

Sprout Social Q1 2026 Pulse Survey: UK Data 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 drove increased social media trust?
<ol style="list-style-type: none">1. The entertainment/humor value (30%)2. The educational value or utility of the information (25%)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.

- 14% of Gen Z users said they would skip immediately, compared to 33% of Baby Boomers
- 46% 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 32% of respondents, with 51% saying it has remained about the same.
- Millennials had the biggest jump in text-based consumption, with 45% saying it has increased, closely followed by Gen Z respondents (44%).

- Self-identified liberals (45%) 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 (39%), WhatsApp (31%) and Instagram (19%).

Trust levels

Trust levels on social media remain the same for the majority, but have altered at the margins. Overall trust has increased for 19% of users, remained the same for 49% and decreased for 33% 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 28% reported an increase in trust, and decreased the most for Baby Boomers, where 40% 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 (11%)	1. Significantly increased (9%)	1. Significantly increased (4%)	1. Significantly increased (3%)
2. Slightly increased (17%)	2. Slightly increased (14%)	2. Slightly increased (9%)	2. Slightly increased (6%)
3. Remained the same (46%)	3. Remained the same (40%)	3. Remained the same (57%)	3. Remained the same (52%)
4. Slightly decreased (19%)	4. Slightly decreased (21%)	4. Slightly decreased (19%)	4. Slightly decreased (21%)
5. Significantly decreased (6%)	5. Significantly decreased (16%)	5. Significantly decreased (12%)	5. Significantly decreased (19%)

- Where trust did increase, it was mostly because of improvements to security and privacy, which drove 34% of responses.
- Of the named social platforms, WhatsApp (46%), Bluesky(32%) and Facebook (29%) are trusted the most.

- Trust decreased due to misinformation (29%), unregulated AI slop (20%) and a perceived imbalance in handling political issues (15%)

What drove increased social media trust?
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Improvements to security/privacy (34%) 2. Good content experiences (26%) 3. Personal connections/community (13%) 4. Spending more time on the sites (12%) 5. Trustworthy alternative to traditional news media (2%)

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, 72% of UK respondents said that they supported social media bans for children under 16. This compared to 63% of US respondents.

- Gen Z had the lowest support, but it still amounted to 68% in favor of a ban.
- Parents of younger children supported a ban at slightly higher levels (73%), but this did not amount to a big difference.
- Liberals (68%) and moderates (70%) tended to have lower levels of support than conservatives (77%)

Gen Z	Millennials	Gen X	Baby Boomers
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Yes (68%) 2. No (18%) 3. Not sure (15%) 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Yes (75%) 2. No (13%) 3. Not sure (12%) 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Yes (73%) 2. No (14%) 3. Not sure (13%) 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Yes (73%) 2. No (11%) 3. Not sure (16%)

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

Preferred methodology for enforcing bans
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Set age restrictions with verified ID checks (72%) 2. Parental consent and monitoring (67%)

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| <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 3. Restrict access during certain hours (56%) 4. Educate young people instead of enforcing a full ban (40%) 5. Ban access to specific platforms (40%) |
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Social issues

The most common response when it came to brands and social issues was the preference that they take a stand on major issues or only when the issues directly relate to their product/industry. 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. 10%).

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 am comfortable with them taking a stand only if it directly relates to their product/industry (26%) 2. I expect them to take a clear public stand on major issues (26%) 3. I want them to be a resource on topics related to their industry and/or expertise (20%) 4. I prefer them to remain neutral and focus solely on their products/services (18%) 5. I actively dislike when brands get involved in politics (10%) 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. I am comfortable with them taking a stand only if it directly relates to their product/industry (24%) 2. I expect them to take a clear public stand on major issues (23%) 3. I want them to be a resource on topics related to their industry and/or expertise (22%) 4. I prefer them to remain neutral and focus solely on their products/services (17%) 5. I actively dislike when brands get involved in politics (14%)

- Liberals were the most likely to expect brands (31%) and creators (28%) to take a clear public stance on major issues.
- For Gen Z, the most common response was that they were comfortable only if it directly relates to the brand's product/industry (31%)
- Boomers were most likely to actively dislike when creators get involved in politics (33%) compared to brands (18%).
- Despite this stated preference, 31% 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 16% 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 14%, with more than half of Baby Boomers (52%) 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, trust of mainstream news institutions decreasing 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 on social media, ahead of TV, podcasts and news apps.

- 50% of people said social media, compared to 41% for TV and 32% for digital news apps
- 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)

Gen Z	Millennials	Gen X	Baby Boomers
1. Social media (65%)	1. Social media (63%)	1. TV (47%)	1. TV (64%)
2. Digital news apps (25%)	2. TV (33%)	2. Social media (46%)	2. Digital news apps (32%)
3. TV (22%)	3. Digital news apps (32%)	3. Digital news apps (39%)	3. Social media (22%)
4. Podcasts (15%)	4. Podcasts (12%)	4. Print media (15%)	4. Print media (16%)
5. Print media (12%)	5. Print media (10%)	5. Podcasts (9%)	5. Newsletter (8%)
6. Newsletter (9%)	6. Newsletter (7%)	6. Newsletter (5%)	6. Podcasts (4%)

The top 5 networks that people turn to for news updates are:

1. Facebook (37%)
2. X (31%)
3. TikTok (30%)
4. Reddit (29%)
5. Instagram (27%)

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 (53%) and Millennials (49%) both seeing significant support for this. Baby Boomers only wanted this at 19%.
- Liberals (48%) and women (43%) 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.

- 90% 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.”
- 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. Often (32%) 2. Sometimes (27%) 3. Very often (22%) 4. Never (10%) 5. Rarely (9%)

- 54% of respondents reported seeing AI slop on social media often or very often, with 81% seeing it at least sometimes
- Baby boomers were the least likely to report seeing it often, with only 37% seeing it often or very often and 21% claiming they never see it.
- Boomers also had the strongest negative reaction to AI slop, with 62% 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. 37% said they were at least somewhat likely to engage, while 38% were unlikely to do so.

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

Only 36% of respondents report unfollowing an account because of AI slop, while 50% reported they have **not** unfollowed an account and 14% are unsure.

Gen Z	Millennials	Gen X	Baby Boomers
1. No (45%) 2. Yes (44%) 3. Not sure (11%)	1. No (44%) 2. Yes (40%) 3. Not sure (16%)	1. No (54%) 2. Yes (33%) 3. Not sure (14%)	1. No (59%) 2. Yes (26%) 3. Not sure (15%)

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

- 68% 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 (21%)
2. Disconnecting/reducing screen time for mental health (20%)
3. Using social media more intentionally (18%)
4. Using social to discover trends and products (11%)
5. Finding more niche communities/hobbies (8%)

- Gen Z (16%) was the least likely to select disconnecting/reducing screen time with Baby Boomers the most likely (27%)

This transferred over to what people want to see from brands on social media, with educational content the top ask at 41%. 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 (41%)
2. Community-focused content (24%)
3. Behind-the-scenes content (22%)
4. High-production episodic content series (21%)
5. Memes and skits (17%)
6. Content from front-line employees (16%)
7. No preference (11%)
8. Content from executives (9%)
9. Other (1%)

- Community was a big focus for consumers, with 24% saying they want content from brands focused on that.
- Gen Z's second most preferred brand content—after educational posts—is memes and skits, with 26% favoring them, far higher than the general population.
- More people (16%) want content from front-line employees compared to executives (9%)

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. Sending automated DMs immediately after following (14%)
4. Engaging in political discussions (11%)
5. Posting too frequently (11%)
6. Using trending audio/memes that feel forced (11%)
7. Other (2%)

Methodology

Methodology: This consumer survey was conducted online by Glimpse, a global market research firm, on behalf of Sprout Social. Participants included 1,000 social media users across the UK. The survey was conducted from February 5 to February 9, 2026.