

Joint online, calls and texts fraud research January 2024

Produced by: Ofcom MR Team using YouGov survey data
Fieldwork: 8th -11th January 2024

Date 1st February 2024

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Background and Objectives

The purpose of this research was to better understand people's experience of fraud and scams encountered online, through calls on landlines, calls and texts and mobile phones and via online apps.

Key aims and objectives:

- Understand the prevalence of suspicious content experienced online, via calls on landlines and calls and texts on apps
- Explore how individuals respond to encountering suspicious content
- Understanding how suspicious content is identified by individuals and how this might differ across channels
- Investigating reporting behaviour including how individuals report suspicious content and their reasons for doing so / not doing so

Methodology

Sample

- 2096 adults aged 16+ in the UK
- Quotas set on region, gender, age, and working status

Data collection

- Online interviews via Ofcom's Online Research Panel (ORP)
- Conducted by YouGov
- Fieldwork from 8th to 11th January 2024

Data reporting

- Weighted to be nationally representative of UK adults (16+)
- Data available in Excel tables (aggregated)
- Significance testing applied at the 95% confidence level

Summary of key findings

Email, text and mobile calls are the most-used forms of communication and also have the highest frequency of suspicious activity

- 27% of the online UK population claim to receive suspicious email content every day
- Frequency is much lower on gaming websites, online forums, dating websites and instant messaging (which have lower numbers of users)

Not recognising the account name/number, and poorly written content, were the main flags for causing suspicion across all channels,

- Although both responses were less common for dating and gaming websites/apps

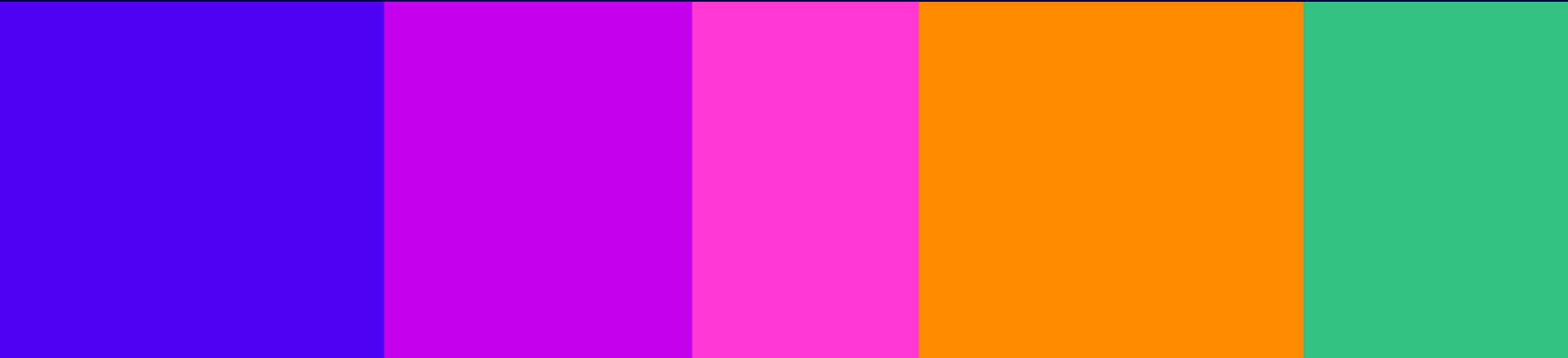
The most common response to encountering suspicious content online or via calls and texts was to ignore/delete the content, and to block the sender's account/number

- Top two responses given across all online and telecoms channels

The most common reasons for **not reporting** were not knowing how to report, and not thinking that action would be taken

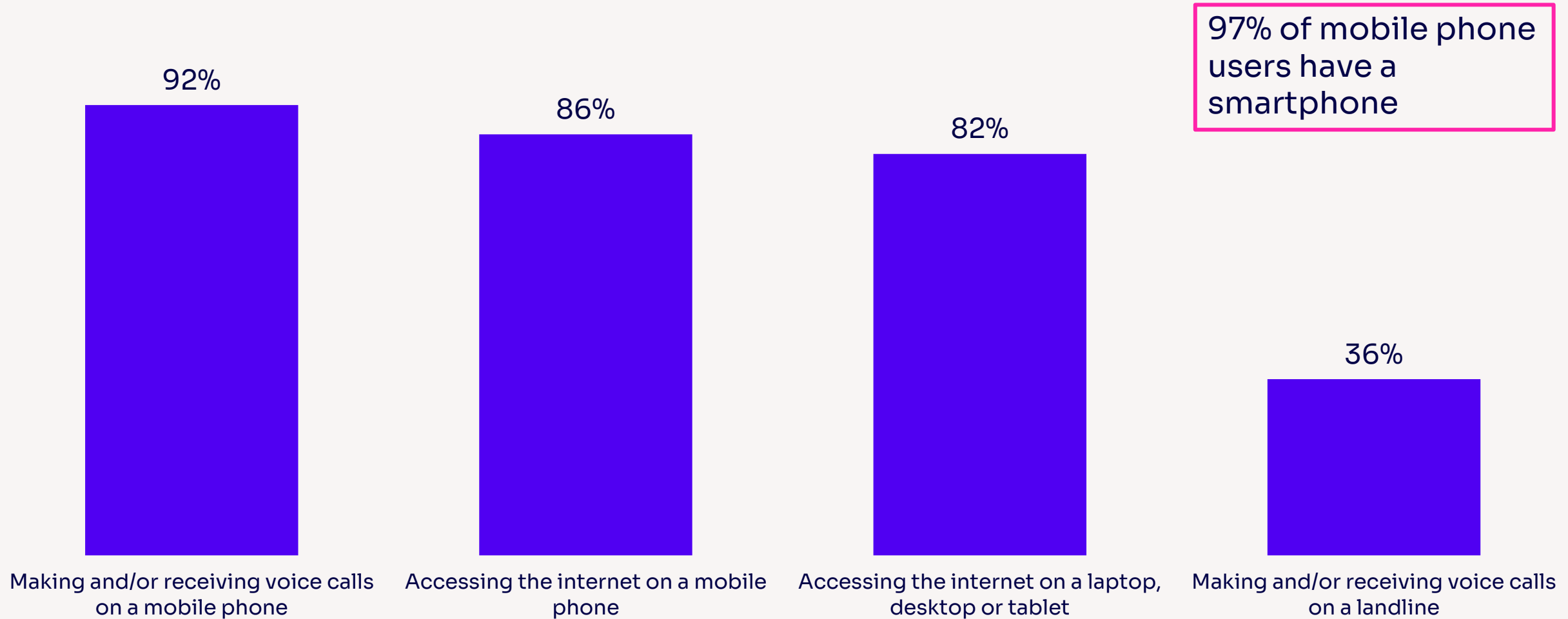
- 28% said they didn't know who to report suspicious content to and 23% said they didn't know how to report it
- 27% said they didn't think any action would be taken

Use of communications channels and experience of suspicious activity



Making and receiving calls on a mobile is the most-used form of communication

Use of communications services



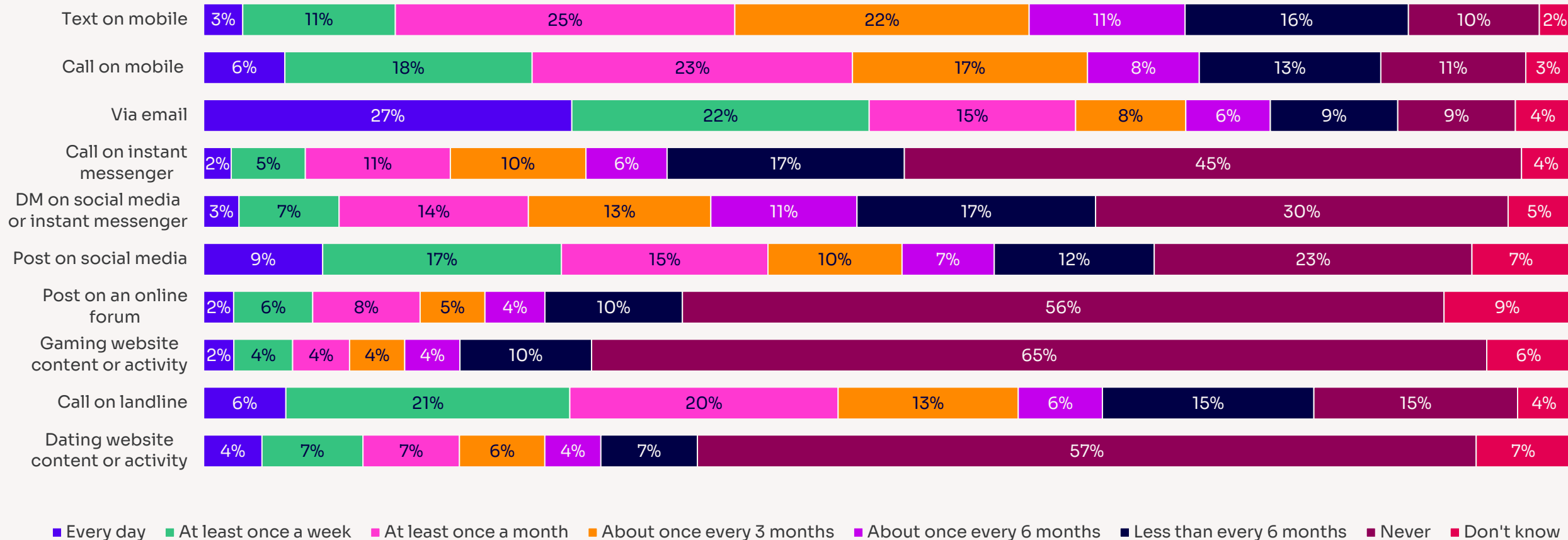
Source: YouGov survey for Ofcom, January 2024

Q1: Which, if any, of the following types of communication do you use? Base: All online UK adults aged 16+ (2096)

Q3: Is your mobile phone a smartphone? Base: all who use a mobile phone (2033)

Over a quarter of email users experience suspicious email activity at least once a day. Frequency is much lower on gaming websites, online forums, dating websites and instant messaging.

Frequency of experiencing suspicious activity via each channel of communication (among users of each channel)



Source: YouGov survey for Ofcom, January 2024

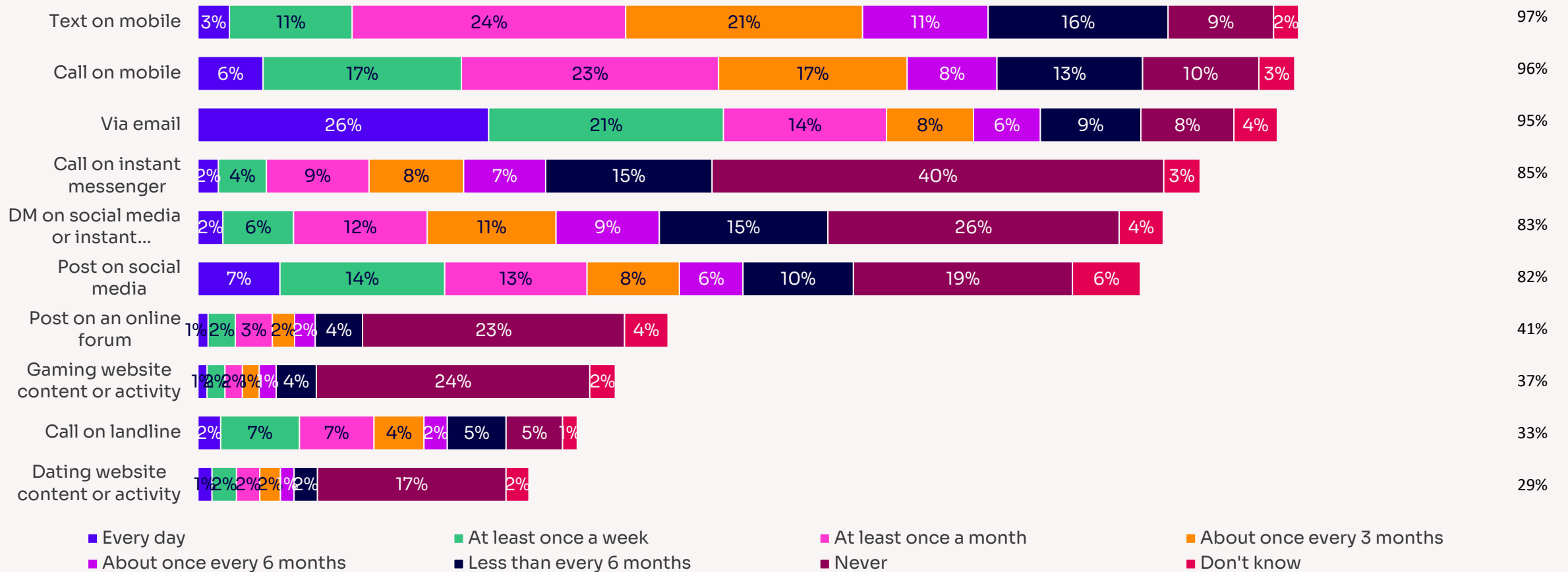
Q5: For this question, please think about your own experiences receiving suspicious content or activity. This can range from receiving contact from someone unknown or seeing an unusual link to click on, to instances when you were directly impacted (e.g. lost money, received sub-standard goods, spoken to a person you thought was someone else). How often, if ever, have you experienced suspicious content or activity via each of the following methods of communication?

Base: All online UK adults 16+ who use each type of communication service: Email (1987) Social media (1729), Mobile calls (2014), Mobile texts (2019), DM/IM (1771), Landline calls (730), Calls on IM (1840), Dating site/content (603), Online forum (844), Gaming website content/activity (745)

Almost half of UK adults experience suspicious content via email once a week or more often.

Frequency of experiencing suspicious activity via each channel of communication (among all adults)

% of all adults using each service



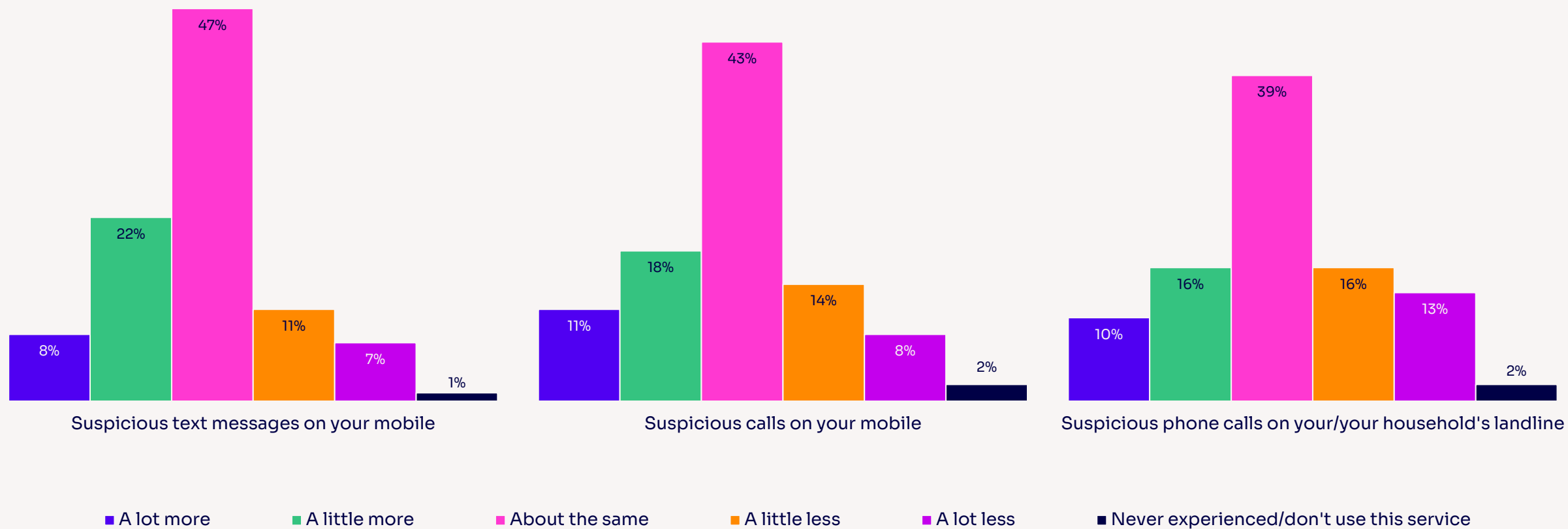
Source: YouGov survey for Ofcom, January 2024

Q5: For this question, please think about your own experiences receiving suspicious content or activity. This can range from receiving contact from someone unknown or seeing an unusual link to click on, to instances when you were directly impacted (e.g. lost money, received sub-standard goods, spoken to a person you thought was someone else). How often, if ever, have you experienced suspicious content or activity via each of the following methods of communication?

Base: All online UK adults aged 16+ (2016)

It was most common for respondents to be experiencing about the same level of suspicious content on their landline or mobile compared to this time last year

Volume of suspicious calls and texts received compared to this time last year



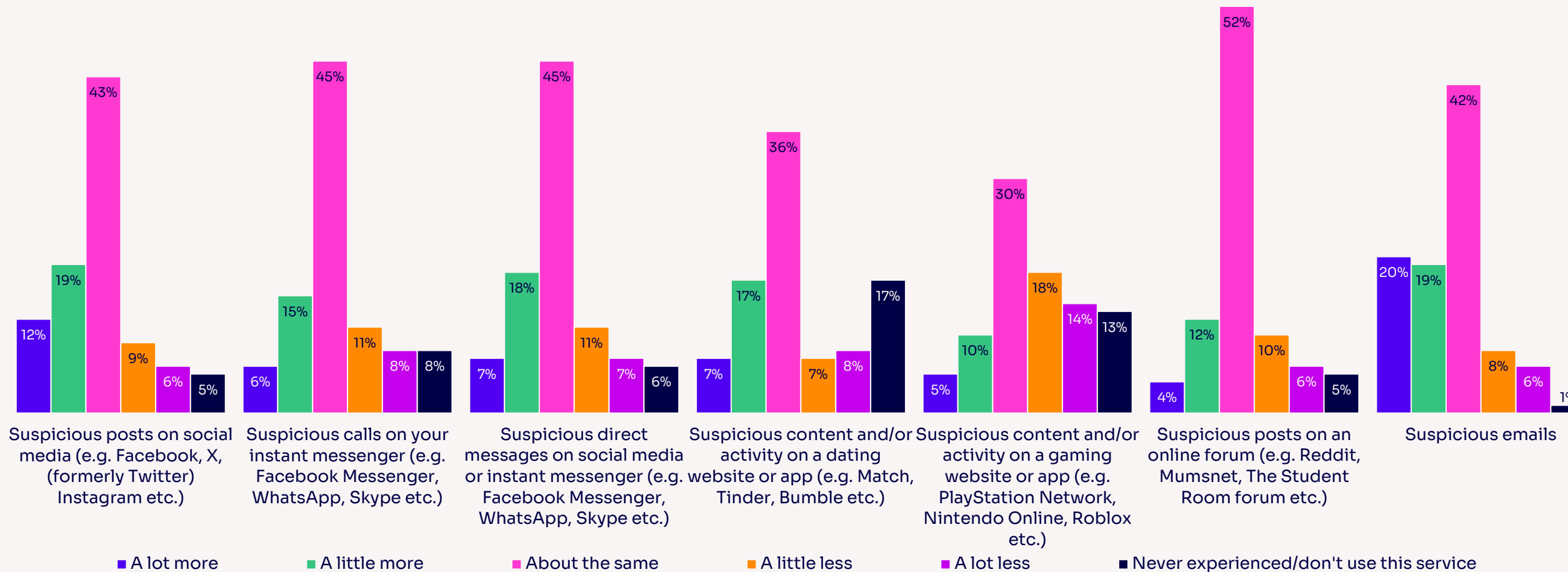
Source: YouGov survey for Ofcom, January 2024

Q6: Thinking back to this time last year, would you say you are experiencing more, about the same, or less of each of the following types of suspicious activity?

Base: All online UK adults 16+ who have previously experienced suspicious content on each service. Text on mobile (1779), Call on mobile (1732) Call on landline (599)

It was most common for respondents to be experiencing the same level of suspicious content online compared to this time last year but there are increases particularly for email

Volume of suspicious online content experienced compared to this time last year



Source: YouGov survey for Ofcom, January 2024

Q6: Thinking back to this time last year, would you say you are experiencing more, about the same, or less of each of the following types of suspicious activity?

Base: All online UK adults 16+ who have previously experienced suspicious content on each service. Post on social media (1196), Call on instant messenger (939), Direct message on social media (1144), Dating app/website (214), Gaming app/website (205), Online forum (287), Email (1742)

Not recognising the caller's / sender's number and poorly written content (in texts) are the main flags for causing suspicion of landline calls and mobile calls and texts

Reasons for thinking a call/text to be suspicious

	Didn't recognise/know the number/sender/account who called/messaged/posted the content	Poorly written content (e.g. spelling/grammar)	The call/message was from an international number/abroad	The caller withheld their number	Heard/saw warnings about it before	Offered rewards which seemed 'too good to be true'	Not endorsed by a credible organisation	Not endorsed by a credible person	The scammer expressed a strong personal/emotional attachment too soon	No/few testimonials / reviews	Poor testimonials/ reviews
Text messages on your mobile	67%	52%	29%	n/a	25%	25%	8%	8%	6%	3%	3%
Calls on your mobile	72%	n/a	42%	33%	17%	19%	8%	8%	7%	3%	4%
Calls on your landline	63%	n/a	44%	33%	26%	19%	10%	8%	10%	2%	1%

Source: YouGov survey for Ofcom, January 2024

Q8: Still thinking about the suspicious content or activity you've experienced via text [source], which of the following reasons made you think it was suspicious? (Please select all that apply)

Base: All online UK adults 16+ who have previously experienced suspicious content on each service. Text on mobile (1779), Call on mobile (1732) Call on landline (599)

Not recognising the originator's name / account and poorly written content are the main flags for causing suspicion of online channels of contact

Reasons for thinking online content to be suspicious

	Didn't recognise/know the number/sender/account who called/messaged/posted the content	Poorly written content (e.g. spelling/grammar)	The call/message was from an international number/abroad	Offered rewards which seemed 'too good to be true'	Heard/saw warnings about it before	The caller withheld their number	Suspicious imagery (e.g. photos of a luxurious lifestyle/money)	Inconsistent profile information (e.g. photos/bio of the supposedly same person didn't match)	No/poor-quality logo	Not endorsed by a credible organisation	Not endorsed by a credible person	The scammer expressed a strong personal/emotional attachment too soon	No/few testimonials/reviews	Poor testimonials/reviews
Posts on social media	44%	50%	13%	38%	22%	n/a	28%	28%	16%	11%	11%	11%	7%	6%
Calls on your instant messenger	58%	n/a	28%	21%	17%	17%	n/a	17%	9%	7%	7%	10%	3%	4%
Direct messages on social media/instant messenger	55%	49%	20%	30%	19%	n/a	20%	24%	14%	9%	9%	14%	4%	3%
On a dating website/app	23%	34%	14%	19%	13%	n/a	27%	27%	13%	4%	9%	21%	3%	4%
On a gaming website/app	33%	31%	13%	26%	18%	n/a	18%	14%	12%	7%	10%	10%	3%	6%
On an online forum	27%	48%	13%	37%	20%	n/a	25%	24%	13%	9%	10%	11%	7%	8%
Emails	59%	65%	19%	41%	23%	n/a	21%	16%	29%	12%	9%	9%	4%	3%

Source: YouGov survey for Ofcom, January 2024

Q8: Still thinking about the suspicious content or activity you've experienced via text messages on your mobile...Which of the following reasons made you think it was suspicious? (Please select all that apply)

Base: All online UK adults 16+ who have previously experienced suspicious content on each service. Post on social media (1196), Call on instant messenger (939), Direct message on social media (1144), Dating app/website (214), Gaming app/website (205), Online forum (287), Email (1742)

The most common responses to suspicious content via landline calls and texts and calls to mobiles were to block the number/account or to ignore/delete the content

Actions taken as a result of receiving suspicious calls and texts

	Blocked the number/account	Ignored/deleted it	Checked to see if the number/account is real (e.g. Google search/elsew here)	Reported it	Told friends/family about it	Clicked on the link but then realised it was suspicious and didn't do as instructed	Clicked on the link and then did as instructed	Engaged with the scammer (e.g. talked over a call/sent them a message)	Sent money/gifts	Arranged to meet the scammer	Invested money as recommended by the scammer
Text messages on your mobile	67%	62%	25%	24%	21%	14%	2%	2%	0%	0%	0%
Calls on your mobile	71%	58%	33%	19%	22%	n/a	n/a	7%	1%	0%	1%
Calls on your landline	43%	63%	29%	16%	27%	n/a	n/a	9%	0%	1%	1%

Source: YouGov survey for Ofcom, January 2024

Q7: Thinking about when you've received suspicious content via text messages on your mobile...Which, if any, of the following actions have you taken as a result? (Please select all that apply)

Base: All online UK adults 16+ who have previously experienced suspicious content on each service. Text on mobile (1779), Call on mobile (1732) Call on landline (599)

The most common responses to suspicious content across all online platforms were to block the number/account or to ignore/delete the content

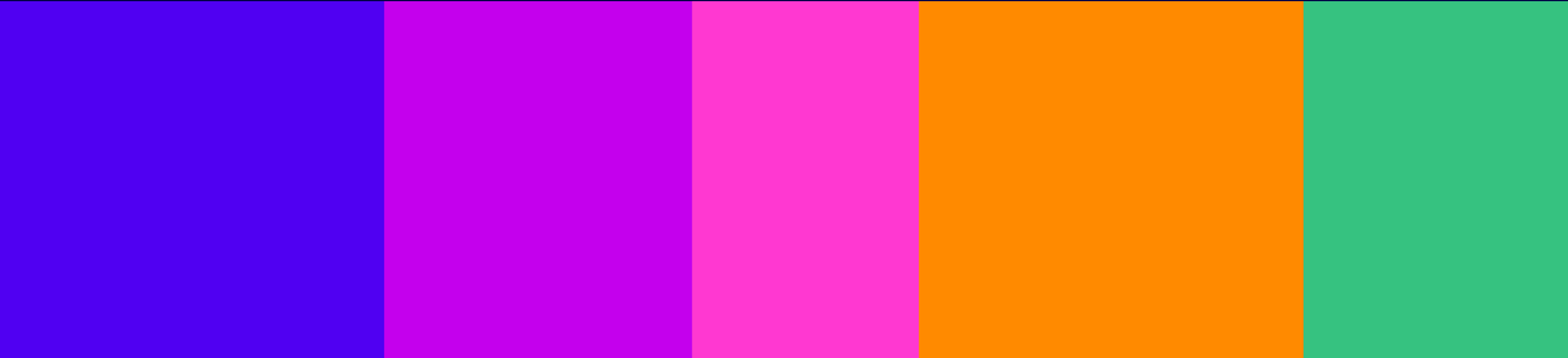
	Blocked the number/account	Ignored/ deleted it	Checked to see if the number/account is real (e.g. Google search/else where)	Reported it	Told friends/family about it	Clicked on the link but then realised it was suspicious and didn't do as instructed	Clicked on the link and then did as instructed	Engaged with the scammer (e.g. talked over a call/sent them a message)	Sent money/gifts	Arranged to meet the scammer	Invested money as recommended by the scammer
Posts on social media	52%	59%	17%	37%	17%	10%	1%	4%	1%	1%	1%
Calls on your instant messenger	57%	54%	17%	20%	17%	n/a	n/a	5%	1%	1%	1%
Direct messages on social media/instant messenger	61%	59%	17%	32%	18%	7%	2%	5%	1%	1%	1%
On a dating website/app	51%	41%	16%	24%	15%	13%	4%	8%	2%	5%	3%
On a gaming website/app	31%	48%	15%	21%	14%	10%	3%	5%	1%	2%	3%
On an online forum	28%	57%	16%	26%	13%	7%	3%	4%	1%	3%	2%
Emails	54%	70%	23%	32%	20%	11%	1%	2%	0%	0%	1%

Source: YouGov survey for Ofcom, January 2024

Q7: Thinking about when you've received suspicious content via text messages on your mobile...Which, if any, of the following actions have you taken as a result? (Please select all that apply)

Base: All online UK adults 16+ who have previously experienced suspicious content on each service. Post on social media (1196), Call on instant messenger (939), Direct message on social media (1144), Dating app/website (214), Gaming app/website (205), Online forum (287), Email (1742)

Reporting of suspicious activity



Two fifths of those who had reported suspicious activity on their mobile claimed to have done so via their handset's reporting facility

Channels used for reporting suspicious calls and texts

	Reported it using my mobile handset's reporting facility	Reported it to a special number for reporting suspicious messages/calls	Reported it to my landline/mobile provider directly	Reported it to my bank/credit card company/building society	Reported it to Action Fraud	Reported it to Ofcom	Reported to another organisation	Reported it to the police	Reported it to Citizens' Advice
Text messages on your mobile	44%	26%	25%	15%	14%	6%	5%	4%	1%
Calls on your mobile	44%	18%	21%	19%	16%	7%	7%	6%	1%
Calls on your landline	n/a	36%	37%	25%	22%	14%	9%	10%	2%

Source: YouGov survey for Ofcom, January 2024

Q9: You previously said that you have reported text messages on mobile as suspicious. Which of the following channels have you reported this to? (Please select all that apply)

Base: All online UK adults 16+ who have previously reported suspicious content on each service. Text on mobile (437), Call on mobile (333) Call on landline (93)

The majority of those who had reported suspicious activity online have done so via the platform's reporting facility

Channels used for reporting suspicious online content

	Reported it using the platform/ app's reporting facility	Reported it to my bank/ credit card company/ building society	Reported it to Action Fraud	Reported it to Ofcom	Reported to another organisation	Reported it to the police	Reported it to Citizens' Advice
Posts on social media	85%	9%	5%	3%	2%	4%	1%
Calls on your instant messenger	70%	11%	13%	6%	4%	6%	n/a
Direct messages on social media/instant messenger	82%	10%	6%	4%	2%	2%	1%
On a dating website/app	74%	8%	10%	9%	3%	8%	5%
On a gaming website/app	64%	14%	8%	9%	2%	7%	5%
On an online forum	77%	11%	7%	9%		8%	2%
Emails	67%	17%	13%	4%	14%	2%	1%

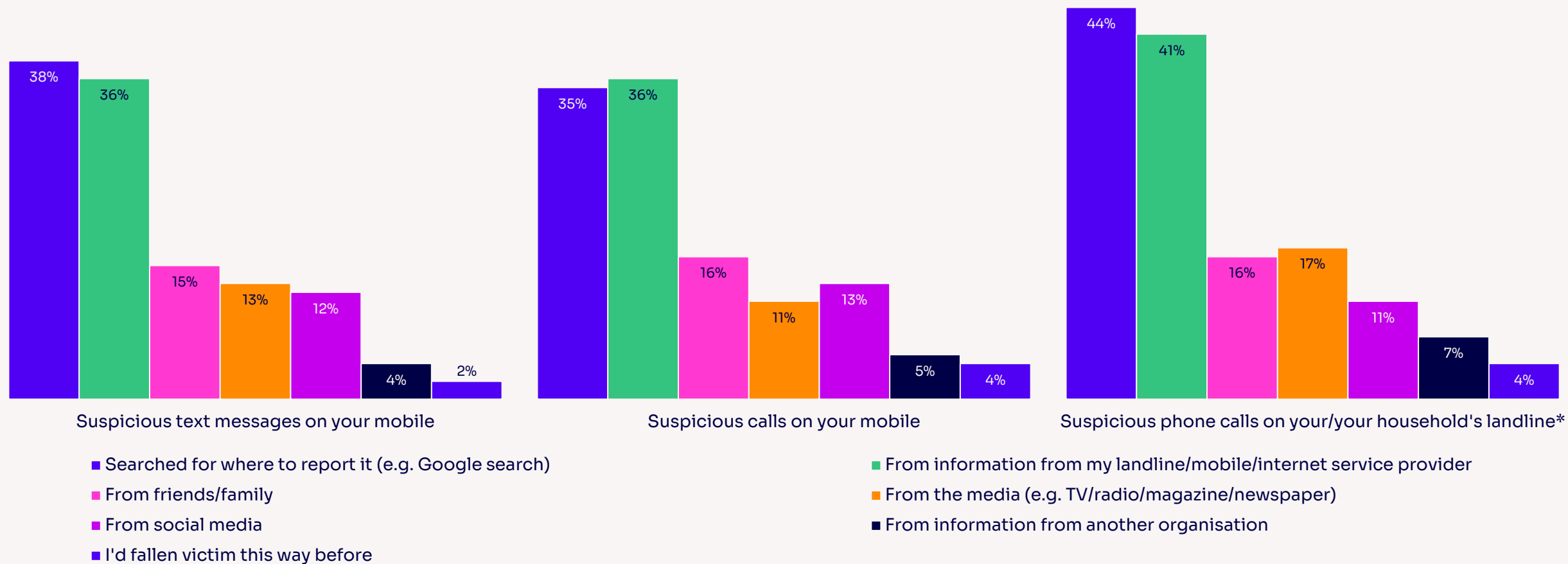
Source: YouGov survey for Ofcom, January 2024

Q9: You previously said that you have reported text messages on mobile as suspicious. Which of the following channels have you reported this to? (Please select all that apply)

Base: All online UK adults 16+ who have previously reported suspicious content on each service. Post on social media (437), Call on instant messenger (189), Direct message on social media (363), Dating app/website (51), Gaming app/website (44), Online forum (78), Email (573)

The most common ways of knowing where to report suspicious content were searching online (e.g. on Google) and via information direct from their landline/mobile provider

How respondents knew where to report suspicious calls and texts



*Caution small base

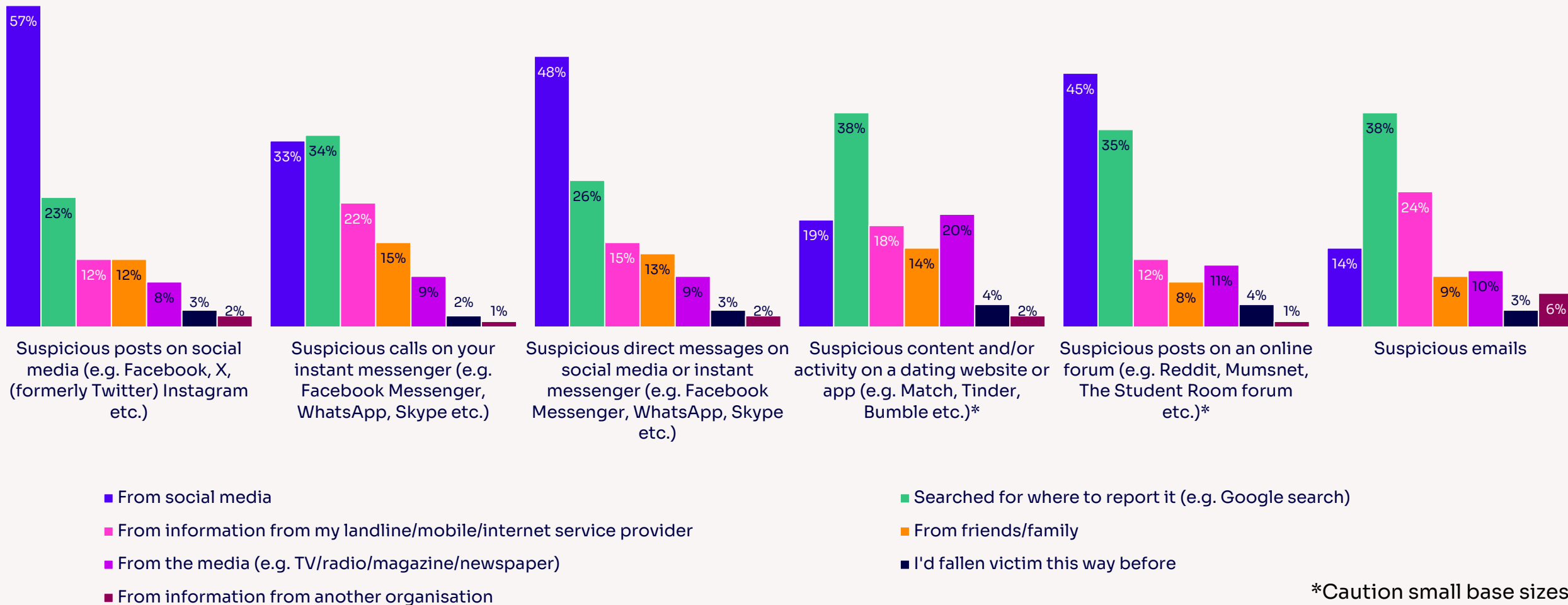
Source: YouGov survey for Ofcom, January 2024

Q10: Still thinking about your experience reporting suspicious [texts on your mobile / calls on your mobile / calls on your landline]. How did you know where to report this? (Please select all that apply)

Base: All online UK adults 16+ who have previously reported suspicious content on each service. Text on mobile (437), Call on mobile (333) Call on landline (93)

Social media is the most-cited source of information about where to report suspicious content on social media itself

How respondents knew where to report suspicious online content



Source: YouGov survey for Ofcom, January 2024

Q10: Still thinking about your experience reporting posts on [social media channel]. How did you know where to report this? (Please select all that apply)

Base: All online UK adults 16+ who have previously reported suspicious content on each service. Post on social media (437), Call on instant messenger (189), Direct message on social media (363), Dating app/website (51), Online forum (78), Email (573)

The main reasons for reporting suspicious activity are to prevent seeing it again, not wanting it to happen to others and wanting to help tackle scams

Reasons **for reporting** suspicious activity



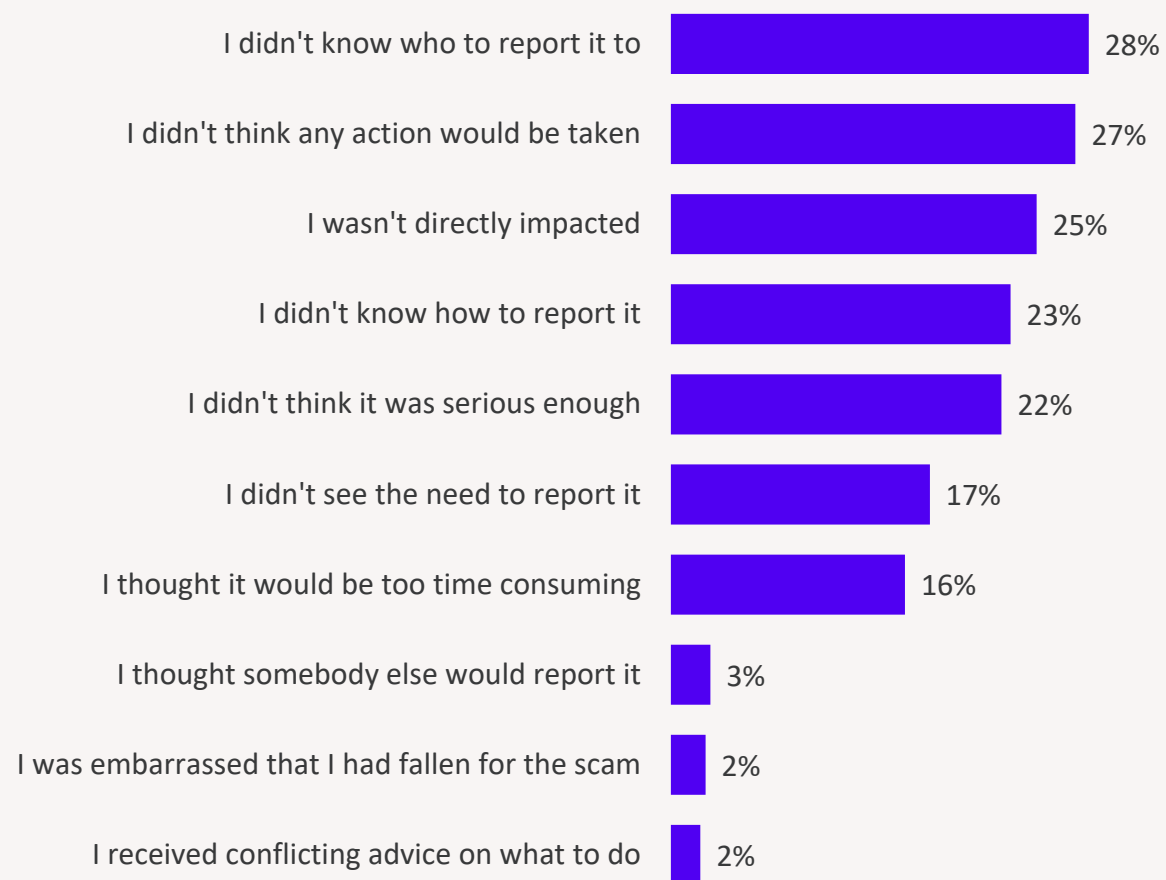
Source: YouGov survey for Ofcom, January 2024

Q14: You previously said that you have reported some types of suspicious content or activity. Which of the following are reasons for why you decided to report it? (Please select all that apply)

Base: All online UK adults 16+ who have previously reported suspicious content (1179)

People have a range of reasons for NOT reporting suspicious activity including not knowing who to report it to or how to report it.

Reasons for sometimes **not reporting** suspicious activity

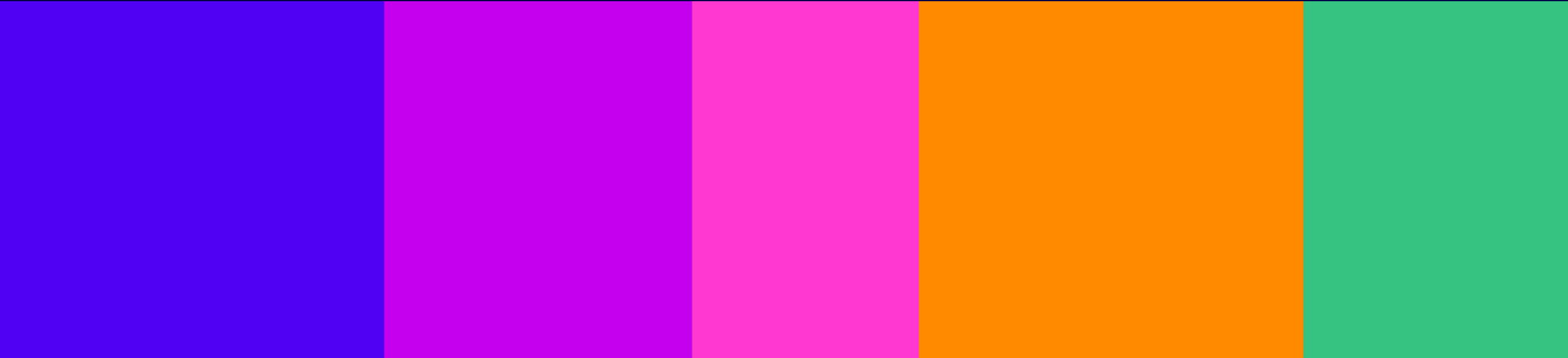


Source: YouGov survey for Ofcom, January 2024

Q15: You previously said that for some types of suspicious content or activity you encountered, you did not report it. Which of the following are reasons for not doing so? (Please select all that apply)

Base : All online UK Adults 16 + who have ever experienced but sometimes not reported suspicious content/ activity (1941)

**Most recent experience of
suspicious activity**



Email was the most-mentioned source of the **most recent** experience of suspicious content, followed by calls to mobiles and texts on mobiles

Nature of most recent experience of suspicious content



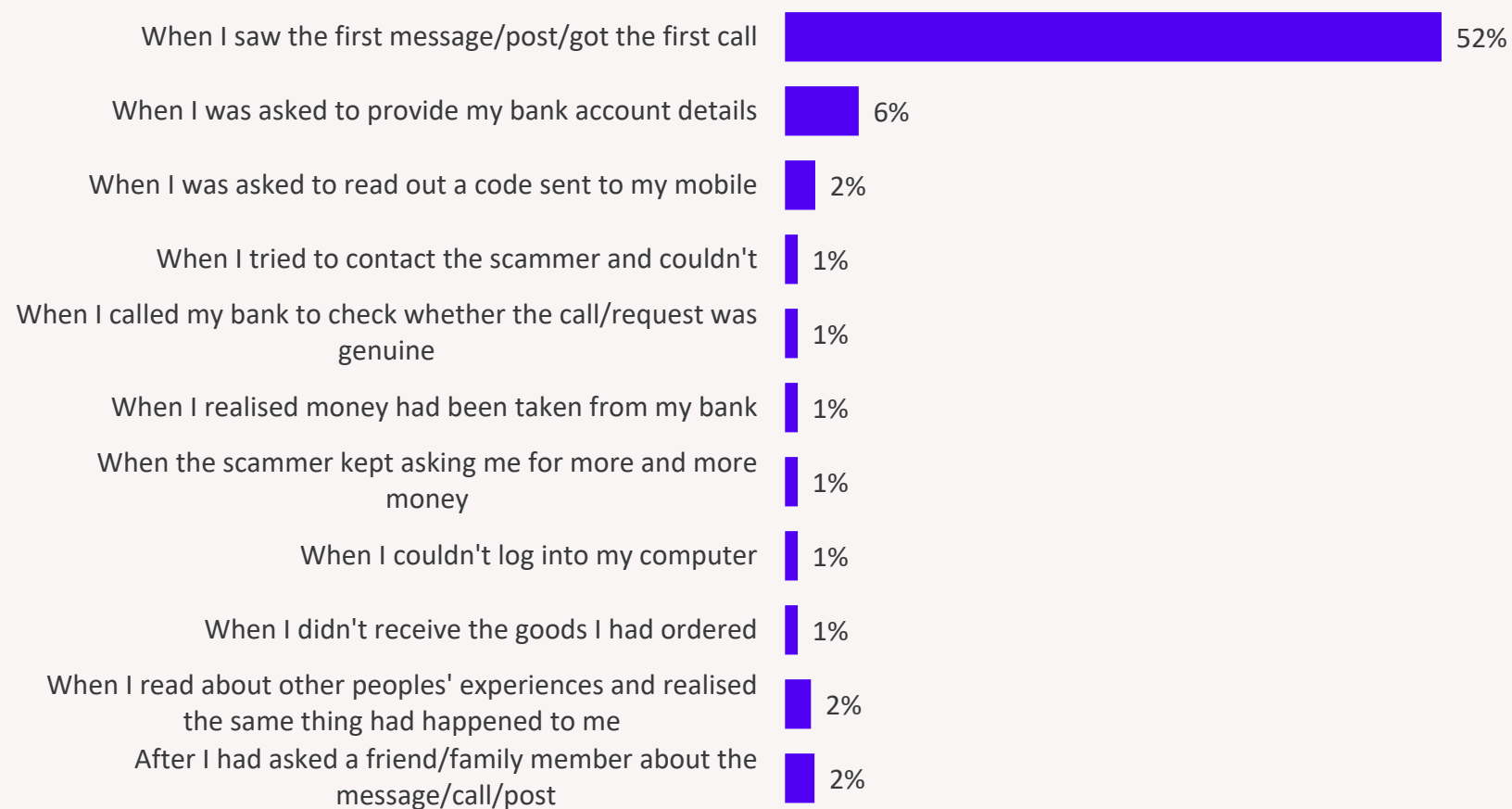
Source: YouGov survey for Ofcom, January 2024

Q11: Now please specifically think about the most recent experience you had with suspicious content or activity among the different communication methods you have used...Which of the following best describes the nature of your most recently experienced suspicious content or activity?

Base: All online UK adults 16+ who have ever experienced suspicious content or activity (2035)

The majority realised the content they had seen was suspicious as soon as they saw it

What best describes the moment you realised something was wrong (most recent experience)?



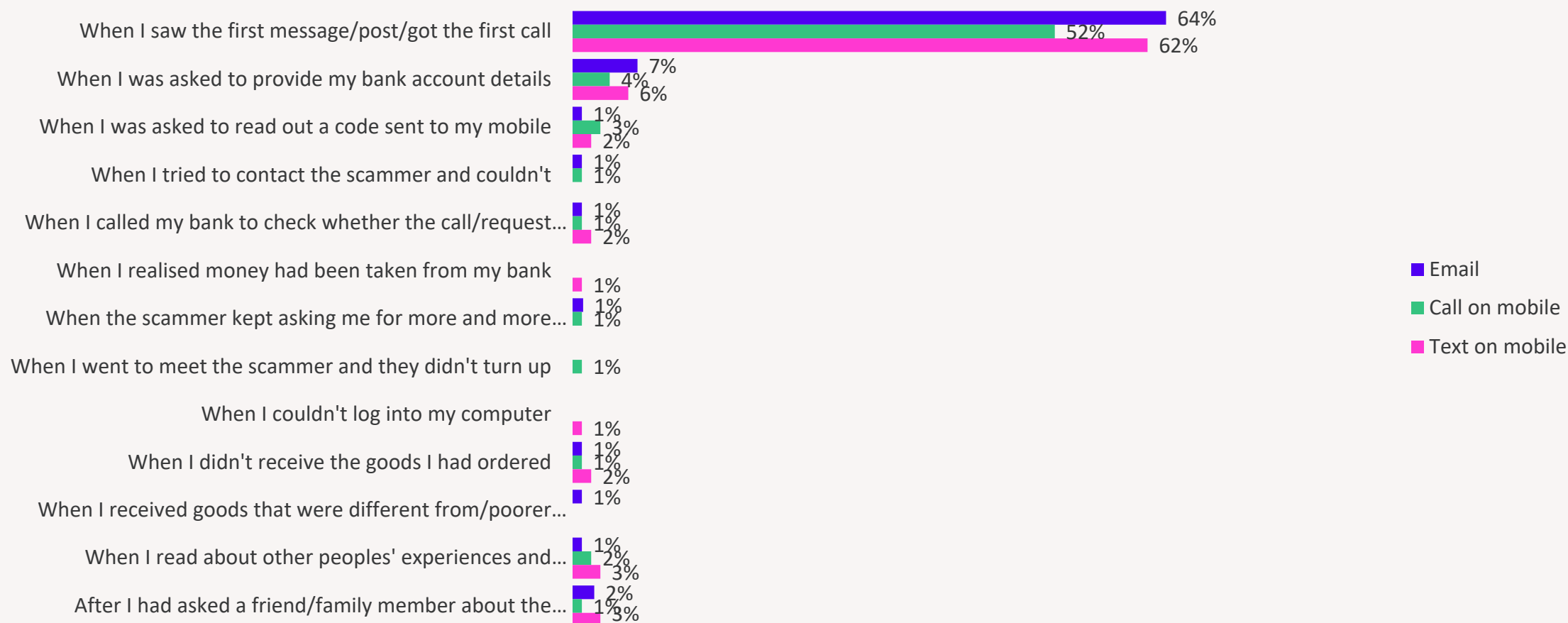
Source: YouGov survey for Ofcom, January 2024

Q12: Still thinking about your most recently experienced suspicious content or activity...Which of the following best describes the moment when you realised something was wrong?

Base: All online UK adults 16+ who have ever experienced suspicious content or activity (2035)

Calls on mobiles were less likely than emails or texts to be identified as suspicious straight away

What best describes the moment you realised something was wrong (when email, call on mobile or text on mobile was the most recent experience)?



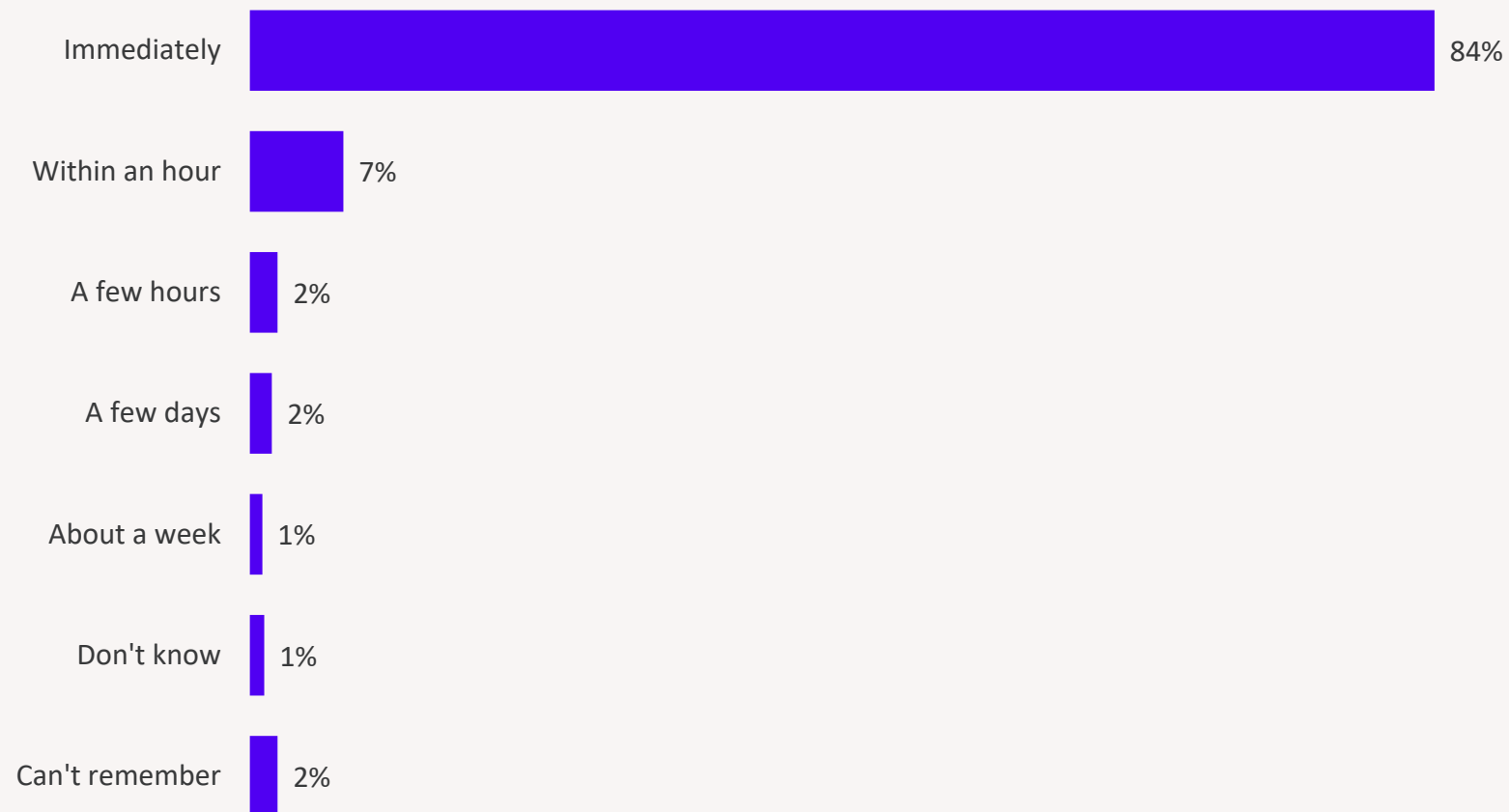
Source: YouGov survey for Ofcom, January 2024

Q12: Still thinking about your most recently experienced suspicious content or activity...Which of the following best describes the moment when you realised something was wrong?

Base: All online UK adults 16+ who have ever experienced suspicious content or activity email (585), call on mobile (402), text on mobile (339)

84% realised immediately that the suspicious content/activity was an attempted scam

Time taken to realise someone was trying to scam you (most recent experience)



Source: YouGov survey for Ofcom, January 2024

Q13: Last time you experienced suspicious content or activity, approximately how long did it take you to realise that someone was attempting to scam you?

Base: All online UK adults 16+ who have ever experienced suspicious content or activity (2035)