

User trust in social platforms is falling, according to our new study

Article

Digital trust is the confidence people have that a platform will protect their information and provide a safe environment for them to create and engage with content. Our sixth annual

benchmark survey of US social media users reveals that trust in social media platforms has declined substantially this year in key areas including privacy, safety, and ad relevance.

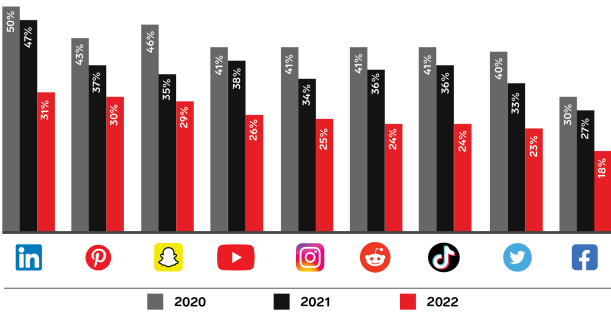
Privacy

In our online survey, conducted in May-June 2022 among 2,225 US adult social media users ages 18-76, security of data and privacy was the leading factor affecting trust. But all nine platforms in the study—Facebook, Instagram, LinkedIn, Pinterest, Reddit, Snapchat, TikTok, Twitter, and YouTube—lost ground in this area.

It's not surprising that Facebook's long history of privacy infringements continues to affect user perceptions. Just 18% of users agreed or strongly agreed the platform protects their privacy. But other platforms suffered as well; only 31% of LinkedIn users and 30% of Pinterest users agreed or strongly agreed that their privacy and data were protected, with lower percentages for the remaining platforms.

All of these figures were down substantially from last year and also from 2020.

US Social Media Users Who Agree That Social Platforms Protect Their Privacy and Data, 2020-2022
% of respondents



Note: ages 18-76; among respondents who used each platform in the past 12 months and agree/strongly agree, based on a 7-level agreement, with the statement, "I am confident that this social platform protects my privacy and data."
Source: Insider Intelligence, "US Digital Trust Benchmark 2022," Sep 2022
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Safety

Feeling connected and safe in an online community is the second most significant factor affecting trust, according to our research. But the percentage of users who agreed that they felt safe participating and posting on social platforms fell markedly this year.

Last year, 44% of users on average across the nine platforms agreed or strongly agreed that they felt safe participating and posting on the social platforms they used. This year, that average sank to 35%.

Ad Relevance

Perceptions of ad relevance declined across all platforms since last year. Apple's privacy-related changes, which limit the ability of platforms to target and measure results from advertising, were likely a factor. At most, only 26% of platform users agreed or strongly agreed that they saw relevant ads, down from 34% last year.

What Should Social Platforms and Their Advertisers Do?

Social platforms must act now to shore up trust. For platforms where user growth is slow or even declining, such as Facebook and Twitter, building trust is one way to keep existing users. But platforms whose user growth is still on an upswing, like TikTok, shouldn't rest on their laurels; building a foundation of trust is far easier than trying to restore it.

In a tough economic environment, trust can help a social platform stand out among competing ad venues. Those that foster positive user engagement and interactions will benefit from having a user base that is also more likely to engage with the advertising.

Marketers should prioritize platforms that are working to raise user trust. Media buying decisions often come down to ad price and audience size, but the steep falloff in user sentiment revealed in our survey should be a wakeup call.

The online survey was conducted in May–June 2022 among 2,225 US adults (ages 18–76) who had used at least one of the nine social platforms in the past 12 months. Our sample aligns with the US general population on the criteria of gender, age (18–76), household income, and race/ethnicity, measured against US Census data. The survey has a margin of error of $\pm 2.4\%$ at a 95% confidence level.

[Read the full report.](#)

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