Voices of the generations.

An Adobe advertising research report.

Whether you're a brand or consumer, digital platform or tech vendor, it's no secret that the online world has continually presented unique challenges.

While the level of innovation and rollout of customized technology is at an all-time high, trust and transparency concerns have also been thrust into the limelight.

In a quest to explore the thoughts and feelings of Americans in relation to online behaviors, challenges, and trends, our *Voices of the Generations* survey polled more than 4,000 consumers on various hot topics.

From questions around trust with personal data to social media use and interaction with brands online, respondents hailed from across four core demographics of U.S. society.

The survey base breaks down to be 48 percent female and 52 percent male, with all of them answering a range of questions. The respondent group was divided equally across generations, with 25 percent each from the Baby Boomers segment (born 1946–1964), Generation X (born 1964–1976), Millennials (born 1977–1995), and Generation Z (born 1996–early 2000s, 18 years old or older).

In this report, we'll take you through the top five areas studied. Our aim is to not only highlight some of the areas of concern but to also show we can correct the issues at hand.

In addition to the survey results, we'll hear from industry experts and top marketers to get their perspectives.
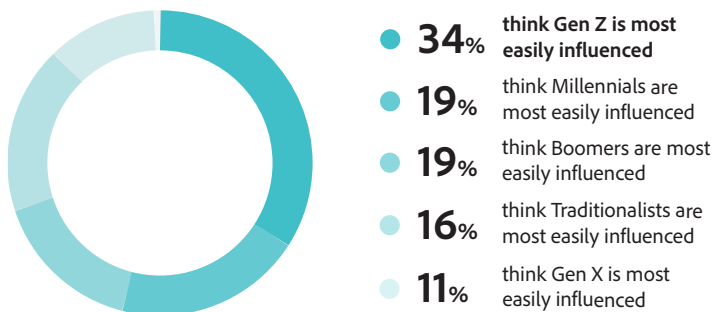
Levels of *trust.*

The findings show that all generations have concerns and beliefs about being influenced online.

Each demographic cohort surveyed sees their own age group as the most susceptible to being most easily influenced or manipulated online.

Gen Z are seen by all groups as the most likely to being misled or influenced by online content, followed by Millennials.

Which generation do you think is most easily influenced online? (percentage of all respondents)

- **34%** think Gen Z is most easily influenced
- **19%** think Millennials are most easily influenced
- **19%** think Boomers are most easily influenced
- **16%** think Traditionalists are most easily influenced
- **11%** think Gen X is most easily influenced

Source: Adobe

A total of 63 percent of Gen Z and 52 percent of Millennials also confess to being unaware of news stories about personal data misuse, or they think the stories are inflated or manufactured.

Those unaware of news stories about personal data misuse or think the stories are inflated or manufactured.

63%
of Gen Z

52%
of Millennials

27%
of Boomers

Source: Adobe

This appears to be a self-perpetuating cycle with participants, but distinctly younger generations, feeling vulnerable and easily misled online. Yet, despite feeling these concerns, younger consumers may either be complacent or indifferent to the risks posed by personal data misuse or to determine the veracity of data leaks, social engineering, and other forms of online manipulation.

Jonathan Wan, director of global marketing for media and social at Japan Airlines, said the airline feels that Gen Z and Millennials do care about their privacy. But he went on to say that these consumers feel powerless to do anything about it as their media consumption habits are so reliant on data-driven platforms and devices that show data-driven content and apps.

"The fact that an online user signs up for an account or subscribes to a service shows trust and engagement toward a brand," Wan said.

"The takeaway for us here is if we can respect and protect the data that a customer has entrusted to us, that is half the battle won in terms of marketing and reaching out to the right customers and building brand loyalty."

Wan said consumers having such a lack of trust and feeling vulnerable to online manipulation is "definitely a concern," and this has forced the airline to change the way they emphasize and convey their messages online.

"Users are becoming more distrusting about the content they consume online, so we need to work a lot harder as brands in order to build credibility with every content piece we put up there," Wan said.

Reasons for the lack of trust by all groups is perhaps reflective of the increasing number of issues taking place in the online ecosystem. From digital fraud to personal and business data hacks, and the rise of fake news, it's easy to see why such skepticism has arisen.

Be it brand ramifications in the online advertising space or consumer impact in the personal tech world, such mishaps only serve to fan the flames of distrust online.

Keith Eadie, VP and GM of Adobe Advertising Cloud, said that despite the increasing frequency of data-related issues, they still seem to have little impact on consumers' online behavior.

"You would think that these issues would lead to more due diligence and more hesitation too, yet, in many cases that's not what appears to be happening," Eadie said.

While digital advertising targeting has advanced greatly, he adds that if there's not consumer awareness of that brand and consumers already have their guard up, it's going to be much harder to break through as an advertiser.

Eadie adds that when ad targeting is contextually relevant and valuable to the consumer, then the feelings of mistrust are likely overpowered by feelings of value.

Jing Yi Ju, senior manager of digital and programmatic media (brand marketing) at the PGA TOUR, said issues such as the frequency of ads, seeing irrelevant ads and giving people too much choice has also likely rocked consumer trust online.

"The noise from the marketplace can also be a factor that people are having less trust with brands—too many options can discredit the brand," Yi Ju said.
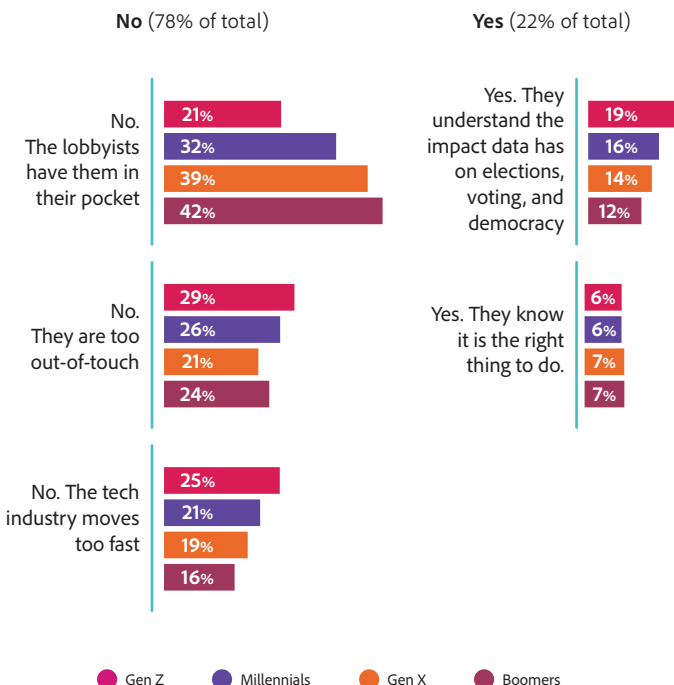
Florida-based Ju said while its first-party data and data management platform help the PGA TOUR with safe and accurate targeting, better consumer education is needed on tools such as Facebook's ad options, which permit feedback like "this is not relevant."

Looking for a *solution.*

As the study supports, Americans don't believe that politicians will create laws to protect personal data, with all generations believing that a solution will not come from government.

Meanwhile, all demographics agree (90 percent) that more education is needed for both children and retirees on the dangers of personal data loss and protection.

Do you trust politicians to protect data?

No (78% of total)   **Yes** (22% of total)

No.
The lobbyists
have them in
their pocket

- 21%
- 32%
- 39%
- 42%

Yes. They
understand the
impact data has
on elections,
voting, and
democracy

- 19%
- 16%
- 14%
- 12%

No.
They are too
out-of-touch

- 29%
- 26%
- 21%
- 24%

Yes. They know
it is the right
thing to do.

- 6%
- 6%
- 7%
- 7%

No. The tech
industry moves
too fast

- 25%
- 21%
- 19%
- 16%

● Gen Z   ● Millennials   ● Gen X   ● Boomers

Source: Adobe

The low faith in politicians' ability to deliver a solution according to the survey
results leaves a gap that provides brands the opportunity to step up
and restore trust.

"There's absolutely a void that could be filled by any brand who wants to
step up with a commitment to privacy or data protection that they put
to consumers," Eadie said.

Ju believes that brands can fill the role of trust ambassadors of their personal data, but they must take serious precautions when it comes to handling precious first-party data.

"I think it can be achieved, but I feel like there is a long way for the brands to establish that trust," she said.
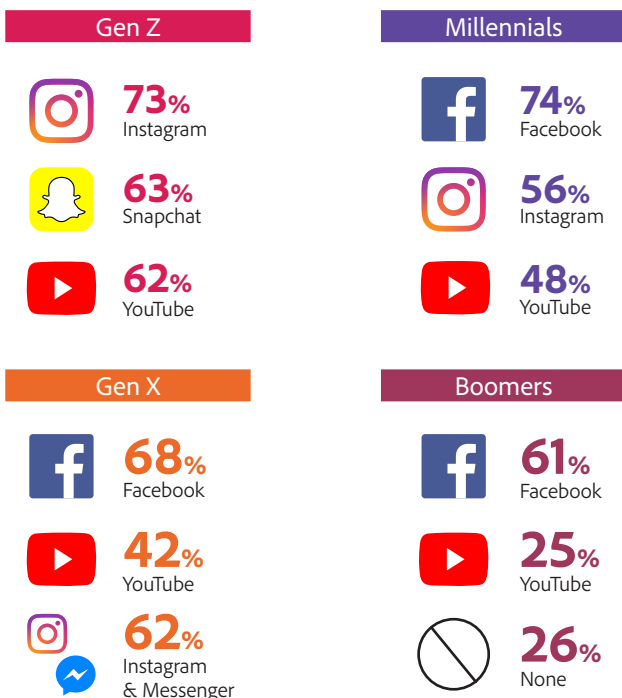
Ju argues that brands should be upfront with consumers about what they are doing, but consumers still need the education to know about where their data is going and how to opt out from different options.

The best path forward could be for brands to recognize the importance of transparency and consumer control and choice to help long-term success.

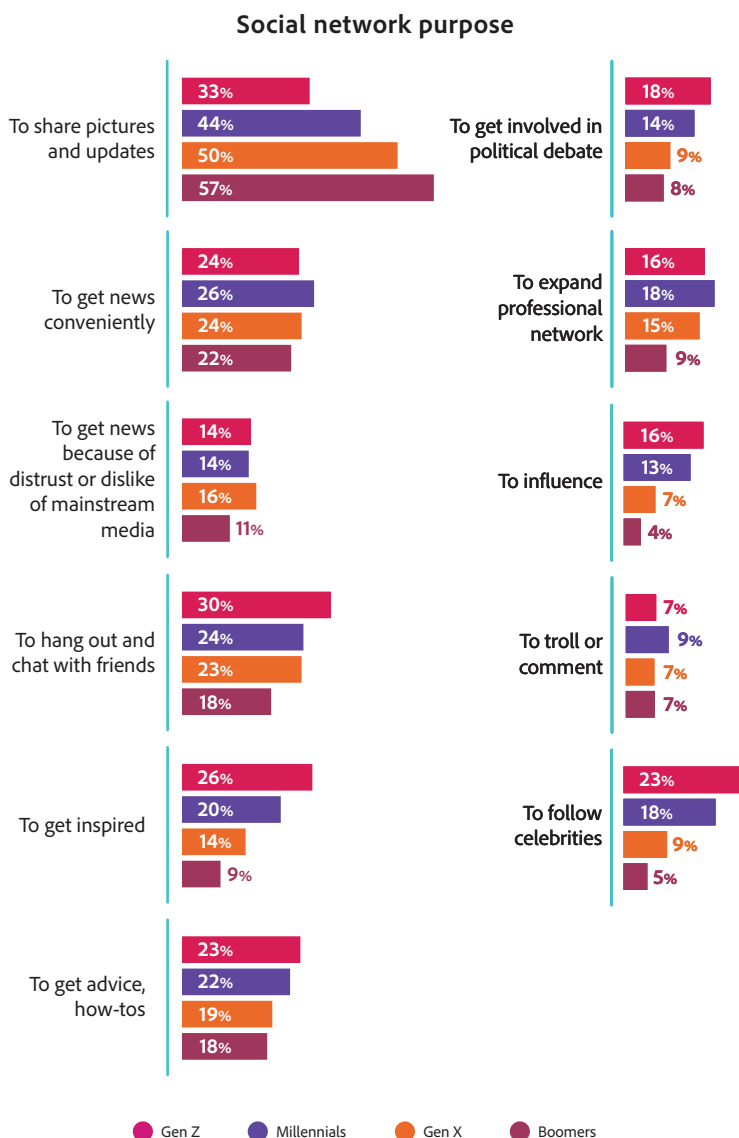# Social media nestles deep across the *generations.*

From Snapchat to YouTube, Instagram, and Facebook, these social media platforms are used heavily by all generations.

Which social networks, forums, or messaging services do you actively use today?

Gen Z

73% Instagram

63% Snapchat

62% YouTube

Millennials

74% Facebook

56% Instagram

48% YouTube

Gen X

68% Facebook

42% YouTube

62% Instagram & Messenger

Boomers

61% Facebook

25% YouTube

26% None

Source: Adobe

Survey results show that while it's the Facebook-owned social media networks that vastly dominate all demographics, the reasons for interacting with platforms differ greatly.

Social network purpose

To share pictures and updates
- Gen Z: 33%
- Millennials: 44%
- Gen X: 50%
- Boomers: 57%

To get involved in political debate
- Gen Z: 18%
- Millennials: 14%
- Gen X: 9%
- Boomers: 8%

To get news conveniently
- Gen Z: 24%
- Millennials: 26%
- Gen X: 24%
- Boomers: 22%

To expand professional network
- Gen Z: 16%
- Millennials: 18%
- Gen X: 15%
- Boomers: 9%

To get news because of distrust or dislike of mainstream media
- Gen Z: 14%
- Millennials: 14%
- Gen X: 16%
- Boomers: 11%

To influence
- Gen Z: 16%
- Millennials: 13%
- Gen X: 7%
- Boomers: 4%

To hang out and chat with friends
- Gen Z: 30%
- Millennials: 24%
- Gen X: 23%
- Boomers: 18%

To troll or comment
- Gen Z: 7%
- Millennials: 9%
- Gen X: 7%
- Boomers: 7%

To get inspired
- Gen Z: 26%
- Millennials: 20%
- Gen X: 14%
- Boomers: 9%

To follow celebrities
- Gen Z: 23%
- Millennials: 18%
- Gen X: 9%
- Boomers: 5%

To get advice, how-tos
- Gen Z: 23%
- Millennials: 22%
- Gen X: 19%
- Boomers: 18%

Legend: ● Gen Z ● Millennials ● Gen X ● Boomers

Source: Adobe

Older generations use social networks for sharing with family and friends, suggesting they prefer to stay connected within close-knit community social circles.

In contrast, younger generations use social networks more to interact with people outside their off-line social network, as well as staying informed on their friends and pop culture.

Hartie Chang, manager of product marketing for Adobe Advertising Cloud, said it's not surprising that Baby Boomers differ than more recent generations in terms of digital ad engagement.

"They are one of the few generations left who have experienced what life was like before the internet, laptops, smartphones—let alone digital ads," Chang said.

"For Baby Boomers, television was the medium they consumed the majority of their life, so marketers need a mixture of both traditional TV and digital channels to maximize impact."

Chang stressed the importance of advertisers precisely catering their messaging to match the form and feel of the environment, as well to their specific audiences in that environment, to ensure messaging has the most opportunity to be welcomed and impactful.

"It's more paramount than ever that advertisers understand the unique characteristics of the medium and the consumption pattern or preferences of their users," Chang said.

The majority of younger Americans agree there is a place for companies interacting with individual people on social networks, but Baby Boomers aren't so open to engaging with companies that place ads, with just 33 percent believing there is a role for brands here.
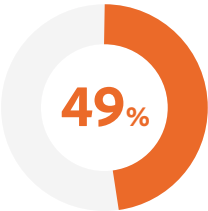
Do you think there is a place for companies interacting with individual people on social networks, forums and/or messaging sites?
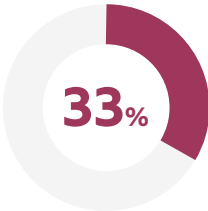
69%

OF GEN Z SAID YES

63%
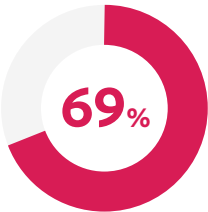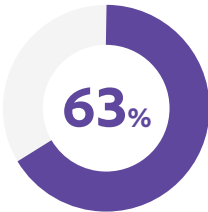
OF MILLENNIALS SAID YES

49%

OF GEN X SAID YES

33%

OF BOOMERS SAID YES

⬤ Gen Z ⬤ Millennials ⬤ Gen X ⬤ Boomers

Source: Adobe

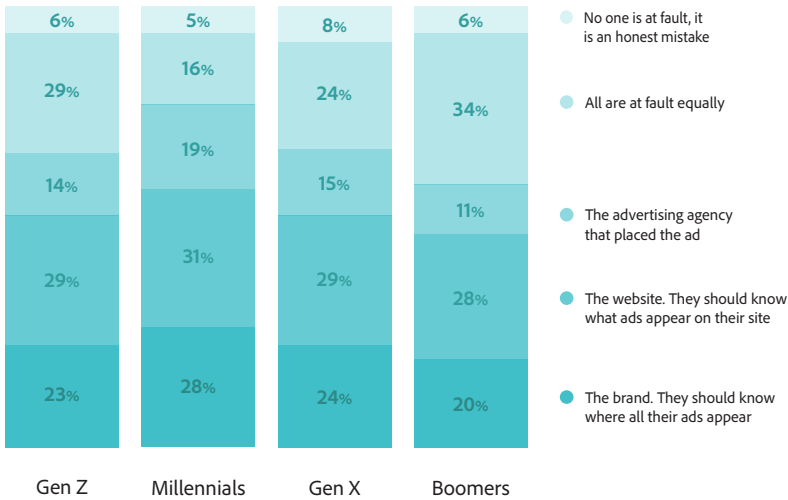# Brand safety bungles can be <u>rescued</u> with *an apology.*

As the debate and reasons for brand safety errors due to incorrect or poor ad placements continue, consumers continue to be impacted and advertisers left red faced by the varying blunders that emerge.

Across the generations, no one is willing to let companies off the hook for bad ad placement.

Whether it's due to blind online ad buying through exchanges or a simple one-off human mishap, incorrect or poor ad placements continue to happen. The survey shows that all generations place significant blame on the websites where the ads appear, but they agree that brands are also very responsible for knowing exactly where their ads are going.

The majority of Baby Boomers assign blame equally to the websites and brands, whereas most Millennials believe the brands are specifically most at fault.

Who is at fault for bad ad placement?

	Gen Z	Millennials	Gen X	Boomers
No one is at fault, it is an honest mistake	6%	5%	8%	6%
All are at fault equally	29%	16%	24%	34%
The advertising agency that placed the ad	14%	19%	15%	11%
The website. They should know what ads appear on their site	29%	31%	29%	28%
The brand. They should know where all their ads appear	23%	28%	24%	20%

Source: Adobe

Brands should take more responsibility for where and how their content sits. While it's hard to ensure 100% brand safety, ultimately brands are in control of their tech stacks and partners, and have a vested interest in avoiding brand safety errors, along with the platform partners.

"Be it a platform partner or an agency partner, we are very honest with our expectations that if anything were to happen, there would be potential penalties or repercussions," he said.

"We do have measures in place such as partnering with auditing and measuring partners and we also work with premium entertainment networks for buyers on YouTube for example, to make sure that our ads are only seen on those trusted and verified channels, but we know that this is a big problem and we do try our very best, even on our own as a brand, to mitigate that."

Should Americans see content they don't like or appreciate alongside other ads, an outright brand boycott is in the cards mostly for Baby Boomers, with 25 percent saying they would cut ties with the offending company.
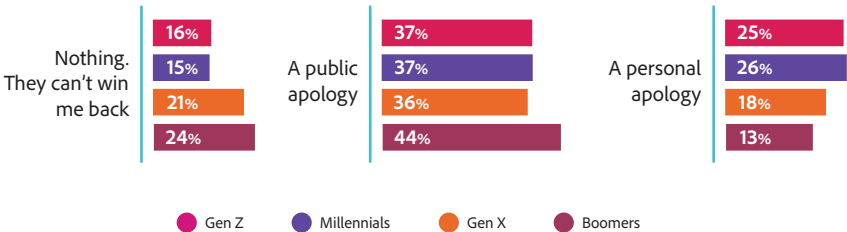
25%
of Boomers

19%
of Gen X

Younger generations are more likely to give companies the benefit of the doubt before boycotting. And for all demographics, a brand apology—especially a personal one—goes a very long way.

15%
of Gen Z

17%
of Millennials

What would the company have to do to win you back?

	Gen Z	Millennials	Gen X	Boomers
Nothing. They can't win me back	16%	15%	21%	24%
A public apology	37%	37%	36%	44%
A personal apology	25%	26%	18%	13%

● Gen Z　● Millennials　● Gen X　● Boomers

Source: Adobe
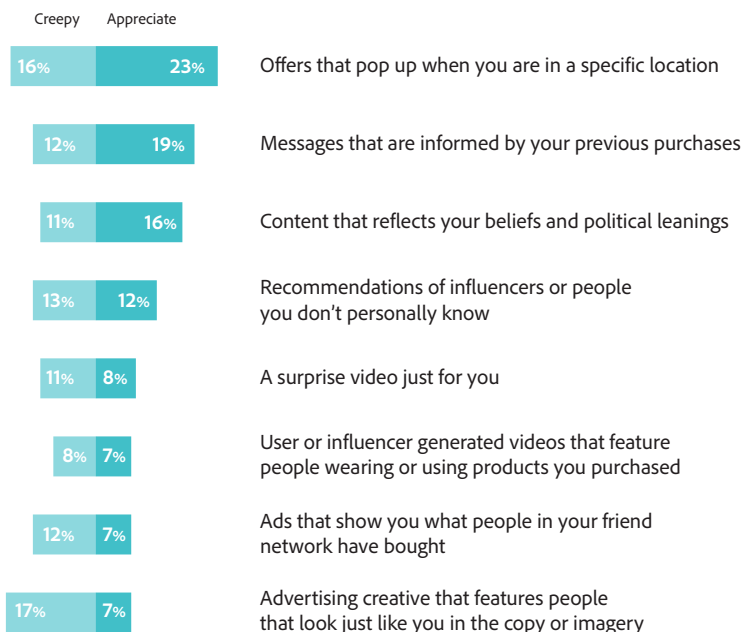
Consumers green-light
location-based ads.

When it comes to ad experiences, many respondents across all generations appreciate location-based offers in return for their data, showing consumers may give if they get something good in return.

Consumers have concerns over being the unknowing subject of data collection for the purpose of targeting. But, on the other hand, with all generations admitting to appreciating location-based offers in return for their data, this signals the need to create a clear and transparent method to help both marketers and shoppers get the experiences they expect.

The reason for appeal could be due to the personalization element, particularly when deals are based on past products bought or a clear understanding of the value exchange.

The growing adoption and use of mobile in older generations, as well as app store download growth, has made mobile a growing channel to provide more engaging experiences.

If you gave companies access to your data, which ad experiences would you most appreciate and which would you find most creepy?

Creepy   Appreciate

16%	23%	Offers that pop up when you are in a specific location
12%	19%	Messages that are informed by your previous purchases
11%	16%	Content that reflects your beliefs and political leanings
13%	12%	Recommendations of influencers or people you don't personally know
11%	8%	A surprise video just for you
8%	7%	User or influencer generated videos that feature people wearing or using products you purchased
12%	7%	Ads that show you what people in your friend network have bought
17%	7%	Advertising creative that features people that look just like you in the copy or imagery

Source: Adobe

Despite the preference for "right location" offers and the increasingly convergence of physical-world and digital-world data, not all marketers and agencies have made appropriate strides to make the case to consumers to engage with the location-based offers. A lack of education and stigma still prevails, with many associating location with simple geo-fencing tactics, being unaware of how to utilize smart locational intelligence mapped with behavioral targeting.

Japan Airlines uses location targeting for marketing and advertising purposes, but only at a rudimentary level, based largely on travel history.

Wan said they use location tactics "very cautiously" for fear of infringing on consumer privacy.

"The one thing that we are staying clear of is to be hyper-localized to a point where it creeps consumers out," Wan said.

"When a brand knows that you are there when they have no right in knowing that you're there—that's something that we want to avoid doing."

Ju said the PGA Tour tends to use topline location targeting for brand awareness across the U.S. as a whole, but they have dabbled in location-based experiences for people who actually go to the local tournaments, using Snapchat filters.

Given her time spent working agency side, Yi Ju is educated in location tactics, but said the brand does not need to dig deep here and explore further.

"For PGA Tour it's a little different because I feel like we are more at the upper funnel at the brand awareness piece," she said.

Embrace the future.

Consumer trust in the ever-evolving online world has never been more valuable than it is today.

As we see from the *Voices of the Generations* survey, skepticism around online experiences, including being misled, has crept in among all demographics. There's a lack of faith that politicians will establish laws or regulations protecting personal data. Brand safety remains important and social media platforms continue to play a significant role in online behavior across the board.

A key theme in all five areas explored appears to be a lack of understanding of the issues facing the various participants among the many facets of the online world.

From consumers needing to understand what brands and digital platforms are doing with their personal data and getting savvy with online ad controls to marketers being able to negotiate privacy and education concerns in relation to exploring evolving marketing techniques, including location-based offers, there's a vast amount of questions and themes that need answers and ownership.

While the current themes in user trust and expectations from the study appear negative, they also can be viewed as an opportunity for smart brands and businesses.

It remains to be seen if the strategy of brands and digital platforms being upfront about their use of personal data in exchange for offering specific experiences and services will take hold. But with commentary and figures suggesting that this will improve consumer sentiment, it seems a natural progression. If brands are transparent and responsible with the way they use consumer data, this can help them earn trust to help responsibly power great experiences.

Visit our *25th Anniversary of Digital Advertising* web page for more research and insights.

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Survey Methodology

Findings in this report are based on an online survey of 4,059 U.S. citizens born between 1944 and 2001 conducted from July 23 to July 29, 2019. The panel was created through a combination of loyalty rewards, open enrollment, and affiliate networks. The data was balanced to the gender proportions found in the general population. The survey was replicated in other countries and reported separately.

For more information please contact **advertising-research@adobe.com.**

Sources

Harti Chang, personal interview with Pippa Chambers, September 2019.

Jing Yi Ju, personal interview with Pippa Chambers, September 2019.

Jonathan Wan, personal interview with Pippa Chambers, September 2019.

Keith Eadie, personal interview with Pippa Chambers, September 2019.

Voices of the Generations, Adobe advertising survey, 2019.

Adobe