

Findings from IFF Research
focus groups on study brand
and taking part in a birth
cohort

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Background and research aims

The UCL Centre for Longitudinal Studies commissioned Hudson Fuggle to develop a participant facing name and brand for the Early Life Cohort Feasibility Study. As part of this work, Hudson Fuggle commissioned IFF research to carry out some research with parents, including to test the names and creative routes for the study which they had designed.

Research aims were to explore:

- Experiences of being a new parent
- Awareness and knowledge of birth cohort studies
- Motivations and barriers to participation in a cohort study
- Information sources on parenting and views on sharing child data

The work also aimed to:

- Test 4 different names and 3 different straplines
- Test 4 different creative executions (logo and website)

Methodology

Two online focus groups with mums and dads of children aged under 2 years, each lasting 2.5 hours. One focus group with ABC1 parents (parents with professional occupations) and one with C2DE parents (parents not in professional occupations). Fieldwork took place 26th and 27th October 2021. A mix of parents by gender, UK

geography, ethnicity, age, number of children and whether parents had pre-term children were included.

Engagement findings

1. Experiences of being a parent in 2021

Parents in the focus groups generally struggled to balance their working and childcare responsibilities. Parents often felt 'something had to give' and that they were 'tagging in and out' of childcare in the few hours they had before or after work, leading to little free time during the week. Daily schedules were finely poised and often felt quite fragile, with something small not going as planned having a big impact on the day. The unpredictability of covid and lockdowns also intensified feelings of chaos or uncertainty when managing this balance.

2. Experiences and perceptions of research

Parents understood the potential of the study to influence change, and thought personal interest in the study would drive participation. The group had mixed experiences of taking part in research prior to this study, with ABC1 parents being more likely to have taken part in focus groups before. Motivations to take part in research generally included knowing that the research could influence policy, the topics of the survey aligning with the parent's personal or professional interests, research around children and health and research that gives participants practical information to use in the future. Potential barriers to taking part in research included lack of time and combining taking part with childcare responsibilities.

3. Understanding of birth cohort studies

Whilst detailed awareness was limited, most knew of or successfully guessed what a birth cohort study entails. Awareness of birth cohort studies almost exclusively came from watching TV programmes about previous studies, although the group struggled to recall specific programmes. There was a consensus in the two groups that these programmes were 'fascinating',

aligning with participants' personal interests and concerns around child development. As such, they acted as positive examples of a birth cohort for those who had viewed them. Most of the participants would be interested in taking part in a birth cohort study if approached.

4. Motivations and barriers to taking part in a birth cohort study

Motivations to take part in a cohort study had greater weight than barriers, but reassurances were vital to buy in. Commonly parents' experiences of supporting their child or children throughout the pandemic was central to their motivation to take part in a birth cohort study. They felt the study could provide them (and society at large) with a better understanding of learning loss, the impact of lockdown on social behaviour, and the impact of reduced healthcare support during and after birth. Additionally, knowledge sharing with other parents and financial incentivization for some was deemed motivating for participation. Barriers to taking part include the perceived intrusiveness of the data collection and planned use, the time commitment and frequency of data collection, the length of the questionnaire, and the need to strict assurances a privacy and confidentiality. Knowing the study is reputable and being kept abreast of study findings were important for addressing reservations.

5. Desirability of different endorsements for the study.

The group thought that reassurances from GPs and the NHS were most desirable, particularly regarding ethics and authenticity. Clear endorsement from the university was deemed next most desirable for reassurances around data protection and methodology. Hearing about the study in the news and endorsement from the four nations was seen as having a neutral impact, whereas celebrity endorsement was seen as negative.

Branding findings

Four possible names and brands were tested with the focus groups. The final name chosen was 'Generation New Era', with tag line 'A study of people born in the 2020s'. The name was consistently popular, and particularly popular with C2DE

parents. The parents liked the simple, self-explanatory nature of the name, with an allusion to Covid-19. The name was also popular as it did not carry any brand associations. The strapline was voted most popular as it was informative, authoritative, and clear.

In terms of the look of the brand, parents preferred imagery of parents and children that was diverse, inclusive and not too perfect or staged. For the website, parents wanted a good look with not too much dead space or unnecessarily large boxes of text. They also wanted clear navigation to find information easily. For the brand colour palette, parents preferred complementary colours that didn't clash. Overall, the focus groups felt it important the brand was not easily associable with any other brands.

Summary

Overall, parents were more realistic than aspirational regarding parenting young children in 2021. They acknowledge the unique difficulties of the pandemic, and have struggled with balancing home working, and having enough time for childcare. Any communication and messaging around a birth cohort study would therefore need to acknowledge parent struggles, with realistic imagery, demonstrating that parenting doesn't always go to plan.

While ABC1 parents were generally more informed about what a birth cohort study was, compared with C2DE parents, there were no other differences found. This was likely driven by the diverse mix of participants included in the study, along with a relatively small sample size.

Parents see gaining a better understanding of the impact of the pandemic on their children as a key motivator for taking part in a birth cohort study. They are particularly interested in research around learning loss, and social behaviour. Generally, most parents viewed birth cohort studies positively (although there was mixed levels of awareness), but would require clear assurances regarding purpose of study, data protection and frequency of input required. In any communications to parents regarding the study, early assurances around these aspects will be vital to allaying concerns.

Communicating the study via GPs/NHS, and providing regular feedback on the study that matches levels of participation, would help to reduce parental reservations.

The final name chosen for the study, influenced particularly by its popularity among C2DE families, was 'Generation New Era'. The study strapline chosen was 'A study of children born in the 2020s'.