

21st Century Evangelicals

A snapshot of the beliefs and habits of evangelical Christians in the UK – Autumn 2011

Are we communicating?



Research by the Evangelical Alliance



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with learning disabilities...

BETTER FOR EVERYONE!

Foreword



The world is constantly changing; and the way we communicate is changing with it. Every day brings new technologies, new media, new ways in which we speak and listen to the world around us. But how has the continual shift in communications technologies affected evangelical Christians in the UK today?

Once again, our research has produced a fascinating picture. Evangelicals are email and web-savvy. It's no surprise that it is younger people who are at the forefront of using the newest technologies such as Facebook and Twitter. There are some interesting differences between men and women in the communication strategies they prefer. But people continue to talk to each other, and it seems that face-to-face meetings in church are still significant.

Naturally, there are some concerns about where the internet is taking us, and whether the sheer

'Every day brings new technologies, new media, new ways in which we speak and listen to the world around us.'

volume and intensity of modern communication is preventing us from really listening to each other or to the voice of God. Even so, there is still a confidence among these Christians that God has spoken and continues to speak today.

Our data reveals that we are not slow in communicating our concerns to those in power, using the full range of media now available. Our political concerns are wide-ranging. They include: local issues; the environment; social justice; world poverty and human trafficking. There are also more familiar evangelical topics such as religious liberty, the persecuted Church, religious education and sexual ethics.

While there is much to encourage us in these findings, we should be concerned that too often we seem to be communicating to ourselves. There is little confidence that the Church is making a significant impact on British culture and society, and little evidence that Christians are making their voice heard through the mass media. We appear to be more likely to try to persuade people to change their theology or politics than to challenge unbelievers to follow Jesus – a sign perhaps of a significant lack of confidence in the gospel.

We now have a wider range of media than ever before. Let's use them all to share the most important message of all.



Steve Clifford
General
Director,
Evangelical
Alliance



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Introduction

This is the second in our quarterly reports that have followed *21st Century Evangelicals*, our groundbreaking snapshot survey of more than 17,000 Christians published in January 2011.

In partnership with 10 organisations who have come together to form our Research Club we are committed to an ongoing programme of research based on these quarterly surveys. Each covers one of a range of different issues that help map out the beliefs, habits and practices of evangelical Christians in the UK today. This report asks 'Are we communicating?' and looks at messages and media to, from and within the Christian community in a world where global communications technologies are changing week by week.

In August 2011, 3,424 emails were sent out to people who had indicated willingness to help us with further research. We asked them to complete our summer survey on communications hosted online by Survey Monkey. By 31 August, 1,161 people had submitted replies that are included in the analysis – 10 more than completed our Easter survey. This represented an excellent response rate of 39.7% taking into account the number of 'bounced' emails.

We are so grateful to our panel for the time they spent telling us about how they use old and newer forms of communication. This report will help the Church to shape and develop strategies for mission and communication in today's world.

Every

respondent except two considered themselves a Christian

92%

said they were evangelicals while a further 6% were unsure

28%

were individual members of the Evangelical Alliance

A wide range

of evangelical traditions are covered by the sample. The largest number were Anglicans (36%), followed by Baptists (16%) and Charismatics (new/community church/fellowship) (13.5%).



Are we still talking?

In an age of new communication technologies and information overload, how important is it to meet, talk and relate to one another offline?



Despite all the new technologies, speaking face to face remains the most common form of communication. Over 92% of people said they had talked to someone today, and virtually 100% within the last week. This compares with 77% who had used email today and 74% who had used the phone.

Face-to-face interaction

Our family, friends and church members are the people we speak to -in person -the most. Not everyone has work colleagues, so 54% said they had spoken to someone at work in the past week. Around 73% had spoken with a neighbour, while just 28% had done so with a fellow member of a community, sports or hobby group.

Older people (over-55s) were significantly more likely to

have had such conversations. We know evangelicals are more community-minded than average but there may be signs that even for them community is not neighbour-focused, and perhaps that church activity limits participation in secular community groups.

Public speaking

Some 38% had spoken in public with a view to encouraging other Christians in their spiritual life. Around 25% had done so in order to change people's

beliefs, but only 20% with an evangelistic intent. This compares with 17% who spoke in public as an advocate to encourage giving of money or time for a good cause, and 12% who had spoken in an effort to influence change in behaviour. In almost every case men were significantly more likely to have spoken in public than women, and the 35-55 age group more likely than younger or older people to have done so.

Hearing God's voice

There is a very strong degree of confidence among our panel that God has spoken and still speaks today.

- 96% agreed or strongly agreed that 'God spoke to people thousands of years ago and that message is recorded accurately in the Bible.'
- 94% agreed or strongly agreed with the statement 'I believe God often speaks directly to people today not only through the Bible but in other ways.'

About three quarters of the panel said God had spoken significantly to them through the Bible in the last month or so (see table). Just under 5% felt God had never spoken to them in more direct ways or via a

message from another Christian. However being given a message was almost as common as hearing God speak through the Bible, while receiving a 'word' was somewhat less common, and least likely for the over-55s.

Some people feared that the noise of the digital world stops us relating to others and hearing the voice of God. For example, exactly 50% (and significantly more among over-55s) agreed or strongly agreed with the statement: *'I fear people will be so involved in the internet that they will not be able to relate well to people in the 'real world'* and 57% that *'There is so much 'noise' of communication around us today that it is difficult to hear the voice of God.'*

Snapshot

88%

had spoken face to face with a family member in the last week

84%

had spoken with a fellow church member

80%

had spoken with a close friend

73%

had spoken to a neighbour

How God has spoken recently	Today	In the last week	In the last month	Less recently	Never
Read or heard something from the Bible that caused you to change something significant in your life	10.7%	33.6%	29.6%	25.8%	0.3%
Felt God was giving you a message (a Scripture, picture, word or insight) that He wanted you to communicate to someone else	9.2%	33.5%	26.0%	26.9%	4.5%
Been given a message (a Scripture, picture, word or insight) by someone that they felt God had given to them and that He wanted them to communicate to you	3.7%	19.6%	26.2%	45.7%	4.9%

Children's world is digital

According to a recent report commissioned by Ofcom, 91% of children aged five to 15 live in a household with internet access via a PC/laptop, compared to 87% in 2010.

According to BARB data, children aged four to 15 watched an average of 17 hours and 34 minutes of television per week in 2010 which was an increase from 15 hours and 37 minutes from 2007.

Everybody's talking

But who are we talking to and what are we talking about?



Evangelicals have always taken the gospel seriously, and talking about Jesus is a priority. We asked our respondents if in the last year they had tried to encourage others to do various things, and if so what medium they had used. Speaking face to face was the most frequently-used medium for every category except encouraging others to take political action.

Three quarters said they had spoken to encourage the spiritual walk of others, and about six out of ten to change beliefs or behaviour. Less than half the respondents had spoken to persuade someone to become a Christian. Even when other media were used, evangelism seemed to be a concern of only 61% while all other topics except environmental action scored higher. Men were more likely than women to speak to others about politics, and younger people more likely than over-35s to have tried to get others to change beliefs or act on the environment. It appears that far

too many Christians either lack contacts or confidence through which they might communicate their faith to others.

Nearest and dearest

Even where our respondents are not able to speak face to face with people who are in close relationships, they seek to keep in touch using other means.

- The phone is still well used – 77% had spoken on the phone to a family member, 61% to a friend and 53% to a fellow church member in the previous week. Text messaging is not far behind with figures of 60%, 56% and 43% respectively.

- Online communication is almost as frequent – 49% for family members, 54% for friends and for fellow church members at 56% is more common than phone calls or text messaging.
- Personal paper communication by card/note or letter lags well behind at 21% for family, 13.5% for friends and 9% for church members.
- Communication with neighbours by any means other than face-to-face conversation is consistently well below 10%.

Women are significantly more likely than men to use text or

Have you tried in the last 12 months or so to encourage people to do any of the following?	Spoken face to face	Done this by any medium
Grow in their trust in God or become more committed to prayer, Bible study or Christian mission	75.5%	90.0%
Change their beliefs about some aspect of Christian faith	61.2%	74.1%
Change behaviour that may be harmful to health or wellbeing	57.3%	68.3%
Offer some time as a volunteer to help people in need or a charitable project	48.8%	65.1%
Become a Christian	47.3%	60.7%
Act more responsibly in protecting the environment	37.6%	52.6%
Give some money to a good cause	37.2%	69.5%
Take political action (from signing a petition to campaigning in an election)	20.6%	63.8%

paper communication with those who are close to them. Younger people are significantly more likely to use text or online communication, while older people are more likely to write, (or with fellow church members phone) than younger people.

Communicating with organisations

For less personal and more formal communications, online communications and writing are more likely to be used. For example 732 of our respondents said they had communicated with their bank in the past week - 39% had done so online. In comparison only 6% had done so in writing, 20% by phone and 28% face to face.

Of the 715 who had been in touch with a Christian organisation or charity in the last seven days, 38% had done so

online and only 4% had done so in writing, 12.5% by phone and 17% face to face.

Online donations

Online giving among the general population shot up 85% between 2008 and 2011.

Over half our respondents said they had made online donations to a charity or ministry during the last year. However, direct debits or standing orders and traditional cash or cheque

donations remain much more popular, while text giving has scarcely taken off as yet. This was however more popular among women and the 35-55 age group.



Have you in the last 12 months made any gifts or donations to a Christian or charitable cause using the methods below?	Yes
Websites or other online services	53.6%
Text message	13.1%
Cash or cheque	81.9%
Direct debit or standing order	85.1%

New social media, new generation

Are evangelical Christians keeping up with the rapid changes in media?



Technologies are changing so fast that many of us fail to keep up either with the necessary new skills, or with the price of new gadgets. But evangelicals seem to be adapting to the changes and many, especially younger people, are using each new technology as it emerges. But are they abandoning the written word and no longer visiting the shops, bank or church?

As might be expected in an online survey panel, 97% of respondents said they had emailed someone within the last seven days, and a similar proportion had used Google or another search engine while browsing the web.

However, in the case of the more advanced or newer internet technologies, responses

were divided. For example, while over half the panel had used Facebook or other social network sites in the last month, less than 20% had uploaded a video clip to Youtube, and three quarters had never used Twitter. Significantly higher proportions of the over-55s had not moved on beyond basic email and web use, while women were less

likely to have taken part in some of the more public, business-oriented and formal applications of technology such as 'Sharing your views or information on a website, or blog'; 'Taking part in a conference call or video conference' or 'Appearing on broadcast media such as radio or TV'.

How recently have you personally made use of the following methods to communicate with other people?	In the last week	Less recently	Never
Email an individual	97.3%	2.5%	0.2%
Email to lists or groups of your contacts	55.1%	38.7%	6.2%
Post messages on Facebook or other social network sites	45.9%	23.6%	30.5%
Comment on or email to other people's websites, blogs or Facebook pages	43.0%	29.9%	27.1%
Use the internet from your mobile phone or other mobile device	39.4%	13.8%	46.7%
Upload or share your photos online	23.9%	48.4%	27.7%
Share your views or information on a website, blog	23.1%	35.8%	41.2%
Use Twitter	12.5%	12.0%	75.5%
Take part in a conference call or video conference	9.0%	38.1%	52.9%
Upload a video clip to Youtube or similar online service	8.9%	27.2%	64.0%
Appear on broadcast media such as radio or TV	2.6%	37.7%	59.8%

Web attitudes

It is possible to detect a certain ambivalence towards the internet in the response patterns of our panel to some of the attitude statements we used. In general there are significantly more favourable views of the new technologies among younger people than among the over-55s.

For example, 70% of respondents agreed or strongly agreed with the statement 'I make good use of Facebook, emails or other online methods to keep in touch with close friends and family'. Meanwhile, 61% agreed or strongly agreed that 'I find the internet my most valuable source of information.' As many as

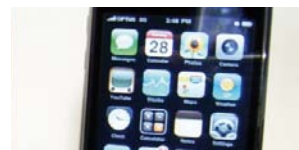
88% agreed or strongly agreed that 'The internet provides an excellent way for churches and Christian organisations to communicate with their members and supporters.' A further 76% said that 'The internet provides an excellent way for churches to share the gospel with the wider public.'

However, just 17% agreed or strongly agreed that 'Almost everybody in my church uses Facebook to keep in touch between meetings'; while 26% agreed or strongly agreed that 'There are a lot of people in my church who want nothing to do with online communications.'

This seems to suggest that going online is at the present time

an individual preference rather than a cultural norm in church communities.

There are indications of some moral difficulties about some of the material found on the internet. Some 80% agreed or strongly agreed that 'There is a high proportion of dangerous rubbish on the internet.' Meanwhile 25% agreed or strongly agreed that 'I think I spend too much time online.' This suggests that they might recognise the potential for addiction.



Talking politics

Are we speaking truth to power?



We know from our earlier reports that evangelicals are remarkably well engaged in politics, with high voting participation rates and awareness of political issues. Many belong to political parties, though they do not agree which one they should as Christians support. In our current survey we asked about how they had communicated with those in power, or become involved in campaigns on an issue.

Relatively few of our respondents had managed, or tried to use the press or broadcast media to make their case. Are Christians missing a trick when so few of them make contributions to radio phone-ins and the like?

The under-35 age group are less likely than middle-aged people to be politically engaged (except perhaps for lobby and protest action). For public meetings and media involvement men are more likely than women to have been active.

It's often assumed that Christians are only concerned to protest about religious and narrowly defined 'moral' issues, usually expressing a conservative or traditional viewpoint. The next question asked people to detail the issues they had been

concerned about. More than 550 gave answers that indicated an amazing range of concerns.

The data is too complex to discuss and analyse here – it deserves a paper in its own right. But we should note that alongside the traditional evangelical issues of abortion, euthanasia, gay rights, pornography, religious education, persecution of Christians and alcohol abuse, there were also widely held concerns about fair trade and world poverty, human trafficking, debt and poverty in the UK, NHS reform, pensions, homelessness, the public sector cuts, Rupert Murdoch's bid for Sky TV and a myriad of local concerns, planning disputes and Sunday parking charges. Environmental issues, views about Islam and concern about Israel / Palestine (both pro Zionist and pro Palestine) also were frequently mentioned.

The word cloud image (opposite) gives a good impression of the balance of concerns. This was generated online at www.wordle.net. It is in no way a rigorous analysis of the data, but does give a good impression. An initial assessment is that it is impossible to group all these concerns into a single political profile for British evangelicals. This raises some difficult issues for the Alliance as we seek to represent the whole of our constituency in the corridors of power. Is it possible to develop a pattern of debate and a theological understanding that allows Christians to work through their political differences? Is it possible to come to a shared understanding of God's priorities for justice, truth and morality in the public sphere as we seek for His Kingdom to be extended on earth?



“We were encouraged by the activism of evangelicals in raising concerns within political and public spheres. It's brilliant to see God's people acting on God's call to love the poor through engaging with justice issues both locally and globally.”

Vikki Davis,
Compassion UK

Snapshot: in the past year

81%

had signed an online petition

71%

had signed a paper petition

57%

had forwarded campaign information via Facebook, email or another online method

52%

had emailed their local MP, councillor or other politician

44%

had posted comments on a website

29%

had met and talked to their local MP, councillor or other politician

19%

had taken part in a lobby event, public meeting, demonstration or protest

15%

had written a letter to a local newspaper

13%

had been interviewed in the media

7%

had contributed to a radio phone-in

Who's talking to us?

What are the key influences shaping contemporary British culture?



Opinions were divided over the most important single influence, with a third saying TV, a quarter each that it was families or peer groups and one person in eight that it was the press.

Over a third of our respondents—especially older people—feel that TV is the biggest influence on culture and beliefs in society, with around a quarter each thinking it is family (especially women and the middle-aged) and peer groups. The press, the internet, music and schools are also seen to have significant influence, while local churches, politicians and church leaders are seen as having little impact. Younger people are significantly more likely to attribute influence to the press, the internet and to

schools than do their elders. It is striking that almost all these evangelical Christians think the Church has little or no influence on society as a whole. Over 85% believe this is the case for local churches, with the men in the sample being somewhat more confident than the women. As for the official spokespeople

of the Church in the nation, one respondent in three can see no impact at all, and most of the rest only a little. This raises some profound questions about what Christians are saying or doing in the public square. We did not ask our respondents about the content of church leaders' public statements, or the style in which

“The survey results confirm just how important family life is to us all. We know that families are the building blocks of society – it’s where our values are ‘caught and taught’ and our experience of family shapes us as individuals.”

Katharine Hill, director of family policy, Care for the Family

Snapshot: What prompted people to give over the past year?

A prompting or communication from God that you should do something	66.1%
A public appeal from your church leader	61.4%
Personal recommendation from a good friend or family member	46.0%
A directly mailed letter asking for help	39.0%
An email from the organisation	37.5%
A printed advertisement, poster or leaflet	27.2%
An appeal being passed on by a friend via email or Facebook	23.7%
Coming across a website asking for help	11.6%
A phone call from or on behalf of the organisation	11.6%
Being approached in the street or at your door by someone representing the organisation	9.8%
A text message from the organisation	4.6%

“Like any high street, the Church is a crowded marketplace with many Christian mission organisations competing to be heard and using ever-increasing sophistication in marketing techniques to influence perceptions towards their area of activity. The consequence is that our churches have become very noisy and the result can be a media influenced approach to mission. This research is invaluable for mission charities with small marketing budgets to understand what is at the heart of the mission-shaped Church in the 21st century.”

Gordon Gill, fundraising manager, Prospects Mission and Ministry

they are delivered. However, it might be the case that they have little or no confidence in the official spokespersons of the Church, most notably the bishops of the established Church. Nevertheless, it is clear from other questions in our survey, and in the wider research project, that evangelicals are very engaged, vocal and active on a wide range of public issues. Is it really the case that we are all frantically running around, chattering loudly and protesting often but without making a significant and godly impact on our contemporary culture? If so, this raises issues about the need for discipleship training for public leadership.

How are we influenced to give?

We asked how people are most likely to be persuaded to give money or time to a ministry or charity. It was clear a personal appeal prompting by a church leader or a relative or friend, and above all a prompting by God, is likely to be more effective than a written or impersonal approach.

Giving to organisations

Over 90% had been asked for money by a Christian organisation and 73% had been persuaded to give some within the last year. Just over half said they had been asked to give time and labour and 39% had responded positively. Two

thirds had been asked to take part in a political campaign and over half had agreed. Bearing in mind that the respondents said that a prompting from God and an appeal from a church leader or personal friend are the most effective channels of persuasion, the levels of influence on Christians by charities and Christian organisations seem to remain substantial.

We also asked about satisfaction with follow-up communication with supporters. Around 54% felt it was usually very good and a further 43% satisfactory.



Digital consumers? Secular vs Christian media

Are evangelicals mainly using Christian media or are we hooked on mainstream media?



Just over half (51%) said they had watched TV news and documentaries today and another 39% in the last week. This compares with 75% who had used a search engine to browse the internet today, and 58% who had listened to radio (news and talk programmes). In interpreting these figures we need to take account of the fact that respondents completing the survey in the morning or afternoon may well have a pattern of not turning on the TV until evening, but would have an internet connection already open.

In contrast 76% had watched TV entertainment programmes (soaps, comedies, dramas etc) in the previous week. Over half had watched a video clip online, and more than one in three had

watched Sky or other pay TV, a film or used an online catch-up service.

This compares to a mere 14% who had watched a Christian TV channel and a tiny number who

had voted in a reality TV show. Some 55% said they had never done this. Women and those aged 35 to 55 are most likely to take part in interactive voting. There also seems to be some

Viewing habits – % of respondents who had:	Within the last week
Watched TV news and documentaries	90.3%
Watched TV entertainment programmes (soaps, comedies, dramas etc)	76.1%
Viewed You Tube, Vimeo or other video site	51.7%
Watched films (at cinema or DVD)	39.9%
Used TV or radio online catch-up services such as BBC iPlayer and podcasts	35.9%
Watched Sky TV or other pay TV channels	33.0%
Watched a Christian TV channel	13.6%
Voted in a TV talent or 'reality' show such as <i>X Factor</i> , <i>Strictly Come Dancing</i> , <i>BBC Sports Personality of the Year</i>	1.70%

resistance to pay channels (43% had never watched); and to Christian channels (24% had never watched). But of course these only broadcast on cable or satellite systems. Men are more likely to have watched Christian TV channels.

On most of the categories other than news and documentaries younger people are significantly more likely to be recent viewers.

Listening and reading

Evangelical Christians are fairly frequent readers of books, magazines and newspapers. But we appear to be even fonder of listening to music and to news and talk programmes on the radio. Nonetheless, all these figures lag behind the rates for email and web searching.

Also the fact that under-35s are significantly more likely

to listen to music, watch TV as entertainment or online or via satellite or cable and that it is older people who are more likely to have read newspapers suggest that our evangelical panellists are following a general cultural trend. As new technologies and more choice of media content have developed, younger people seem to be turning away from the press and public service broadcasters towards the internet for information, and other digital media for entertainment. At the same time there may be a lessening of interest in public affairs, and 'serious' topics and growing interest in entertainment and celebrity, (and indeed a blurring of the distinction between the two) from which Christians are not immune.

Snapshot: over the past week

88%

had listened to music

83%

had listened to the radio (news and talk programmes)

23%

had listened to Christian radio

71%

had read a secular magazine or book

62%

had read a national newspaper

56%

had read a local newspaper



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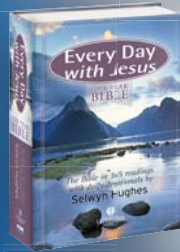
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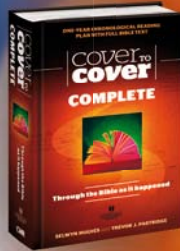
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So what? In the light of these findings how should the Church react?

Celebrate

- That Christians are not being left behind in using the new communication tools and technologies that we have been given in the 21st century.
- That the ongoing value of talking and relating to one another face to face is recognised as essential to the well-being of church and society.
- That Christians are concerned with so many issues of truth and justice and active in campaigning in the public sphere, and that the agendas are not just a narrow range of predictable 'moral' issues. They also back up their concerns with a generous response in giving money and time to relevant causes.
- That so many Christians believe and have experienced that God speaks to and through them today.

Recognise

- The potential of the new technologies for communication within the Church, locally and globally, and for sharing the gospel and Kingdom values with the wider public.
- That younger people are adopting the new technologies more rapidly than the older age groups who form the majority in most sections of the UK Church. In our enthusiasm for progress we must not allow older people to be excluded and marginalised.
- That women often communicate differently and more relationally

than most men, and are finding some of the technologies such as text messaging and social networking more suitable for their concerns.

- That while we may see the internet as a mere tool that can and is being used for good and bad purposes, cyberspace also represents a political and spiritual battlefield in which we need wisdom and prayer as we produce and consume messages, images and virtual networks.

Be concerned

- That Christians seem to have a tendency to communicate only among themselves about Christian issues and agendas, and that so few of us have the confidence or contacts to engage with unbelievers in presenting the Good News of Jesus Christ in any of the available media.
- That so few Christians are involved in and contributing to the way our culture is shaped by the mass media, and that those who do are perceived as unclear and largely ineffective in what they say.
- That where Christian voices are heard in public they often seem contradictory and strident, rather than well grounded in Scripture and contemporary reality and graciously expressed.
- That many younger Christians, though in tune with technology and popular culture, may be seduced by its emphasis on immediacy, celebrity and trivia rather than being

biblically and spiritually formed to be effective disciples of Christ in the context of Church and society.

What next?

We must confront the potential challenges that the research presents. Do people feel equipped to follow Jesus in the world of global mass communications and rapidly changing digital media? 'Although our message remains the same, are we clearly understanding the changing nature of the medium for the message?

We must prayerfully reflect on what these results say about us as a body of evangelical Christians in the UK. We must stimulate conversation.

And then we need to take action.

Academic research advisors

Keith J. White, Visiting Tutor: Spurgeons College; Malaysia Baptist Theological Seminary; Asian Graduate School of Theology.

John M Evans, Research Director of Gweini (The Council of the Christian Voluntary Sector in Wales)

Dr Mandy Robbins, Senior Lecturer, Division of Psychology, Institute for Health, Medical Science and Society, Glyndwr University, Wrexham

Dr Matthew Guest, Senior Lecturer in Theology and Religion, Durham University

Dr Sylvia Collins-Mayo, Criminology and Sociology Department, Kingston University

Benita Hewitt, Partner at Christian Research Consultancy



To find out more details of the findings, comment on the report or join our research panel and get involved with future research go to www.eauk.org/snapshot



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