A Global Study on Information Literacy

Understanding generational behaviors and concerns around false and misleading information online

Research conducted by: Poynter Institute for Media Studies, its digital media literacy initiative, MediaWise, and YouGov Inc., with support from Google

August 2022

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Project Overview, Methodology and Demographics

What We Did

OBJECTIVES

Information Literacy is a critical skill for navigating digital environments and making decisions about what information to trust and to share. To understand how Gen Z, Boomers and other generations verify information, the Poynter Institute for Media Studies, its digital media literacy initiative, MediaWise, and YouGov conducted a study on user behaviors and perceptions around information literacy globally, with support from Google. We surveyed 8585 respondents in the US, Brazil, the United Kingdom, Germany, Nigeria, India, and Japan.

What We Did

METHODOLOGY

- Field dates: June 27th - July 20th, 2022
- YouGov interviewed 1998 US, 1213 BR, 1405 DE, 1131 IN, 1451 JP, 1160 NG,and 1342 UK respondents who were then matched down to a sample of 8585 (1269 US, 1177 BR, 1326 DE, 1121 IN, 1362 JP, 1055 NG, and 1275 UK) to produce the final dataset. The respondents were matched to a sampling frame on gender, age, race (US only), and education. The frame was constructed by stratified sampling from the full 2019 American Community Survey (ACS) 1-year sample for the US, the 2017 Latin Americas Barometer for BR, the 2019 Pew Global Attitudes for IN, JP, and NG, and the 2019 Euro Barometer for DE and UK. This occurred with selection within strata by weighted sampling with replacements.
- All differences between generations and between countries pointed out in this report have been tested for statistical significance.

Markets

United States
Brazil
United Kingdom
Germany
Nigeria
India
Japan

Generations

Gen Z (ages 18-25)
Millennials (ages 26-41)
Gen X (ages 42-57)
Boomers (ages 58-67)
Silent generation (ages 68+)

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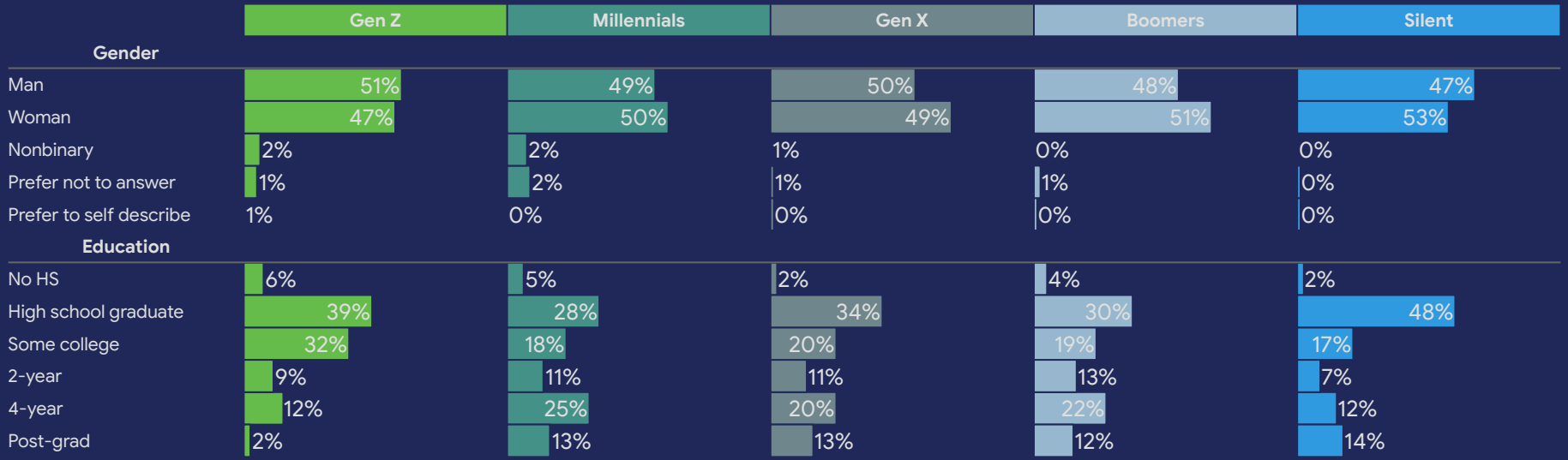
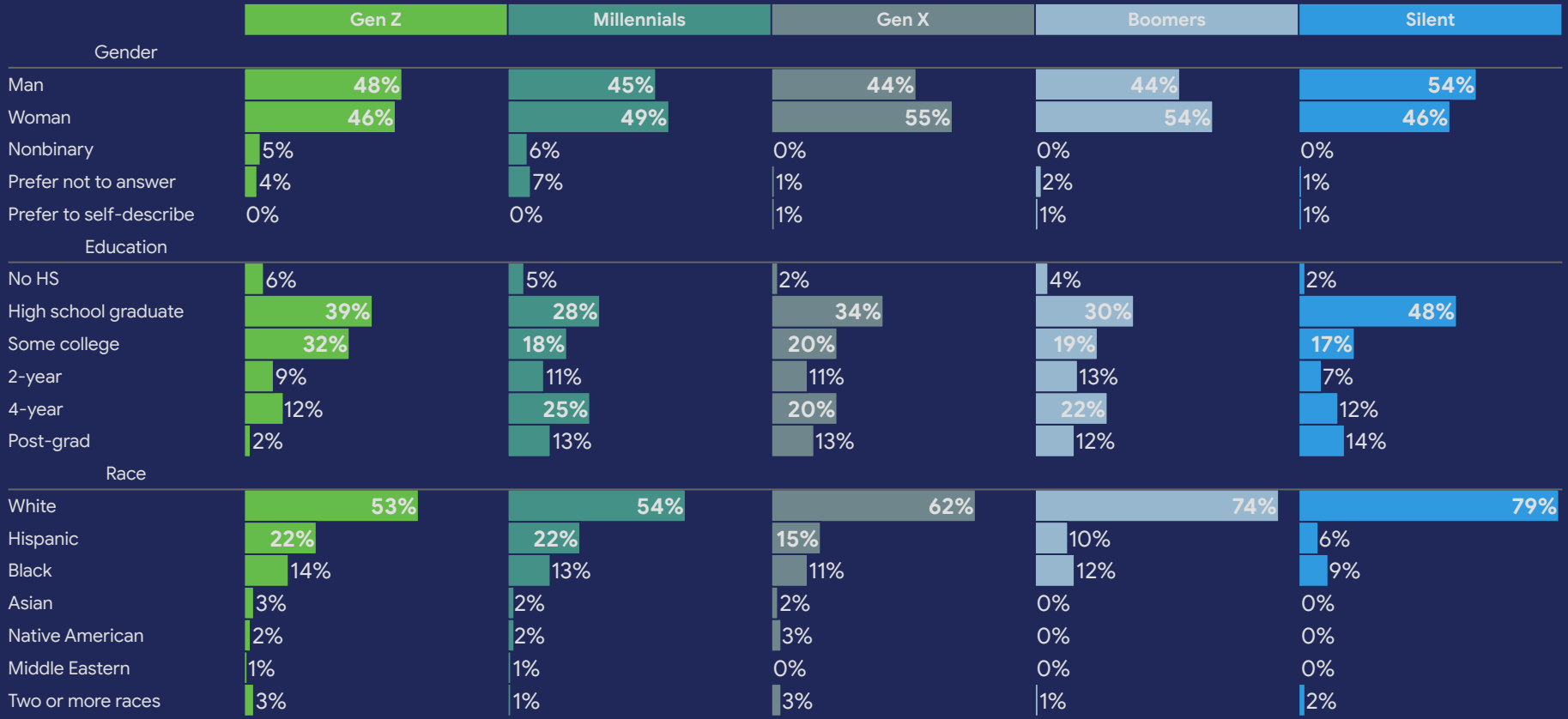
Distribution of age groups by country

Age Group	All	US	UK	India	Brazil	Nigeria	Japan	Germany
Total	8,585	1,269	1,275	1,121	1,177	1,055	1,362	1,326
Gen Z (18-25)	1456	177	185	277	235	339	97	145
Millennials (26-41)	2582	364	329	400	429	433	306	320
Gen X (42-57)	2184	273	336	305	333	227	366	344
Boomers (58-67)	1277	269	195	100	138	53	251	271
Silent (68+)	1084	185	229	39	42	3	341	245

Demographics - Global



Demographics - US



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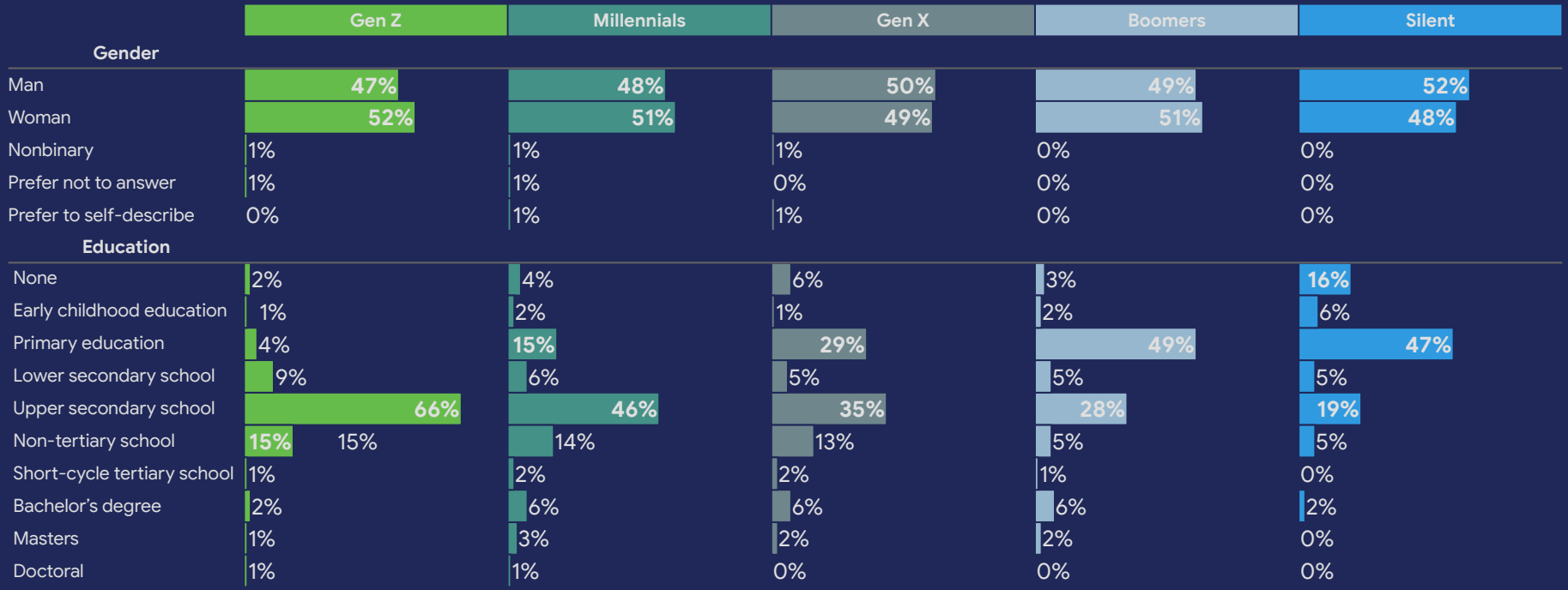
Demographics - BR



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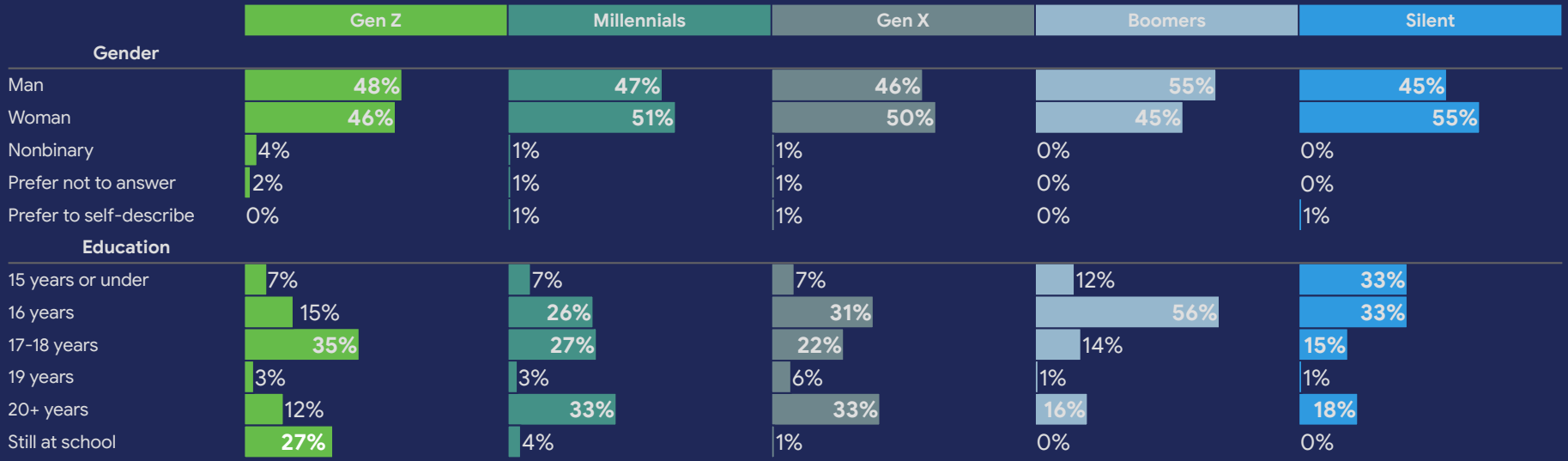
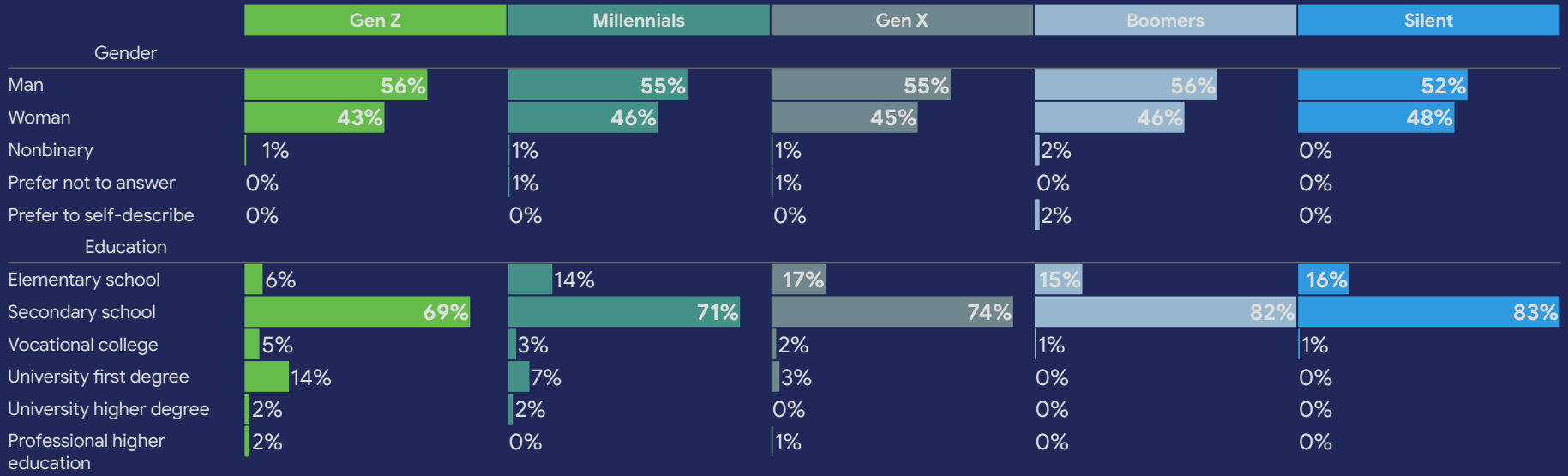
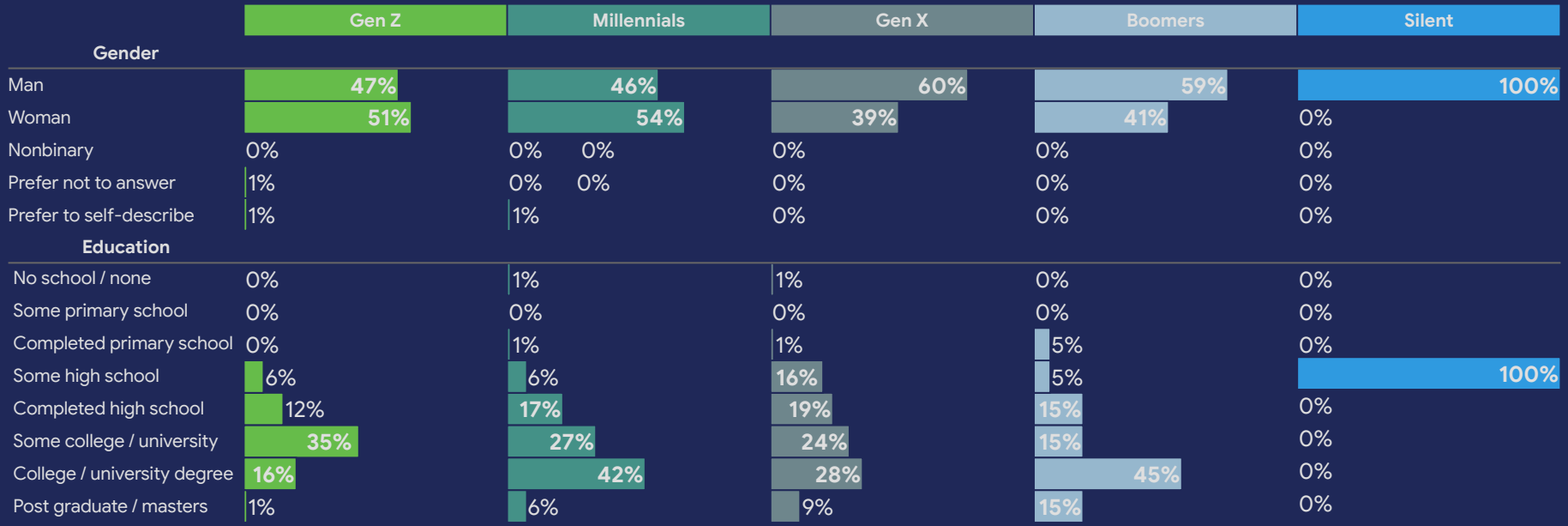
Demographics - UK



Demographics - IN



Demographics - NG



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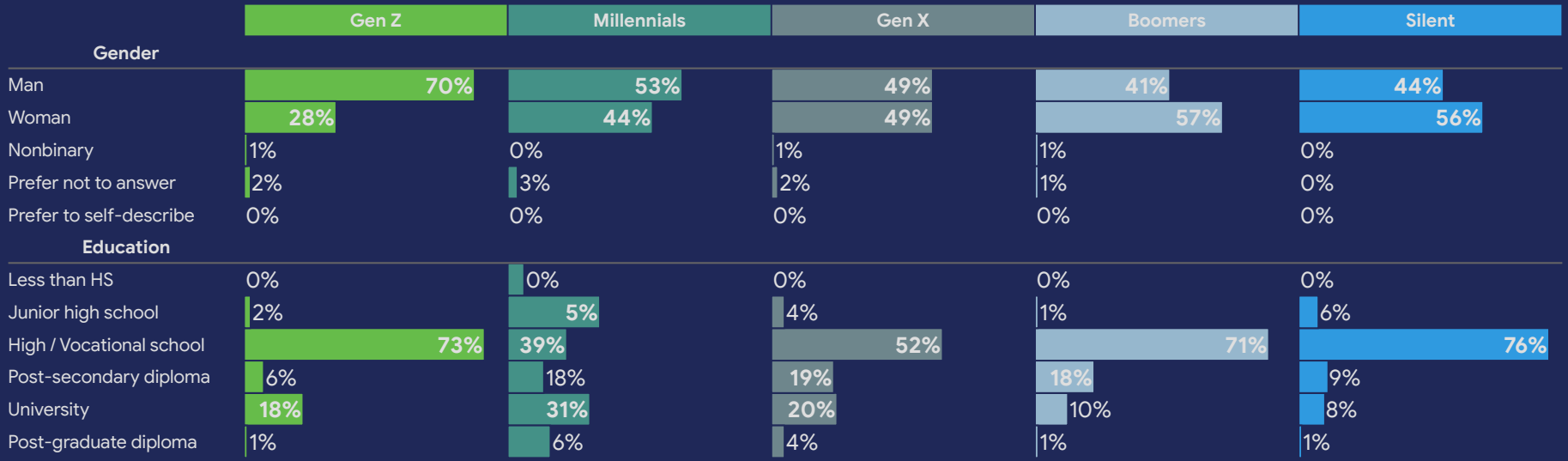
Demographics - JP



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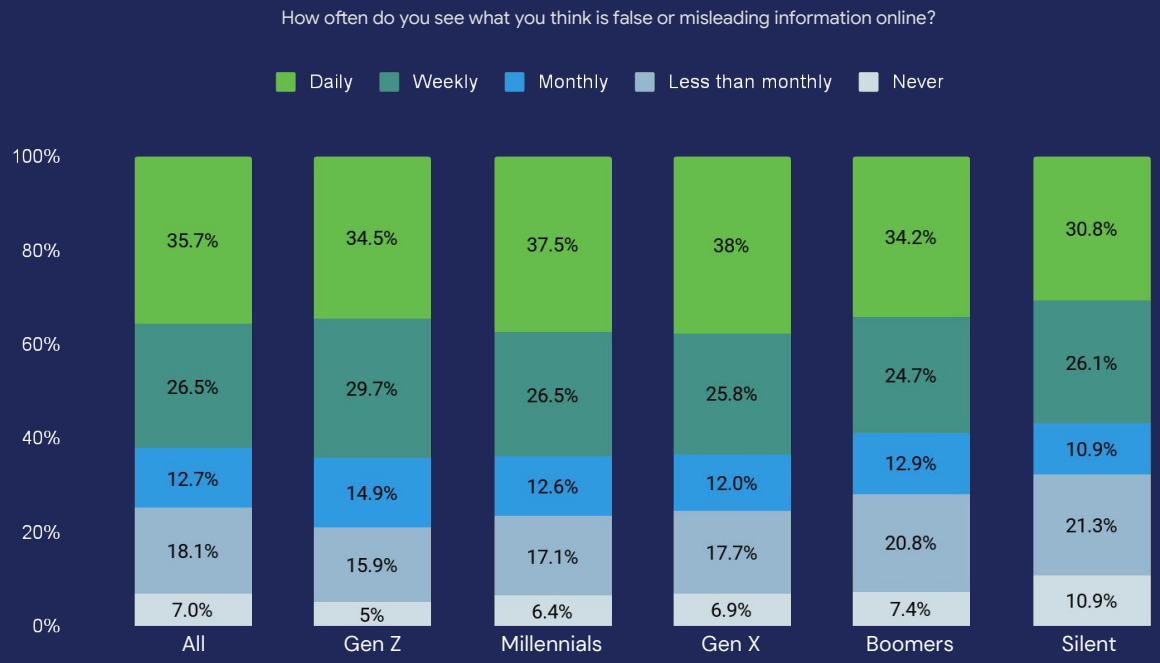
Demographics - DE

	Gen Z	Millennials	Gen X	Boomers	Silent
Gender					
Man	49%	46%	50%	49%	47%
Woman	47%	51%	50%	51%	53%
Nonbinary	3%	3%	0%	0%	0%
Prefer not to answer	2%	1%	0%	0%	0%
Prefer to self-describe	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%
Education					
15 years or under	5%	3%	5%	15%	26%
16 years	16%	21%	25%	27%	25%
17-18 years	18%	21%	24%	26%	15%
19 years	7%	18%	20%	15%	14%
20+ years	4%	28%	24%	12%	20%
Still at school	45%	5%	0%	0%	0%
Can't remember	5%	6%	3%	2%	1%

Concerns around False or Misleading Information Online

62% of respondents think they see false or misleading information online every week



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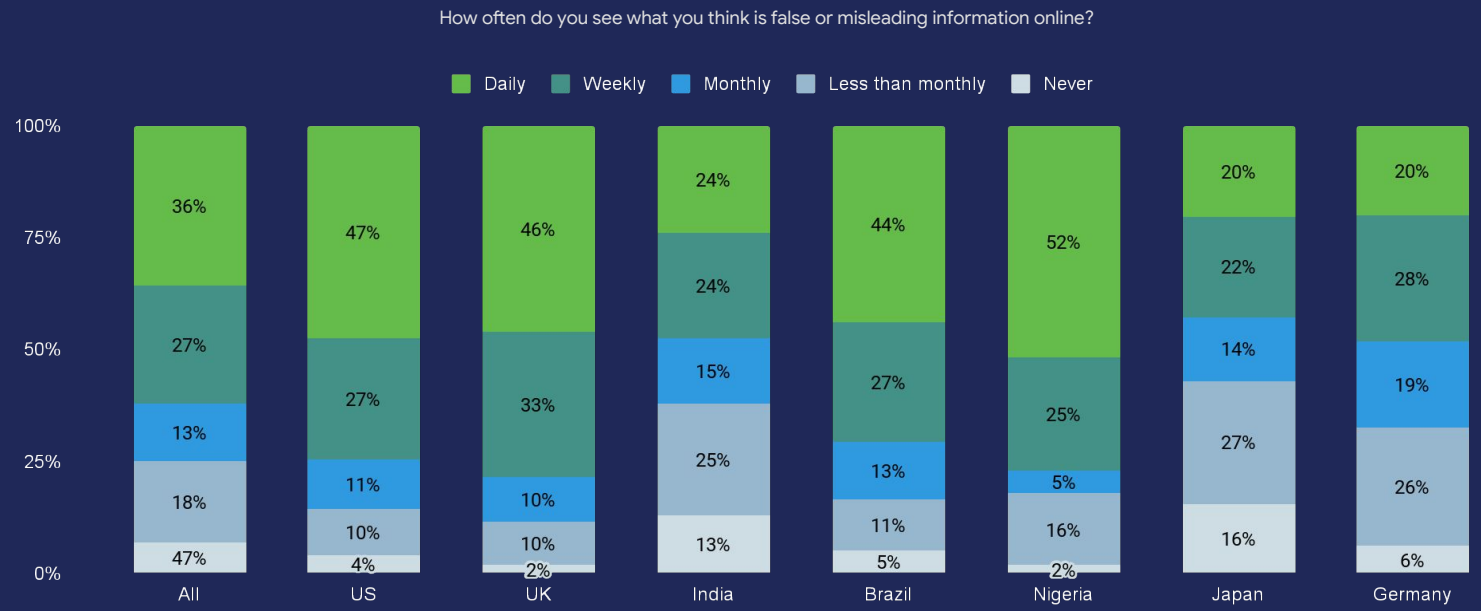
Asked of everyone, n = 8,584

In the US, the UK, Brazil and Nigeria, respondents are more likely to say they see false or misleading information daily compared to India, Germany and Japan



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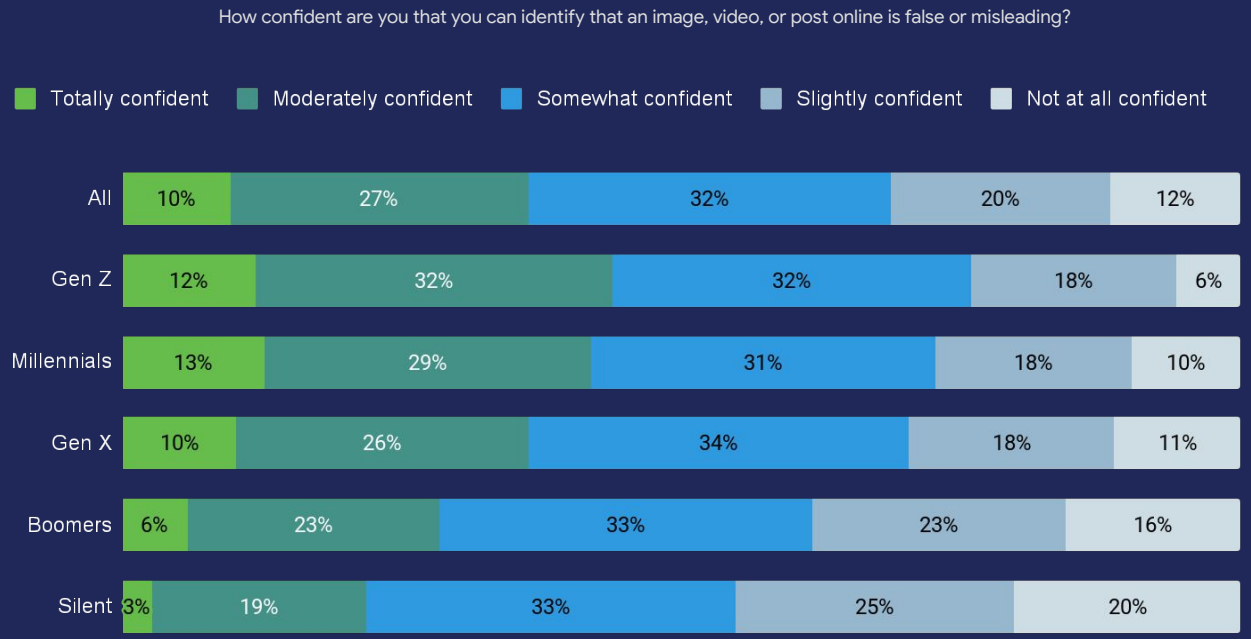
Asked of everyone, n = 8,584

Gen Z, Millennials and Gen X feel slightly more confident in identifying false or misleading information than Boomers and the Silent generation



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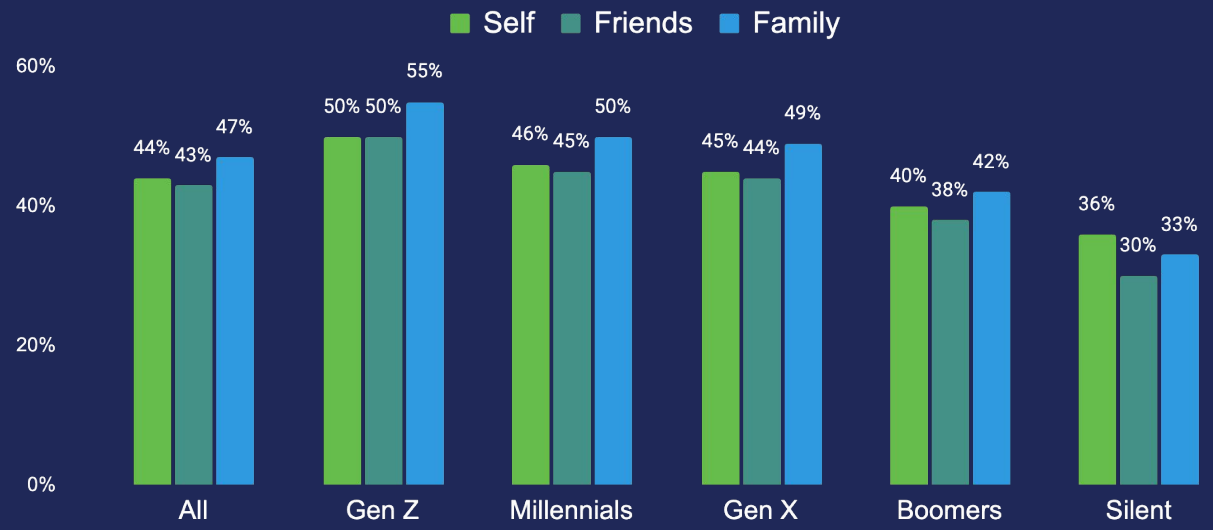
Asked of everyone, n = 8,582

Among Gen Z, Millennials, and Gen X respondents, around half are moderately or extremely concerned about their friends and family believing false or misleading information they see online

How concerned are you about being exposed to false or misleading information encountered online?
How concerned are you about your friends / members of your family believing false or misleading information encountered online? (Top-2 box, moderately or extremely concerned)



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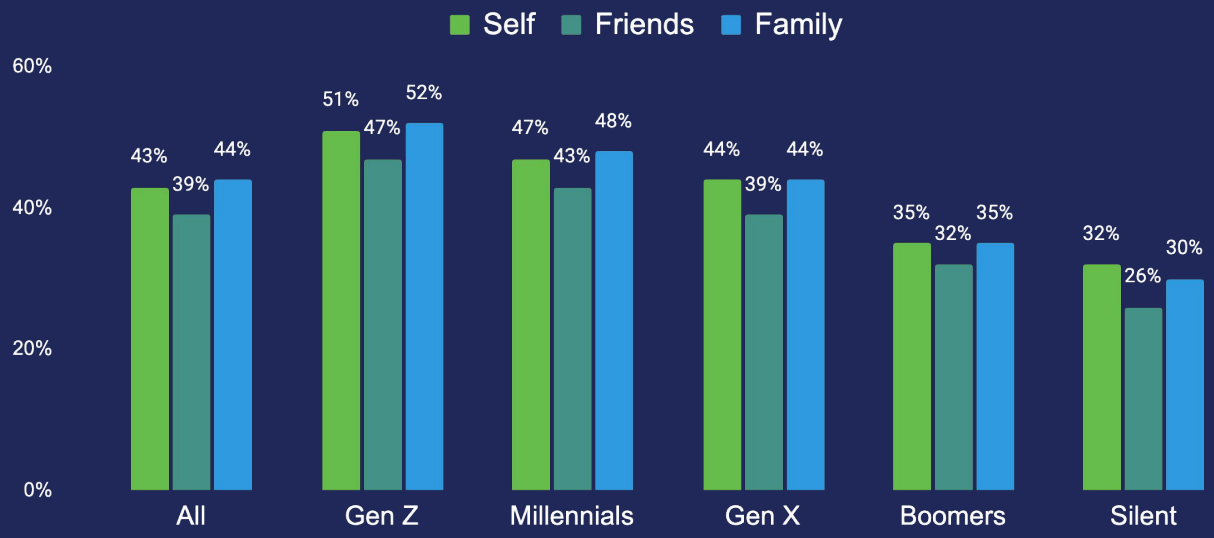
Asked of everyone, n = 8,585 (Self, n = 8,577 / Friends, n = 8,575 / Family, n = 8,580)

Gen Z, Millennials and Gen X respondents are more concerned than Boomers and the Silent generation about friends and family members unintentionally sharing false or misleading information

How concerned are you about unintentionally sharing false or misleading information online?
How concerned are you about [your friends / members of your family] unintentionally sharing false or misleading information online? (Top-2 box, moderately or extremely concerned)



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Asked of everyone, n = 8,585 (Self, n = 8,583 / Friends, n = 8,581 / Family, n = 8,583)

Four in ten respondents are very concerned about the effects of false or misleading information on the education of young people and the effects on public health

Gen Z, Millennials, and Gen X are more concerned than the Silent generation about the effects of false or misleading information on public health. Gen X and Boomers are more concerned than Gen Z about the effects on political polarization.

How concerned are you about the effects of false or misleading information on the following? (Top-1 box, extremely concerned)

	All	Gen Z	Millennials	Gen X	Boomers	Silent
Education of young people	40%	42%	41%	41%	40%	33%
Public health	38%	42%	40%	39%	37%	26%
Trust in government	32%	30%	31%	34%	33%	30%
Political polarization	31%	27%	29%	34%	34%	30%
Trust in the media	29%	26%	28%	30%	31%	27%
Trust in community (neighbors, friends, family)	24%	27%	27%	25%	20%	18%

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Asked of everyone, n = 8,571-8,581

Verifying Information

Across generations, respondents are most likely to verify information they see on search engines and messaging apps

Gen Z and Millennials more often verify information seen on search engines and messaging apps compared to Boomers and the Silent generation.

When seeing information on the following platforms, how often do you try to verify articles, posts, images, videos or other information before sharing? / When reading, watching or listening to information online from the following, how often do you try to verify articles, posts, images, videos or other information before sharing? (Top-2 box, always or most of the time)

Source of information	All	Gen Z	Millennials	Gen X	Boomers	Silent
A search engine, such as Google or Bing	44%	51%	49%	45%	39%	29%
A messaging app, such as WhatsApp, Telegram or Signal	39%	48%	46%	40%	28%	19%
Facebook	36%	38%	42%	37%	32%	22%
A video platform, such as YouTube or Vimeo	34%	44%	41%	35%	26%	15%
National news websites	33%	32%	38%	33%	31%	22%
Local news websites (for your city or county)	31%	32%	37%	31%	30%	20%
A news app	30%	31%	34%	32%	28%	21%
Instagram	29%	44%	39%	27%	14%	7%
Online blogs	25%	33%	31%	24%	19%	11%
Twitter	22%	30%	28%	22%	13%	6%
TikTok	16%	28%	22%	15%	7%	3%
Snapchat	12%	20%	16%	9%	5%	2%
Other	13%	22%	20%	14%	5%	3%

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Asked of everyone, n = 7,452-8,577

There are broad similarities across generations on the preferred methods of verifying information before sharing. The most common methods are checking the source and date of the post and using a search engine.

Gen Z and Millennials use almost any method to verify information more often than Gen X, Boomers and the Silent generation. Gen Z and Millennials are particularly more inclined than older generations to use social media to see if others have commented on posts being false or misleading.

When trying to verify what you think is false or misleading information online, how often do you use any of the following methods for verification? (Top-2 box, always or most of the time)

Method of verification	All	Gen Z	Millennials	Gen X	Boomers	Silent
Check if the source is reputable	49%	55%	54%	48%	44%	34%
Check the date of the post	46%	50%	50%	44%	42%	34%
Use a search engine to find out more about the post or who shared it	41%	50%	46%	40%	35%	24%
See if other people on social media have commented on it being false or misleading	34%	49%	42%	32%	23%	13%
Click on links in an article, post or comment to go directly to the original source of the information	34%	44%	39%	33%	27%	15%
Check national news outlets	34%	40%	39%	35%	29%	20%
Check for a warning label	33%	35%	35%	33%	28%	29%
Search for the information on a fact-checking site	32%	38%	39%	30%	25%	17%
Check local news outlets	29%	32%	34%	29%	24%	15%
Search Wikipedia	26%	33%	32%	25%	18%	15%
Send it to a knowledgeable friend or family member to ask for their opinion	22%	30%	28%	20%	13%	7%
Comment on it on social media to ask if others think it is false or misleading	19%	26%	26%	18%	10%	7%
Report it	18%	23%	23%	18%	10%	8%

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Asked if respondents previously reported they every verify information, n = 8,244 - 8,261

When looking to verify information using a search engine, Gen Z and Millennials use more advanced search techniques than older generations

They are more likely than Gen X and Boomers and even more likely than the Silent generation to use a reverse image search or to engage in “lateral reading”* (opening multiple tabs and performing multiple searches).

When verifying information using a search engine, how frequently do you do the following? (Top-2 box, always or most of the time)

Method of verification	All	Gen Z	Millennials	Gen X	Boomers	Silent
Go past the first page of results on a search engine	32%	36%	37%	31%	28%	18%
Open multiple tabs or windows and perform multiple searches using different combinations of keywords	24%	33%	31%	23%	15%	6%
Include keywords in your search to specifically look for evidence of false or misleading information (e.g., "fake news", "propaganda", "legit")	24%	32%	32%	23%	15%	8%
Use multiple search engines to compare results	23%	32%	29%	22%	16%	8%
Filter your search using time, date, etc.	23%	31%	29%	22%	16%	9%
Use a reverse image search to find the original source of an image	19%	26%	27%	18%	10%	4%

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** concept developed by Stanford History Education Group*
Asked of those who verify using a search engine, n = 8,426 - 8,428

When looking to verify information using a search engine, respondents in India, Brazil and Nigeria, compared to other countries, are more likely to engage in lateral reading*, use multiple search engines, filter their search by date and time, and use a reverse image search.

When verifying information using a search engine, how frequently do you do the following? (Top-2 box, always or most of the time)

Method of verification	All	US	UK	India	Brazil	Nigeria	Japan	Germany
Go past the first page of results on a search engine	32%	32%	27%	36%	38%	45%	7%	39%
Open multiple tabs or windows and perform multiple searches using different combinations of keywords	24%	21%	14%	34%	32%	42%	11%	18%
Include keywords in your search to specifically look for evidence of false or misleading information (e.g., "fake news", "propaganda", "legit")	24%	21%	10%	37%	40%	46%	7%	15%
Use multiple search engines to compare results	23%	19%	10%	34%	39%	44%	8%	15%
Filter your search using time, date, etc.	23%	21%	12%	36%	34%	41%	7%	18%
Use a reverse image search to find the original source of an image	19%	16%	10%	33%	30%	32%	5%	13%

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* opening multiple tabs and performing multiple searches; *concept developed by Stanford History Education Group*
Asked of those who verify using a search engine, n = 8,426 - 8,428

When deciding if information is true, what respondents find most important is whether conclusions are supported by sources and facts

Among Gen Z and Millennials, 33% find it important whether the information was shared by an influencer they follow. Among Boomers and the Silent generation, fewer than 20% say this is important to them.

How important do you find the following for deciding if information is true? (Top-2 box, very or extremely important)

	All	Gen Z	Millennials	Gen X	Boomers	Silent
Whether conclusions are supported by sources and facts	72%	68%	70%	71%	76%	76%
Whether conclusions are logical	60%	61%	60%	60%	62%	59%
Whether it is from a government source (local county officials, the state health department, the Census Bureau)	55%	59%	56%	52%	54%	52%
Whether the writer may have a conflict of interest	49%	48%	49%	50%	48%	52%
Whether you personally know and trust the person who shared the information	48%	47%	49%	47%	49%	48%
Whether you have seen it reported somewhere else before	40%	44%	46%	38%	36%	33%
Whether it is from a newspaper	35%	44%	41%	34%	28%	23%
Whether it is in line with my own experience	42%	42%	43%	42%	42%	41%
The tone	37%	40%	42%	36%	34%	29%
Whether it was shared by a public figure/influencer you follow	27%	33%	33%	27%	20%	16%

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Asked of everyone, n = 8,582 - 8,585

Respondents across countries largely agree on what are the most important factors for deciding if information is true

However, in India, Brazil and Nigeria, respondents place more importance on whether the information comes from a newspaper and whether it was shared by a public figure or influencer they follow.

How important do you find the following for deciding if information is true? (Top-2 box, very or extremely important)

	All	US	UK	India	Brazil	Nigeria	Japan	Germany
Whether conclusions are supported by sources and facts	72%	77%	84%	54%	68%	80%	64%	75%
Whether conclusions are logical	60%	64%	66%	52%	65%	64%	46%	65%
Whether it is from a government source (local county officials, the state health department, the Census Bureau)	55%	50%	56%	57%	53%	70%	47%	52%
Whether the writer may have a conflict of interest	49%	61%	62%	45%	47%	52%	36%	43%
Whether you personally know and trust the person who shared the information	48%	54%	50%	52%	55%	62%	28%	38%
Whether it is in line with my own experience	42%	37%	33%	49%	52%	58%	25%	45%
Whether you have seen it reported somewhere else before	40%	40%	32%	46%	49%	56%	29%	35%
The tone	37%	37%	32%	47%	43%	47%	24%	37%
Whether it is from a newspaper	35%	28%	20%	51%	52%	58%	20%	27%
Whether it was shared by a public figure/influencer you follow	27%	22%	17%	45%	36%	49%	12%	19%

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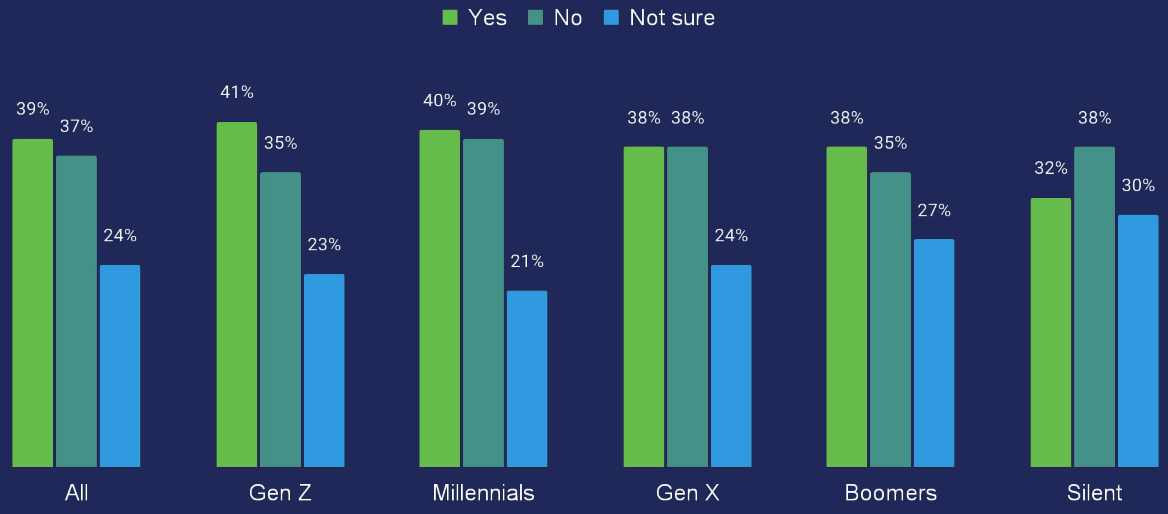
Asked of everyone, n = 8,582 - 8,585

Sharing Information

39% of respondents across countries say they have unintentionally shared false or misleading information

Gen Z and Millennials are more likely than the Silent generation to say think they have shared false or misleading information.

Many people have accidentally shared misinformation at some point. Have you ever shared a post, video, image or news story that you discovered later to be untrue?



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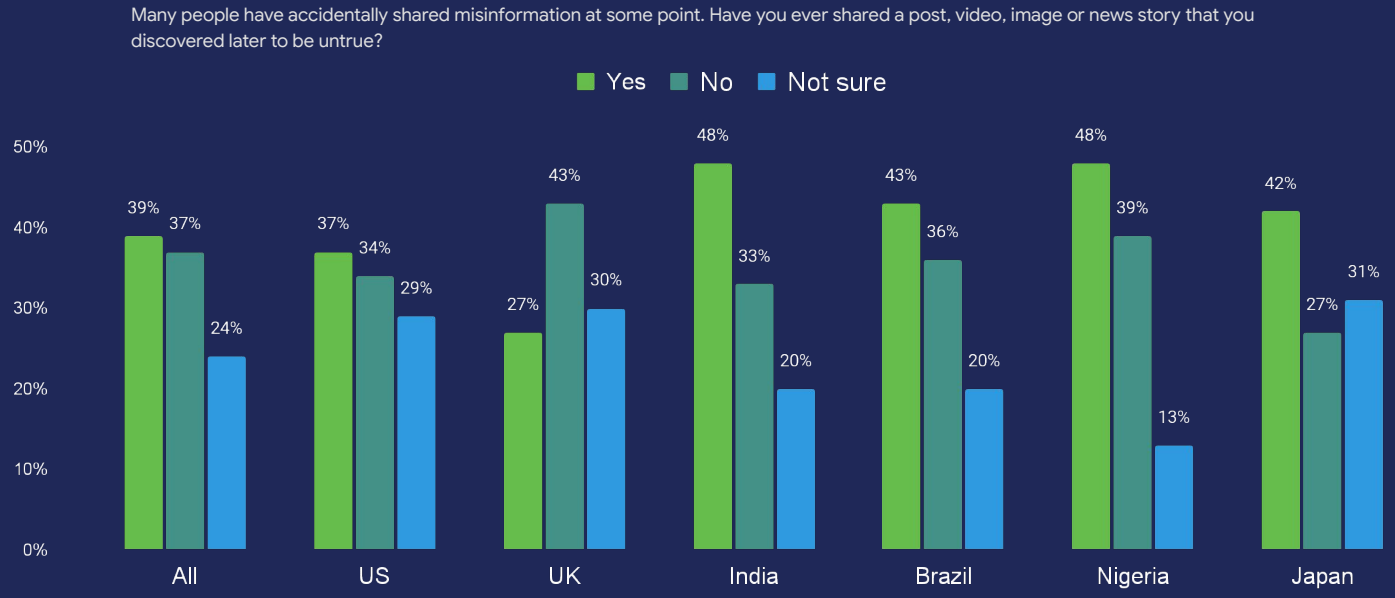
*Asked of respondents who **ever** share articles, posts, images or videos on social media, n = 6,548*

In India and Nigeria, almost half say they have accidentally shared false or misleading information at some point. In the US and the UK, about a third say the same, and in Germany, fewer than 1 in 4 do.



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*Asked of respondents who **ever** share articles, posts, images or videos on social media, n = 6,548*

55% of respondents say they have shared false or misleading information because they say they thought it was true. A third say they shared impulsively.

Gen Z and Millennials are more likely than Boomers and the Silent generation to say they accidentally shared false or misleading information because they felt pressure to share quickly, and less likely to say they shared it because they thought it was true.

As best you can remember, why have you shared that information? Check all of the following reasons that apply

Method of verification	All	Gen Z	Millennials	Gen X	Boomers	Silent
I thought it was true at the time	55%	49%	50%	60%	60%	67%
I shared impulsively without thinking too much about it	32%	32%	34%	32%	31%	29%
I was busy and did not have time to verify the information	25%	24%	27%	28%	24%	11%
I wasn't sure if it was true and wanted to start a discussion	18%	23%	22%	14%	12%	5%
I felt pressure to share information quickly about a current event	17%	22%	20%	14%	10%	8%
It supported my beliefs	17%	17%	19%	16%	14%	15%
I didn't think it was important enough	13%	12%	14%	12%	15%	10%

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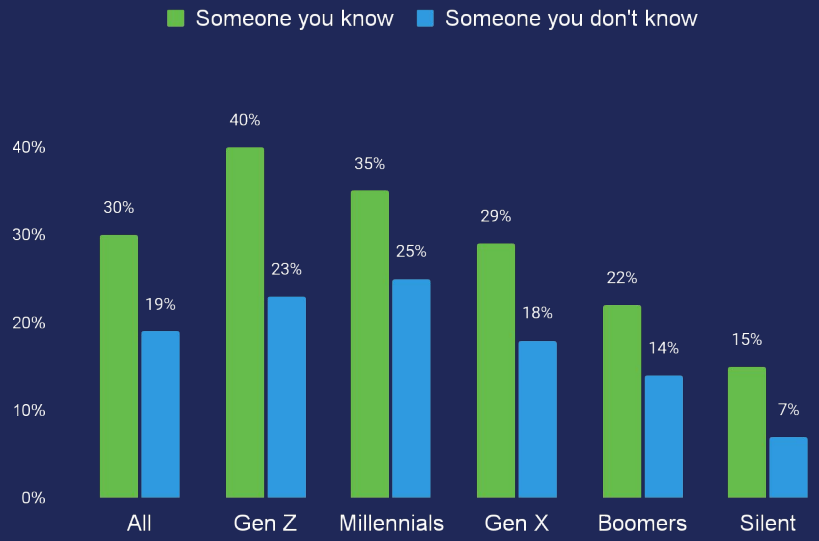
Asked of those who previously reported they probably have shared false or misleading information. Not showing "Other" and "Not sure", n = 2,447

Most respondents, but older generations in particular, are reluctant to correct people who post false or misleading information online

Among Gen Z and Millennials, over a third correct people they know personally always or most of the time, but only 1 in 4 say they correct people they don't personally know.

When someone [you know personally / you don't know] posts false or misleading information on social media, how often do you correct them? (Top-2 box, always or most of the time)



Among Gen X and Boomers, fewer than 2 in 10 say they correct someone they don't know, and among the Silent generation, fewer than 1 in 10 says the same.

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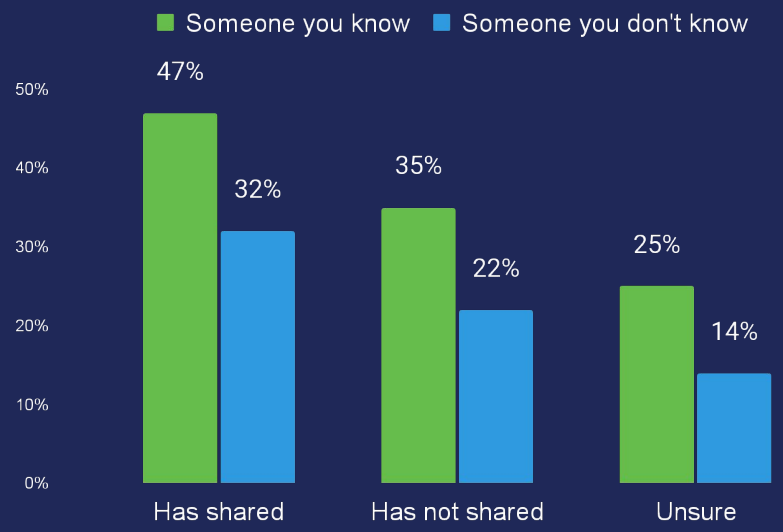
Asked of everyone, n = 8,584, n=8,581

Respondents who say they have accidentally shared false or misleading information themselves are less reluctant to call out other people who post false information

When someone [you know personally / you don't know] posts false or misleading information on social media, how often

Many people have accidentally shared misinformation at some point. Have you ever shared a post, video, image or news story that you discovered later to be untrue?



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Asked of everyone, n = 6,548

Highlights per Country

Key Findings In The United States

47% of US respondents say they see false or misleading information daily. Fewer Gen Z (30%) and Millennials (43%) than older generations (54%) say they see false or misleading information daily.

The largest share of respondents in the US are only somewhat confident (36%) that they can identify information as false or misleading.

4 in 10 respondents (43%) are moderately or extremely concerned about family members believing false information they come across on the internet. Gen Z and Millennials are more concerned (39%) about family members accidentally sharing false or misleading information than older generations (27%).

To verify information online, most Americans check if the source is reputable (52%), check the date of the post (49%) and use a search engine (42%) to find out more about the post and who shared it.

When using a search engine to verify information, Gen Z and Millennials (30%) are more likely to filter their search by date and time than older generations (13%). Gen Z and Millennials are also more likely to use multiple search engines (26%) than older generations (14%) and more likely to engage in lateral reading* (33% vs. 13%).

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* opening multiple tabs and performing multiple searches; *concept developed by Stanford History Education Group*

Key Findings In Brazil

More than 4 in 10 Brazilians (44%) across generations think they see false or misleading information daily.

Around two in three Brazilians (65%) across generations are concerned about themselves or their family believing false or misleading information.

Brazilians check the source (66%) and the date of posts (59%) to verify information they find on the internet and use a search engine (55%) to find out more about posts they suspect are false or misleading.

When verifying information using a search engine, Gen Z in Brazil engage in lateral reading* (26%), filter results (27%) and go past the first page of results (33%) less than Gen X (35%, 37%, 40%).

When deciding if information is true, more than half of the respondents in Brazil (55%) find it important whether they personally know the person who posted the information.

* opening multiple tabs and performing multiple searches; *concept developed by Stanford History Education Group*

Key Findings In The United Kingdom

Almost half of respondents in the UK (46%) think they see false or misleading information daily. 1 in 3 say they see it weekly. Millennials and Gen X (51%) are more likely to say they see false or misleading information daily than Gen Z (40%) and the Silent generation (39%).

Fewer than 1 in 3 respondents in the UK say they are moderately or extremely concerned about their own exposure (30%), or their friends' exposure (31%) to false or misleading information – they are more concerned about their family members believing false or misleading information (37%).

Nearly half of respondents in the UK check the date of the post (48%) and check if the source is reputable (47%) when verifying information before sharing.

When verifying information using a search engine, Gen Z uses lateral reading* (19%) and keyword searches (19%) at much higher rates than Boomers and the Silent generation.

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Key Findings In India

Just under half of respondents in India say they see false or misleading information at least weekly – 24% say they see it daily, 24% weekly. Gen Z respondents say they see information at least weekly (54%) more than older generations (45%).

More than 4 in 10 Indian respondents are moderately or extremely concerned about themselves (42%) being exposed to false or misleading information online. They are slightly more concerned about their family members believing false or misleading information, at 47%. This concern is shared equally across generations.

More than 4 in 10 respondents in India use a search engine (42%) or check the date of the post (41%) when verifying information before sharing.

When verifying using a search engine, Gen Z gravitates towards advanced techniques like lateral reading* (40%) and using multiple search engines (38%) more than Boomers.

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Key Findings In Nigeria

Half of Nigerians (52%) across generations report they see false or misleading information daily. 25% think they see it weekly.

39% of Nigerians feel moderately confident and 20% feel totally confident that they can identify information being false or misleading. Older generations are slightly more confident. While 15% of Gen Z and 21% of Millennials say they feel totally confident, 23% of Gen Xers and 30% of Boomers say the same.

Over 80% of Nigerians across generations feel moderately or extremely concerned about members of their family believing or accidentally sharing false or misleading information.

To verify information online, Nigerians overwhelmingly turn to social media. 69% say they would see if others on social media have commented on the information always or most of the time. Aside from social media, the most preferred verification methods in Nigeria are checking if the source of the information is reputable (69%) and using a search engine to find out more about the post and who shared it (68%).

When deciding if information is true, Nigerians find most important whether the information comes from a government source (70%). While Nigerians find it *least* important whether the information comes from a public figure or influencer, still half of the respondents say this is moderately or extremely important to them (49%).

Key Findings In Japan

In Japan, only 20% of respondents across generations think they see false or misleading information daily, and 22% think they see it weekly.

The largest share of respondents in Japan (32%) feel “not at all confident” that they can identify information being false or misleading. Only 13% feel moderately confident and 2% totally confident. Older generations in particular lack confidence. While 16% of Gen Z and 30% of Millennials feel not at all confident, 39% of Boomers and 35% among the Silent generation feel this way.

Nearly 4 in 10 Japanese feel moderately or extremely concerned about members of their family believing (33%) or accidentally sharing (37%) false or misleading information. This concern is shared across generations.

Respondents in Japan try to verify information much less than other countries. Fewer than 1 in 4 say they check if the source is reputable (23%), and when the information was posted (22%) always or most of the time. Only 13% say they use a search engine always or most of the time. However, Gen Z and Millennials report using each of these verification methods twice as often as older generations.

Key Findings In Germany

Only 2 in 10 Germans see false or misleading information daily. 28% say they see it weekly.

The largest share of respondents (44%) feel only somewhat confident that they can identify information being false or misleading, while only 3% feel totally confident. Confidence in Germany is similar across generations.

Unlike in other countries, respondents in Germany are relatively unconcerned about members of their family believing (22%) or accidentally sharing (17%) false or misleading information.

To verify information online, Germans most often check if the source is reputable (47%), check when the information was posted (39%), or use a search engine (36%). Gen Z and Millennials (33%) are more likely than older generations (22%) to click on links in the article or post or comment directly on the post.

When using a search engine to verify information, Gen Z and Millennials (26%) more often engage in lateral reading* than older generations (13%).

* opening multiple tabs and performing multiple searches; *concept developed by Stanford History Education Group*