How user trust in social media platforms could affect engagement with ads

Article

Issues of deceptive content, privacy, and safety continue to plague social media. Building user trust is critical for social platforms and their advertisers; it affects how users feel when they
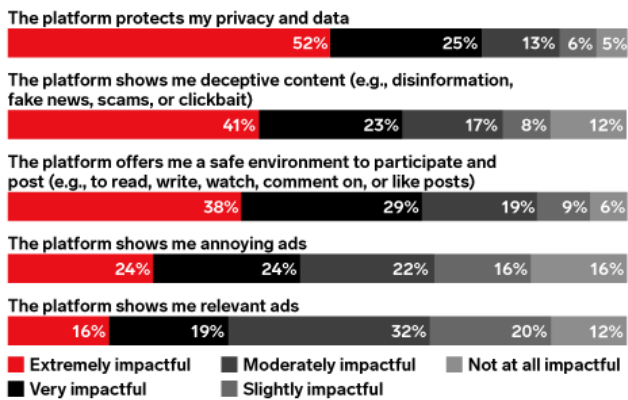
use social media and may also impact whether users want to engage with ads on social media platforms.

Our new Digital Trust Benchmark Report 2021, based on a Q2 2021 survey of 1,730 US social media users, evaluates how these users feel about nine major social media platforms— **Facebook**, **Instagram**, **LinkedIn**, **Pinterest**, **Reddit**, **Snapchat**, **TikTok**, **Twitter**, and **YouTube**— and reveals the extent to which trust affects usage and attitudes toward advertising.

Strong majorities of our respondents felt that the same three factors that most affect trust— **Security** (whether a platform protects user privacy and data), **Legitimacy** (whether a platform shows deceptive content), and **Community** (whether a platform provides a safe environment) —were either extremely or very impactful on their decision to engage with ads or sponsored content on a social platform.

What Most Affects US Social Media Users' Decision to Engage* with Ads or Sponsored Content on Social Media Platforms?
% of respondents, June 2021

The platform protects my privacy and data

| 52% | 25% | 13% | 6% | 5% |

The platform shows me deceptive content (e.g., disinformation, fake news, scams, or clickbait)

| 41% | 23% | 17% | 8% | 12% |

The platform offers me a safe environment to participate and post (e.g., to read, write, watch, comment on, or like posts)

| 38% | 29% | 19% | 9% | 6% |

The platform shows me annoying ads

| 24% | 24% | 22% | 16% | 16% |

The platform shows me relevant ads

| 16% | 19% | 32% | 20% | 12% |

■ Extremely impactful   ■ Moderately impactful   ■ Not at all impactful
■ Very impactful   ■ Slightly impactful

Note: n=1,730 ages 18-75; number may not add up to 100% due to rounding; *view, watch, click, share, comment
Source: Insider Intelligence, "US Digital Trust Survey," Q2 2021

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Notably, users felt these trust factors were more likely to impact whether they engage with ads on social media than factors directly tied to the quality of their ad experience or ad relevance.

For many advertisers, the effectiveness of social media advertising has tended to outweigh crises of user trust surrounding social platforms. Trust concerns haven't always led advertisers to actively pull back on their social ad spending. And when they have, they've done so only

temporarily. Past boycotts have often been short-lived before advertisers quietly returned to platforms.

But our study suggests that advertisers do need to consider the state of user trust in their ad spending decisions. They should prioritize data privacy in both their own internal policies and in their advertising decisions. They should also consider voting with their dollars, choosing to support platforms that provide safe content environments over those that harm users. And they should continually monitor their ad creative and media buying choices to ensure balance between delivering ads that are relevant and engaging versus those that are annoying.