

Sprout Social Q1 2026 Pulse Survey Analysis

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Content engagement

People still want to be entertained on social media. It was the main factor that influenced the decision to stop scrolling, just ahead of educational value. This continues the theme of the success of “edutainment” that we have seen in previous surveys and reports.

What ?
<ol style="list-style-type: none">1. The entertainment/humor value (30%)2. The educational value or utility of the information (26%)3. The visual aesthetic/high production value (20%)4. The creator’s personality or relatability (17%)5. The audio/trending sound used (5%)

On Instagram and TikTok, when longer videos (>60 seconds) were served to users, Baby Boomers were the most likely to skip them immediately, while Gen Z rarely did so.

- 13% of Gen Z users said they would skip immediately, compared to 33% of Baby Boomers
- 44% of consumers say they would watch longer content if the first five seconds are engaging

We’ve also seen an increase in consumption of text-based social media, as people look for more discussion and/or reading.

- Overall this has increased for 30% of respondents, with 52% saying it has remained about the same.
- Gen Z had the biggest jump in text-based consumption, with 43% saying it has increased, with millennials (38%) also above the median.
- Self-identified liberals (41%) had the biggest increase from a political standpoint, with other groups increasing less than the average.

- The top networks that people turn to for text-first social media are Facebook (46%), WhatsApp (26%) and Reddit (18%).

Trust levels

Trust levels on social media remain the same for the majority, but have altered at the margins. Overall trust has increased for 16% of users, remained the same for 49% and decreased for 35% over the last 12 months.

This comes amid a rise in unverifiable info and AI slop across almost all networks, which is having the most direct impact on the decrease in trust.

- Trust has increased the most for Gen Z, where 25% reported an increase in trust, and decreased the most for Baby Boomers, where 41% reported a decrease in trust.
- Beyond generational distinctions, there was no significant demographic variation.

<i>Gen Z</i>	<i>Millennials</i>	<i>Gen X</i>	<i>Baby Boomers</i>
1. Significantly increased (9%)	1. Significantly increased (7%)	1. Significantly increased (3%)	1. Significantly increased (3%)
2. Slightly increased (16%)	2. Slightly increased (11%)	2. Slightly increased (7%)	2. Slightly increased (5%)
3. Remained the same (47%)	3. Remained the same (45%)	3. Remained the same (54%)	3. Remained the same (51%)
4. Slightly decreased (20%)	4. Slightly decreased (21%)	4. Slightly decreased (21%)	4. Slightly decreased (23%)
5. Significantly decreased (8%)	5. Significantly decreased (16%)	5. Significantly decreased (14%)	5. Significantly decreased (18%)

- Where trust did increase, it was mostly because of improvements to security and privacy, which drove 32% of responses.
- Of the named social platforms, WhatsApp (37%), Facebook (32%) and Bluesky(32%) are trusted the most.
- Trust decreased due to misinformation (30%), unregulated AI slop (20%) and a perceived imbalance in handling political issues (16%)

What drove increased social media trust?

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| <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Improvements to security/privacy (32%) 2. Good content experiences (24%) 3. Personal connections/community (16%) 4. Spending more time on the sites (14%) 5. Trustworthy alternative to traditional news media (1%) |
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Social media bans

There has been significant online discussion of banning social media for under-16s. Australia was among the first countries to do this, and the UK is currently seeking parental input for whether it should follow suit. In the US, a federal law banning children under 13 from social media is being debated, while several states have already brought in some form of regulation for those under 16.

Overall, 68 % of respondents said that they supported social media bans for children under 16. This was a slight decrease from the previous survey, where 78% of those surveyed said that they supported a ban.

- Gen Z had the lowest support, but it still amounted to 62% in favor of a ban.
- Parents of younger children supported a ban at slightly higher levels (70%), but this did not amount to a big difference.
- Liberals (64%) and moderates (66%) tended to have lower levels of support than conservatives (73%)

Gen Z	Millennials	Gen X	Baby Boomers
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Yes (62%) 2. No (20%) 3. Not sure (18%) 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Yes (68%) 2. No (18%) 3. Not sure (15%) 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Yes (70%) 2. No (15%) 3. Not sure (15%) 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Yes (73%) 2. No (12%) 3. Not sure (16%)

- When it came to the methodology of enforcing a ban, the two most popular responses were parental consent and monitoring and age restrictions using verified ID checks.

Methodology for enforcing bans
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Parental consent and monitoring (74%) 2. Set age restrictions with verified ID checks (71%) 3. Restrict access during certain hours (52%) 4. Educate young people instead of enforcing a full ban (45%) 5. Ban access to specific platforms (38%)

Social issues

The most common response when it came to brands and social issues was the preference that they take a stand on these issues only if it directly relates to their product/industry, but about a quarter said they expect a clear stand on major public issues. The numbers were similar for creators, though there was a slightly greater number who said they actively dislike it when creators get involved in politics compared to brands (14% vs. 11%).

What is your expectation for brands regarding political or social issues?	What is your expectation for creators and influencers regarding political or social issues?
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. I expect them to take a clear public stand on major issues (24%) 2. I want them to be a resource on topics related to their industry and/or expertise (18%) 3. I am comfortable with them taking a stand only if it directly relates to their product/industry (25%) 4. I prefer them to remain neutral and focus solely on their products/services (21%) 5. I actively dislike when brands get involved in politics (11%) 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. I expect them to take a clear public stand on major issues (22%) 2. I want them to be a resource on topics related to their industry and/or expertise (20%) 3. I am comfortable with them taking a stand only if it directly relates to their product/industry (24%) 4. I prefer them to remain neutral and focus solely on their products/services (20%) 5. I actively dislike when brands get involved in politics (14%)

- Liberals were the most likely to want brands (30%) and creators (29%) to take a clear public stance on major issues.
- Millennials had the highest response level for a clear public stance for creators at 27%, exactly the same as the level for brands (27%).
- For Gen Z, the most common response was that they were comfortable only if it directly relates to the brand's product/industry (29%)
- Boomers were more likely to actively dislike when creators get involved in politics (31%) compared to brands (19%).
- Despite this stated preference, 32% of people said that political stances have zero impact on purchasing decisions, with those based on price and quality alone. 29% said they stop buying brands' products if their values clash, while only 15% reported actively buying products to support a brand's values.
- Gen Z was the least likely to say a brand's values had zero impact at 17%, with almost half of Baby Boomers (49%) reporting that.

News on social media

More and more people are now turning to social media directly for their breaking news updates. This has been a trend for years, but with more networks than ever before, and more ways to personalize your interests, it's only continued to rise in recent years

Social media is now the most common channel for people to discover breaking news, ahead of TV, podcasts and news apps.

- 49% of people said social media, compared to 45% for TV and 32% for digital news apps
- Liberals (54%) were the most likely to get their news from social media, followed by digital news apps (38%)
- Conservatives still leaned towards TV (52%) with social media in second (43%)
- This was one of the areas with the biggest generational divides, with Gen Z and Millennials widely favoring social media, while TV still led for Gen X and Boomers.

Which channels do you find most useful to discover breaking news? (Select up to three)

<i>Gen Z</i>	<i>Millennials</i>	<i>Gen X</i>	<i>Baby Boomers</i>
1. Social media (67%)	1. Social media (61%)	1. Social media (44%)	1. Social media (24%)
2. TV (27%)	2. TV (36%)	2. TV (52%)	2. TV (67%)
3. Podcasts (13%)	3. Podcasts (11%)	3. Podcasts (10%)	3. Podcasts (10%)
4. Digital news apps (27%)	4. Digital news apps (33%)	4. Digital news apps (35%)	4. Digital news apps (31%)
5. Newsletter (10%)	5. Newsletter (8%)	5. Newsletter (5%)	5. Newsletter (7%)
6. Print media (11%)	6. Print media (11%)	6. Print media (10%)	6. Print media (12%)

Using raw numbers, the top networks that people turn to for news updates are:

- Facebook (649 respondents)
- Instagram (348)
- YouTube (323)
- TikTok (272)
- Reddit (180)
- X (183)
- WhatsApp (122)

A plurality (39%) of people reported that they want news organizations and individual reporters to be more active on social media to share breaking updates and engage with audiences.

- This was highest among younger users with Gen Z (51%) and Millennials (48%) both seeing significant support for this
- Baby Boomers only wanted this at 19%, but mostly expressed indifference towards it, as long as the reporting was accurate (36%)
- Liberals (48%) and women (41%) wanted this at a higher rate than the general population broadly.

Amid this rise in social media as a news source, it's important to recognize the impact that AI has had on how consumers interact with that news.

- 88% of people surveyed said that they either strongly or somewhat agreed that "The rise of video generation AI tools has resulted in me having less trust in the news I see on social media."
- The US had the highest proportion of people strongly agreeing with this statement (46%)
- This statement was agreed with similarly across every demographic breakdown, from generational, to geographical, to political views.

AI slop

AI slop—mass-produced, often low-quality or pointless content generated at scale to increase views and engagement—has been on the rise as video generation tools have gotten better, and it's now pervasive on a number of platforms.

How often consumers see AI slop
1. Very often (26%)
2. Often (30%)
3. Sometimes (26%)
4. Rarely (8%)
5. Never (9%)

- 56% of respondents reported seeing AI slop on social media often or very often, with 83% seeing it at least sometimes
- Baby boomers were the least likely to report seeing it often, with only 37% seeing it regularly and 19% claiming they never see it.
- Boomers also had the strongest negative reaction to AI slop, with 56% saying they would be very unlikely to interact with it if they saw it.
- Gen Z had a more neutral outlook towards interacting with this type of content. 34% said they were at least somewhat likely to engage, while 40% were unlikely to do so.
- That said, Gen Z was also the most likely to unfollow, mute or block accounts because their content felt like AI slop, with 50% saying they have done so.

Have you unfollowed, muted or blocked a brand or creator because their content felt like AI slop (i.e., low-effort or repetitive)

Gen Z	Millennials	Gen X	Baby Boomers
1. Yes (50%) 2. No (40%) 3. Not sure (10%)	1. Yes (44%) 2. No (43%) 3. Not sure (13%)	1. Yes (38%) 2. No (48%) 3. Not sure (14%)	1. Yes (29%) 2. No (54%) 3. Not sure (17%)

This has carried over into a broader sense of selectivity about what people engage with on social networks.

- 66% of people said they feel more selective about the content that they engage with compared to a year ago.

2026 outlook

Looking at social media usage for the rest of 2026, there's a clear desire to be more intentional about the content that consumers are looking at. The top responses all share that as a theme, whether it's disconnecting and reducing screen time, logging in with purpose or consuming content that supports self-improvement.

Thinking about your social media usage for the rest of 2026, which personal goal is influencing your habits the most?

1. Consuming content that supports self-improvement, learning or skill building (22%)
2. Disconnecting/reducing screen time for mental health (21%)
3. Using social media more intentionally (17%)
4. Using social to discover trends and products (11%)
5. Finding more niche communities/hobbies (8%)

- Gen Z (15%) was the least likely to select disconnecting/reducing screen time with Baby Boomers the most likely (29%)
- Gen Z also wanted to create more content and consume less at a higher rate than every other demographic (11%)
- The US (24%) had the highest desire for self-improvement content while Australia was highest for disconnecting/reducing screen time (24%)

This transferred over to what people want to see from brands on social media, with educational content the top ask at 40%. This was the #1 type of content all generations want to see from brands.

What type of content do you want to see from brands in 2026? (select all that

apply)

1. Educational posts about products or services (40%)
2. Community-focused content (27%)
3. High-production episodic content series (20%)
4. Behind-the-scenes content (19%)
5. Memes and skits (18%)
6. Content from front-line employees (16%)
7. Content from executives (9%)
8. Other (1%)
9. No preference (13%)

- Community was a big focus for consumers, with 27% saying they want content from brands focused on that.
- More people (16%) want content from front-line employees compared to executives (9%)
- Gen Z wants episodic content (27%), behind-the-scenes content (26%) and memes and skits (30%) at a higher rate than the general population, while educational posts (34%) and community-focused content (19%) were prioritized significantly less.
- Australia (30%) had the highest demand for community content, and the UK was the lowest at 24%.

AI-generated content without labels was the one thing that consumers most wished brands would stop doing in 2026.

What is the one thing you wish brands would stop doing on social media in 2026?

1. Posting AI-generated content without labels (28%)
2. Using engagement-bait tactics (typos, wait 'til the end, etc.) (23%)
3. Engaging in political discussions (14%)
4. Sending automated DMs immediately after following (13%)
5. Posting too frequently (12%)
6. Using trending audio/memes that feel forced (9%)

- Gen Z, millennials, and Gen X were most averse to unlabeled AI content, while Baby Boomers most disliked engagement bait tactics.
- Conservatives (19%) wanted brands to avoid political discussions at a higher rate than the average.

Methodology

[Full crosstabs](#)

Methodology: This consumer survey was conducted online by Glimpse, a global market research firm, on behalf of Sprout Social. Participants included 2,250 social media users across the US, UK and Australia. The survey was conducted from February 5 to February 9, 2026.

Demographic Highlights:

- Country: 1,000 US, 1,000 UK, 250 AUS
- Ages
 - 505 Gen Z
 - 628 Millennial
 - 604 Gen X
 - 513 Boomers
- Gender
 - 1,148 Female
 - 1,102 Male