are concentrating their efforts in just a handful of the mechanisms mentioned, and only one in seven Socio-political Influencers are involved in over half of the mechanisms we presented to them.

Which of the following things, if any, have you personally done <u>in the last year</u>?[47]			
	Activist	**Socio-political influencer**	**General Public**
Base: All respondents	*(197)*	*(188)*	*(2008)*
	%	*%*	*%*
None	28	39	78
At least 1	73	63	22
At least 2	45	31	8
At least 3	20	14	3
			Source: Ipsos MORI

---

[46] See our report for Department of Health as part of Your Health Your Care Your Say about public involvement in out of hospital care.

[47] Attended a council meeting to give your views about an issue affecting the community, Been a member of a political party, Been a school governor or active in a Parent Teacher Association, Been actively involved in a tenants' or residents' association, Been involved in a Patient and Public Involvement (PPI) forum or other health service related group, Been involved in any other group concerned with public services or local issues (such as a crime reduction or regeneration scheme, Taken part in a demonstration or protest

7. How do Socio-political Influencers differ from the general public?

As we have seen in the previous chapter, although activists as a rule have more influence than the general public, it is the Socio-political Influencers who are really networking, keeping themselves informed and sharing their views with other people. Therefore we believe that they are a vitally important group to understand in detail as they have more impact on attitudes and behaviour than the activist and could be key to public services and Government.

In this chapter we explore the similarities and differences between the attitudes and beliefs of socio-political influencer group and the general public.

7.1. Political views are very similar

In terms of political views, Socio-political Influencers are more likely than the public to support a party. However, their voting intentions follow a similar pattern to the general public, which at the time of the interview was the Conservatives in the lead, followed by Labour.

How would you vote if there were a General Election tomorrow?

If undecided/refused Which party are you most inclined to support?

		Socio-political influencer	General Public (online)	General public (face to face omnibus)[48]
Base: respondents	All	(188)	(2,008)	(1,984)
		%	%	
Conservative		33	26	27
Labour		27	21	26
Liberal Democrats		14	15	15
Other		14	13	8
Would not vote		4	8	12
Undecided		6	13	10

Source: Ipsos MORI

If the voting intention is recalculated to exclude those who would choose not to vote, those who are undecided and those who refused to answer, the Conservatives have 37% of the support among Socio-political Influencers, with Labour remaining slightly behind. However, the results remain very similar to those of the general public as a whole at the time.

---

[48] Data from Ipsos MORI political monitor. Fieldwork dates 25th – 30th May 2006 http://www.ipsos-mori.com/polls/2006/mpm060530.shtml (data re-based to be comparable)

Ipsos MORI

How would you vote if there were a General Election tomorrow?

If undecided/refused Which party are you most inclined to support?

	Socio-political influencer	General Public
Base: All respondents who know how they will vote	*(166)*	*(1,521)*
	%	%
Conservative	37	35
Labour	30	28
Liberal Democrats	16	20
Other	17	17
		Source: Ipsos MORI

When trying to understand how different groups will actually vote it is useful to look at the views of just the people who say they are certain to vote, as our polling experience shows that this is the best way to reflect actual outcomes. As we discussed in the previous chapter, this is approximately half of the general public and rises to nearly three quarters of activists. As can be seen in the table below, when those who are not certain to vote are removed from the sample, we again see few differences between the views of the Socio-political Influencers and the general public.

How would you vote if there were a General Election tomorrow?
If undecided/refused Which party are you most inclined to support?

	Socio-political influencer	General Public	General public (face to face omnibus)[49]
Base: All respondents say they are certain to vote	*(131)*	*(1,024)*	*(1,151)*
	%	%	%
Conservative	40	37	38
Labour	27	24	29
Liberal Democrats	14	17	17
Other	15	15	10
Undecided	3	6	7
			Source: Ipsos MORI

---

[49] Data from Ipsos MORI political monitor. Fieldwork dates 25th – 30th May 2006 http://www.ipsos-mori.com/polls/2006/mpm060530.shtml (data re-based to be comparable)

These similarities in political views are further evidenced when looking at satisfaction with the party leaders, where the only difference is that Socio-political Influencers are slightly more negative than the other groups about Menzies Campbell as leader of the Liberal Democrats.

Would you say you are satisfied or dissatisfied with the following…

	Socio-political influencer	General Public
Base: All respondents	(188)	(2,008)
	Net satisfied	Net satisfied
The way Mr Blair is doing his job as prime minister	-49	-52
The way Mr Cameron is doing his job as leader of the Conservative party	7	4
The way Mr Campbell is doing his job as leader of the Liberal Democrats	-18	-13
		Source: Ipsos MORI

Ipsos MORI

7.2. Socio-political influencers are more likely to express an opinion and more optimistic about the future

During the questionnaire we asked a number of attitudinal questions about a range of social and political issues. Although Socio-political Influencers were not consistently more positive or more negative about particular aspects, they were significantly more likely to express an opinion – opting not to choose the neutral option where available, tending towards the extremes of scales and rarely responding with don't know.

They are more likely to be positive and optimistic about Government's approach to the economy and public services than the public as a whole. However, the proportion of socio-political influencers who disagree is the same as the proportion of the general public and overall they disagree that policies will improve the economy or public services at a ratio of 2 to 1.

Therefore it is safe to conclude that this group is more opinionated, and from the data above, better informed than the general public.

Questions about the future		
	Socio-political influencer	**General Public**
Base: All respondents	*(166)*	*(2,008)*
	%	%
On balance, do you agree or disagree that "in the long term, this government's policies will improve the state of Britain's economy?"		
Agree	31	21
Disagree	60	57
Don't know	10	22
On balance, do you agree or disagree that "in the long term, this government's policies will improve the state of Britain's public services?"		
Agree	29	17
Disagree	65	64
Don't know	6	19
		Source: Ipsos MORI

Ipsos MORI

7.3. They are more aware of the choice agenda, but remain sceptical

Socio-political influencers are more likely to say they have heard a bit or a lot about Government plans relating to choice.

The Government is considering new policies providing people with more choice about the use of public services, for example, offering patients choices about how and where they receive treatment. How much, if anything, have you heard about these new policies?

	Socio-political influencer	General Public
Base: All respondents	*(188)*	*(2,008)*
	%	%
A great amount	11	4
A fair amount	34	19
Just a little	40	51
Nothing at all	15	23

Source: Ipsos MORI

But they are less likely than the public to think they currently have a choice in schools, although this difference does not extend to choice about hospitals where similar proportions of Socio-political Influencers and the public feel they have choice. This is potentially worrying for government as socio-political influencers are by definition better informed and more likely to be spreading their views.

How much choice, if any, would you say you have at the moment in choosing…

	Socio-political influencer	General Public
Base: All respondents excl DK/not applicable	*(138)* *%*	*(1,263)* *%*
Which school to send your children to		
A great amount	9	14
A fair amount	23	32
Just a little	48	40
None at all	20	14

Source: Ipsos MORI

Ipsos MORI

How much choice, if any, would you say you have at the moment in choosing…

	Socio-political influencer	General Public
Base: All respondents excl DK/not applicable	(184) %	(1,830) %
Which hospital to go to if you need treatment		
A great amount	7	9
A fair amount	22	24
Just a little	35	32
None at all	37	35
		Source: Ipsos MORI

Socio-political influencers show greater support for the principle of public services, but they are also are more likely to agree that users of public services should be treated as customers. In some ways this reflects government aims for services – sustaining the public service approach but bringing in greater customer focus.

Please indicate to what extent you agree or disagree with the following statements…

	Socio-political influencer	General Public
Base: All respondents	(188) %	(2,008) %
Public services such as education and health should be funded by the taxpayer and be available free at the point of use		
Strongly agree	51	39
Agree	30	35
Neither/nor	8	13
Disagree	9	9
Disagree strongly	2	2
Britain's public services need to start treating users and the public as customers		
Strongly agree	48	39
Agree	31	37
Neither/nor	10	14
Disagree	8	6
Disagree strongly	5	2
		Source: Ipsos MORI

However, unlike the general public, Socio-political Influencers are also happy to pay more taxes if it means high quality services locally, rather than having the option to travel to receive services. This will no doubt be partly because they are slightly better off on average than the general public as a whole, but may also reflect their reservations about how choice will work in practice.

If you had to choose between these two policies, which would you prefer?

	Socio-political influencer	General Public
Base: All respondents	(188) %	(2,008) %
Paying more taxes to ensure a good quality hospital near your home	51	36
Having no increase in taxes but a choice of receiving treatment in a hospital anywhere in the country	47	54

Source: Ipsos MORI

Socio-political Influencers and the public are equally receptive to the idea of choice over hospital referrals – one in five say they think it is a good thing and would like to make the decision themselves, around three in five would like to be able to make the decision but feel they would need guidance and around one in five feel that choice is unnecessary and that GPs should make the decision.

It is perhaps surprising that Socio-political Influencers are not more interested in making their own choices on health, given their generally greater knowledge and self confidence. This in turn suggests that support for choice among the general public is unlikely to shift greatly with increased promotion and understanding of the issues.

If your GP decided that you needed to be referred to hospital and offered you a choice of 4 or 5 hospitals, both in your local area and the rest of the country, which of the following would best represent your feelings?

	Socio-political influencer	General Public
Base: All respondents	(188) %	(2,008) %
I think it is a good thing – I would like to make the decision myself	23	21
I would like to be able to make the decision but would need advice and information to help me decide	58	61
I think it is unnecessary – the GP is the professional, they should be making the choices	19	19

Source: Ipsos MORI

Ipsos MORI

7.4. Socio-political influencers have different views on who can be trusted

One of the important things about influence is where information comes from and which sources the Socio-political Influencers find most trustworthy. As can be seen below, Socio-political Influencers are more likely to be trusting of 'experts' than the general public, in particular business leaders, scientists, civil servants, pollsters and professors. Interestingly, it appears they are also more trusting of the 'ordinary man/woman in the street'.

For each type of person, could you tell me if you generally trust them to tell the truth or not

	Socio-political influencer	General Public
Base: All respondents	(188)	(2,008)
	% expect to tell truth	% expect to tell truth
Doctors	90	88
Teachers	83	82
Scientists	81	73
Professors	79	73
Clergymen/Priests	72	69
Judges	71	69
The ordinary man/woman in the street	63	55
Television news readers	52	57
The police	44	48
Pollsters	40	28
Civil servants	35	27
Trade union officials	27	22
Business leaders	23	15
Journalists	12	8
Politicians generally	10	6
Government Ministers	5	5

Source: Ipsos MORI

This finding is perhaps unsurprising – we usually find that the key drivers of trust in other people are having a high level of education (first degree or higher degree), being financially comfortable, being involved in local groups and having voted in the last election[50] - and our Socio-political Influencers do rate higher than the public on most of these positive drivers. However, it does also make the point that "downward" influence from opinion leaders is still vitally important in shaping wider views, even indirectly through influencing the Influencers.

---

[50] Duffy, B. (2004) *Life satisfaction and trust in other people,* MORI London

Ipsos MORI

7.5. And are more concerned than the public about topical issues

While the pattern of national concerns between Socio-political Influencers and the general public are broadly similar, Influencers choose more issues as 'important issues facing Britain today' than the public, as seen in the table below (on average, Socio-political Influencers choose 15 issues, and the general public choose just 12 from a list of 45). This higher level of concern will be a reflection of the fact that they are better informed – but there also some differences in the relative ranking of issues. In particular, the general public place greater relative emphasis on issues that could be seen as more media driven, such as immigration, petrol prices (which was a major story at the time of the study) and drug abuse.

Ipsos MORI

What would you say is the most important issue facing Britain today? What do you see as other important issues facing Britain today? PROMPTED

	Socio-political influencer	General Public
Base: All respondents	(188)	(2,008)
	%	%
Crime/law & order/violence/vandalism	72	68
National Health Service/Hospitals	68	63
Pensions/social security	67	51
Care for the Elderly	63	50
Climate change/global warming	54	46
Morality/individual behaviour	53	40
Education/schools	50	40
Race relations/immigration/immigrants	48	48
Dishonest government	47	37
Leadership/government	47	38
Pollution/environment	47	38
Drug abuse	46	42
Defence/foreign affairs/international terrorism	45	37
Local government/council tax	45	36
Petrol prices/fuel	45	45
Poverty/inequality	44	29
Social issues	38	22
Public services in general	37	29
Children issues	36	28
Civil liberties/rights	35	22
Housing	35	29
Taxation	33	29
Unemployment/factory closure/lack of industry	32	29
Transport/public transport	31	22
Inflation/prices	28	24
Water shortage	28	27
Economy/economic situation	27	20
Over population	27	26
Low pay/minimum wage/fair wages	26	23
Common Market/EU/ Europe/EURO/Constitution	25	22
Maintaining country's identity	25	25
Religious freedom/conflicts	21	17
Countryside/rural life	19	12
Nuclear weapons/nuclear war/disarmament	19	16
AIDS	18	13
Privatisation	18	9
Bird flu/Flu pandemic	16	16

Source: Ipsos MORI

7.6. Socio-political influencers are more open to changing their views and behaviour than the public

Interestingly, as well as being more likely to influence people, Socio-political Influencers also believe they are most likely to be influenced by the views of others. The tables below show that they are more likely to recall examples of issues on which they have changed their mind as a result of something someone has said and also changed their behaviour in response to something someone has said.

In the last year, can you think of an example where you have…		
	Socio-political influencer	General Public
Base: All respondents	*(188)*	*(2,008)*
	%	%
…changed your mind about an important issue or topic because of something someone has said?		
Yes	51	26
No	45	58
Don't know	5	16
…used a different public service or complained about a service because of something someone has said?		
Yes	30	11
No	68	76
Don't know	3	13
		Source: Ipsos MORI

This finding is perhaps less surprising than it might initially seem; these people are high consumers of information and therefore it would be unusual if they were not open to changing their mind in the light of new evidence. They are also likely to be more opinionated generally, and therefore presumably more aware of their point of view and how and when it changes.

7.7. Socio-political influencers are more likely to take part in consultation

Socio-political influencers are more likely than the public to have taken part in both qualitative and quantitative research in the past two years. This result is of significant importance to people developing policy and those providing services - socio-political influencers are more likely to make themselves heard which means it is important to identify them early on and work with them as well as ensuring the less influential also have their say.

Ipsos MORI

Prior to this survey, have you been involved in any of the following types of market or social research in the last 2 years?

	Socio-political influencer	General Public
Base: All respondents	(188) %	(2008) %
Postal survey	45	33
Telephone survey	40	24
Focus group	24	7

Source: Ipsos MORI

The motivations for getting involved also differ between Socio-political Influencers and the general public. As can be seen in the table below, compared with people overall, the socio-political influencer's motivations show a greater emphasis on the importance of the issue and the chance it might create improvements or change, as well as a perception of it being their duty. Other main drivers appear to be ones of opportunity – they were asked to take part, had the time and were curious about it so agreed to take part. This suggests that the Socio-political Influencers are generally more conscientious and potentially more optimistic about the potential for change.

What motivated you to get involved in the types of market or social research you just mentioned

	Socio-political influencer	General Public
Base: All respondents who have been involved	(188) %	(1666) %
Felt that it was an important issue	67	34
The fact that someone asked me	59	49
Interested to see what I would be asked	57	52
Hoped that it would change something that directly affects me or my family	52	33
There was a financial incentive	41	39
Hoped that it would change something although it doesn't affect me directly	37	23
Caught me at a good time	30	24
Felt that it was my duty	27	15

Source: Ipsos MORI

Ipsos MORI

7.8. They are no better than the public at estimating current public opinion.

It seemed feasible that socio-political influencers would be better at estimating current public opinion than other members of the public[51]. More generally, recent studies have shown that, in some cases, asking people to predict an outcome (e.g. who will win an election) can be more accurate than traditional opinion polling – arguably because it overcomes social-desirability biases (where people respond in the way they think the researcher wants or in the way that puts the respondent in the best light[52]).

We asked Socio-political Influencers and the public to predict current satisfaction with the Government. As can be seen in the table below, Socio-political Influencers and the general public both thought that the UK as a whole was less dissatisfied and more neutral than the survey suggested it was.

A Would you say you are satisfied or dissatisfied with the way the Government is running the country?

B We would like you to try to estimate how you think the UK population as a whole would answer that question… What proportion of the UK public do you think will say they are satisfied or dissatisfied with the way the Government is running the country?

	Socio-political influencer prediction	Public prediction	Actual (F2F omnibus)
Base: All respondents	*(188)* %	*(2008)* %	*(c.2000)* *(%)*
% Satisfied	24	23	22
% Neutral	22	24	9
% Dissatisfied	56	55	69
Net Satisfied	-32	-32	-47

Source: Ipsos MORI

From this data there is no evidence that Socio-political Influencers are better at estimating current opinion than the public. In the future we will explore this idea further, and look at whether they are able to predict answers to different types of questions – for example, whether or not they are better at predicting public opinion on topical questions or issues.

---

[51] Keller, E., Berry, J., (2003), *The Influentials,* The Free Press: New York

[52] Earls, M. (2005) *Rethinking prediction: Were you still up when Bob called it for Kerry?* Presented at Market Research Soceity Conference 2005 and Surowieki, J. (2004) *The Wisdom of Crowds: Why the Many Are Smarter Than the Few and How Collective Wisdom Shapes Business, Economies, Societies and Nations,* DOUBLEDAY, USA

Ipsos MORI

7.9. But they are better at predicting future opinion

We also asked whether they felt that satisfaction with Government would increase or decrease in the next six months. Results from our regular tracking survey six months on show the number of people satisfied (despite fluctuations over the six months) is actually exactly the same as it was before – 22% satisfied and 69% dissatisfied.[53]

Nearly three in five Socio-political Influencers compared to just under a half of the general public predicted that there would be no change, significantly higher than the public as a whole.

We would like you to try to estimate how you think the UK population as a whole would answer that question in six month's time … Do you think people will be more satisfied, less satisfied or there will be no change?		
	B **Socio-political influencer prediction**	**B** **General Public prediction**
Base: All respondents	*(188)*	*(2008)*
	%	*%*
More Satisfied	9	5
No Change	58	47
Less Satisfied	34	48
		Source: Ipsos MORI

[53] Ipsos MORI Political Monitor, November 2006, http://www.ipsos-mori.com/polls/trends/satisf12.shtml

8. Conclusions and next steps

In this paper we have argued that it is useful combine traditional measures of socio-political activism with an understanding of horizontal influence, in order to identify those who are truly influential on social and political issues.

Socio-political Influencers do seem to have some predictive power – but more needs to be done to explore this. They were more accurate than the general public in predicting future opinion, but this was on one simple measure, and they were no better at estimating current opinion than the public. But other evidence does give weight to their usefulness in understanding future trends. In particular, the proportion of letters MPs received about immigration more than tripled between 1990 and 2000 – while hardly anyone in the general population was raising it as an important issue in our regular tracking surveys. Public concern about immigration has shot up since 2000, so that it is now consistently one of the top issues in the country – something that we may have been able to predict quicker if we had been monitoring these more active, influential groups. We will be exploring this further.

In any case, Influencers' generally greater levels of understanding and more developed views on a range of issues makes them an interesting group to test public policy against, in the way the private sector uses "leading edge" consumers. We have found, for example, that socio-political activists are more sympathetic than the general public on some aspects of the government's agenda (treating public service users as customers) but not on others (choice in certain services such as health). Again, this is something that will be interesting to explore further in future work.

In order to do this, we have set up a panel which will give us access to over 4,000 Socio-political Influencers for both quantitative surveys and qualitative consultation on key social policy issues.

Ipsos MORI

Ipsos MORI Socio-political Influencers

Socio-political Influencers are key to understanding trends in public attitudes. As public services increasingly view service-users as customers, it becomes more important to understand how the citizen-consumer will behave. Moving beyond traditional definitions, this model takes into account informal as well as formal mechanisms for social and political influence in order to better understand how public views are formed.

Over the coming months we intend to conduct further methodological research with this audience. Additionally, we are able to give you access to this valuable group. In particular we will be offering:

- Ad hoc online research of up to 4,000 socio-political influencers;

- Syndicated research studies on particular topics;

- Benchmarking and tracking research.

For more details about how you can get the most out of socio-political influencers please contact Anna Pierce or Bobby Duffy in the Ipsos MORI Participation Unit.