

**Ipsos MediaCT**

The Media, Content and Technology Research Specialists



# Social Grade

## A Classification Tool

Bite Sized Thought Piece

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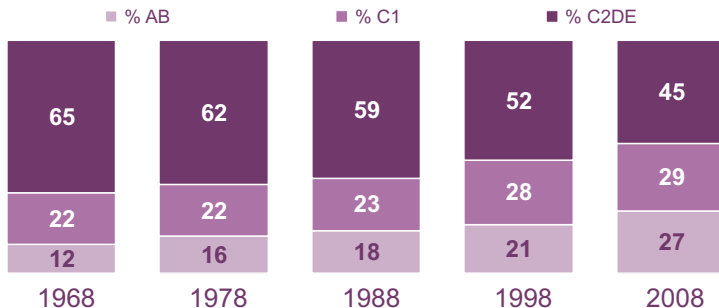


There are several demographic classification systems used in market research. A well established system, as well as the most widely known and used, is that of social grading, derived from the British National Readership Survey (NRS). Whilst everyone in the industry is familiar with the term social grade and its six groups A, B, C1, C2, D and E, what is less well known is how social grade is defined and how it can be used as a powerful discriminator.

Social grade in its current form has been used on the NRS since the 1960s and has provided a valuable insight into changes in the occupational make-up of Britain over time. Ipsos MediaCT has a long association with the NRS and has been the research contractor since 1977.

Looking at the last 50 years of NRS data, and taking those classified as AB (higher and intermediate managerial, administrative or professional occupations) as an example, the proportion has increased from 12% to 27%.

## Social Grade of CIE, 1968-2008



## Social Grade of Chief Income Earner

Social Grade	Description	% population
A	High managerial, administrative or professional	4
B	Intermediate managerial, administrative or professional	23
C1	Supervisory, clerical and junior managerial, administrative or professional	29
C2	Skilled manual workers	21
D	Semi and unskilled manual workers	15
E	State pensioners, casual or lowest grade workers, unemployed with state benefits only	8

Source: NRS 2008 (unweighted sample 37,359, estimated population 15+ (000s) 49,077)

## How is Social Grade defined?

Social grade is a classification system based on occupation and it enables a household and all its members to be classified according to the occupation of the Chief Income Earner (CIE). In addition, if the respondent is not the CIE and is working, then the social grade of that individual is also recorded on the NRS.

A number of questions need to be asked in the interview in order to assign social grade accurately. The interviewer probes the respondent for information about the occupation of the CIE, the type of organisation he or she works for, job actually done, job title/rank/grade, and whether the CIE is self-employed. Also relevant are details of the number of people working at the place of employment and whether the CIE is responsible for anyone, together with confirmation of qualifications.

Once the interviewer is satisfied that sufficient information has been gathered in order to determine social grade, their estimate is recorded and this is later double-checked for accuracy by experts in social grading coding at Ipsos MORI when it can be amended if necessary.

## Social Grade or Social Class?

Social grade as defined by the National Readership Survey is not the same as social class. The social class system is derived from the Census and, prior to 2001, was based on the occupation of the individual. The system focuses on professional status and qualifications rather than purchasing power. Unlike social grading it cannot be used as a household-based system and only provides a classification for the working population.

The current social class system was updated for the last Census in 2001 and is now known as NS-SEC (National Statistics Socio-Economic Classification). It differs from the previous social class system by grouping occupations by employment conditions and relations rather than skills. The current classification, as distinct from the previous system but similar to social grade, applies to everyone, not just those who are working.



## Social Grade: a discriminatory tool

The power of social grade as a discriminator can be demonstrated by some recent results from the National Readership Survey (NRS 2008).

Looking firstly at data for media consumption amongst those working full-time in terms of indices, the index for readership of any quality daily newspaper for ABs is 208, C1 is 77, C2 is 34 and D is 21. Conversely the corresponding indices for any popular daily newspaper are 52 for ABs, 100 for C1, 137 for C2 and 147 for D. The same degree of discrimination can be observed by looking at other media, such as the internet, with indices for internet access in the past 12 months ranging from 112 for ABs through to 77 for social grade D.

Whilst social grade is a particularly good discriminator for media, it can also be used for analysing other data related to purchasing power, an example being those claiming to have taken at least one holiday abroad of two or more nights in the last 12 months. The index for ABs is 123 and for social grade D is 66.





Social grade, as an occupation based classification system, is a barometer of changes in occupations over time. Since the 1960s, social grade has tracked the changing shape of the British workforce and as a classification system it has developed over time as the workforce has evolved. Its strength lies in its simplicity and its application as a discriminator, particularly for media consumption. That is why it has stood the test of time.

**For more information, please contact:**

Dawn Collis  
Tel.: +44(0)20 8861 8000  
Email: [dawn.collis@ipsos.com](mailto:dawn.collis@ipsos.com)  
[www.ipsos-mori.com](http://www.ipsos-mori.com)

