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Teens, Trust, and Technology in the Age of AI:

Navigating Trust in Online Content

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Overview

Given the current digital landscape—where generative AI is increasingly embedded in the tools we use every day—inauthentic visual content can be produced with alarming speed and ease. This raises a crucial question: *To what extent does generative AI influence the trust that teens have in the information that underpins how we interact and understand our world and ourselves?*

While the accessibility of generative AI opens new doors for creativity and efficiency, it also raises concerns about trust. Teens are navigating new challenges in discerning truth from misinformation and manipulation. In this new spotlight report, we examine how U.S. teens age 13–18 experience trust in the age of generative AI. This report builds on our prior research, "**The Dawn of the AI Era: Teens, Parents, and the Adoption of Generative AI at Home and School**," which explored how teens interact with AI. Here, we're delving deeper into the specific ways in which generative AI influences their trust in content and platforms. These findings provide insight to help teens, parents and caregivers, educators, and tech leaders address the challenges to trust posed within an era of rapid technological transformation.

Credits

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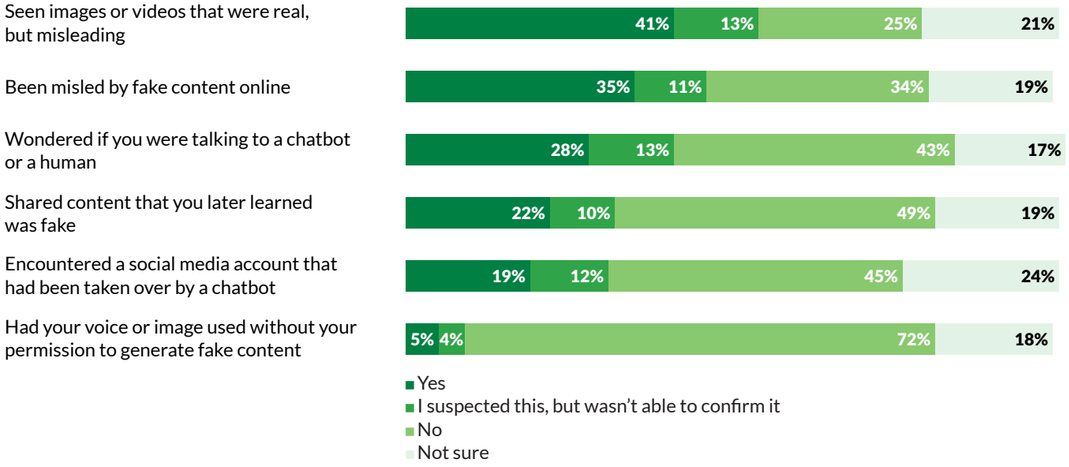
Key Findings

1. Many teens say they have been misled by fake content—including AI-generated content.

- Around two in five (41%) teens are aware of having seen images or videos that were real but misleading.
- Over a third (35%) of teens report having been misled by fake content online.
- About one in five teens (22%) report that they had shared content that they later learned was fake.
- Over a quarter (28%) of teens have wondered if they were talking to a chatbot or a human.

Implication: Teens face significant challenges in distinguishing between authentic and manipulated content, which could lead to an erosion in trust in online platforms.

Figure A: Many teens know they have been misled or experienced fake content, but many are still unsure
% of teens age 13–18 who have ever experienced the following



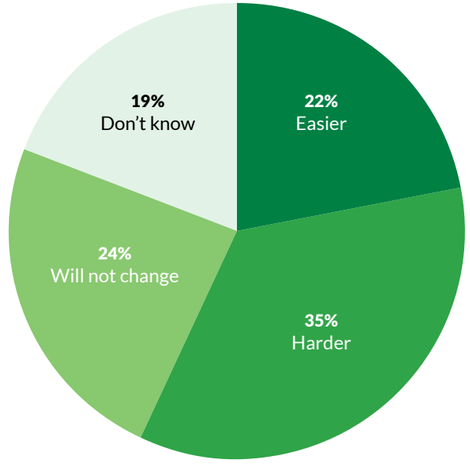
Note: Q: "Have you ever experienced the following…?" Total amounts may not sum to 100% due to rounding and non-response.

2. Teens' experiences with fake and misleading material reshape their trust in online content.

- Over 7 in 10 (72%) teens changed the way they evaluate the accuracy of online information after having an experience with deceptive or fake content (see Figure C for list of experiences and the percentage who changed as a result of that experience).[1]
- More than a third (35%) of teens say that generative AI systems will make it *harder* to trust the accuracy of the information they see online (Figure B).
- Teens who have experienced any form of fake or misleading content are more likely than teens who have not had these experiences to say that generative AI will make it harder for them to trust the accuracy of information online (40% vs. 27%).

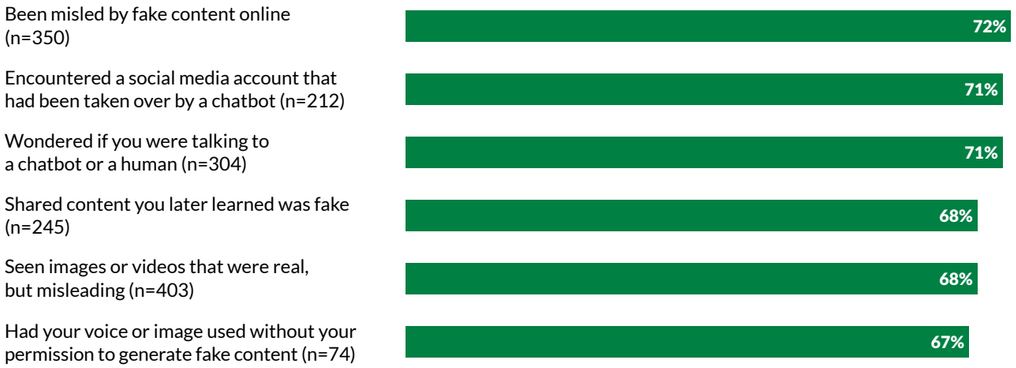
Implication: Teens' perceptions of the accuracy of online content signal a distrust in digital platforms, pointing to an opportunity for educational interventions on misinformation for teens, as well as the need for tech companies to prioritize transparency and develop features that enhance the credibility of the content shared on their platforms.

Figure B: A third of teens think generative AI will make it harder to trust the accuracy of information they see online
% of teens who think gen AI will make it easier, harder, or not change their ability to trust the accuracy of the information they see online



Note: Q: "Generally speaking, would you say that generative AI systems will make it easier, harder, or not change your ability to trust the accuracy of the information you see online?"

Figure C: About 7 in 10 teens have changed the way they evaluate online information after experiences with fake or deceptive content
% of teens age 13–18 who have experienced _____ and say "YES" that they have changed the way they assess the accuracy of online content



Note: Q: "Did the following experiences change the way you assess the accuracy of online content that you see now?" The chart reflects "Yes" responses. Question asked only among those who reported having each experience.

[1] "Experiencing fake content" indicates that teens answered "Yes" to any of the response options for the following question. Q: "Have you ever experienced the following…?" Response options: "Been misled by fake content online"; "Seen images or videos that were real, but misleading"; "Shared content that you later learned was fake"; "Had your voice or image used without your permission to generate fake content"; "Wondered if you were talking to a chatbot or a human"; "Encountered a social media account that had been taken over by a chatbot."

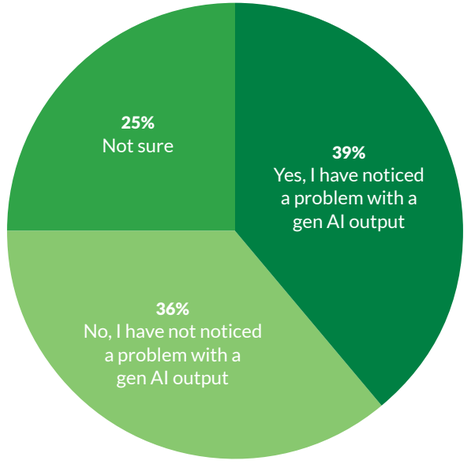
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3. Generative AI faces substantial credibility challenges among teens.

- Nearly two in five teens (39%) who have used generative AI for schoolwork have found problems or inaccuracies in the AI output (Figure D).
- 36% of teens say they have not noticed a problem, and another quarter (25%) are not sure.

Implication: About a third of teens have found inaccuracies in generative AI outputs, which underscores the importance of improving AI reliability and equipping all teens with the tools and skills to critically assess AI-generated content, especially in educational contexts.

Figure D: Among teens who have used AI for schoolwork, 2 in 5 have noticed a problem with a generative AI output
% of teens age 13–18 who have used AI for school



Note: Q: "Have you ever noticed a problem with or inaccuracy in a generative AI output?" The respondents included in this chart were 452 young people age 13–18 who have used generative AI to help with school assignments.

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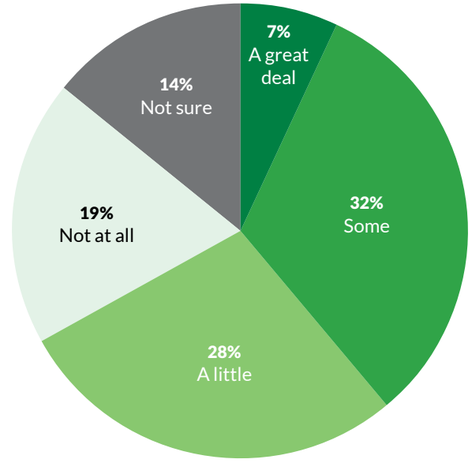
4. Teen trust in tech companies is low.

- Around 6 in 10 teens say that major technology companies (i.e., Google, Apple, Meta, TikTok, Microsoft, etc.) cannot be trusted to care about their mental health and well-being (64%) or to protect people's safety even if it hurts profits (62%).
- Slightly over half of teens report that they have low levels of trust in major technology companies to make ethical and responsible design decisions (53%), keep teens' personal information secure (52%), or be inclusive and fair when considering the needs of different users (51%).

In regard to AI, nearly half (47%) of teens have little to no trust that tech companies will make responsible decisions about how they use AI (Figure E).

Implication: When it comes to tech companies, teens are not confident that these companies have teen safety and well-being in mind when designing and making decisions about new features and technologies. To rebuild trust, tech companies could engage directly with young people through participatory design processes, incorporating their feedback to create safer, more ethical digital environments that address teens' specific concerns about privacy, safety, and mental health.

Figure E: Teens are split on how much they can trust tech companies to make responsible decisions about AI, if at all
% of teens who report how much they trust tech companies, if at all, to make responsible decisions about how they use AI in their products



Note: Q: "How much do you trust tech companies, if at all, to make responsible decisions about how they use AI in their products?"

Figure F: Teens express low levels of trust in major technology companies
% of teens who indicated how often they think they can trust major technology companies to do the following



Note: Q: "Overall, how much of the time do you think you can trust major technology companies (i.e., Google, Apple, Meta, TikTok, Microsoft, etc.) to _____?" Total amounts may not sum to 100% due to rounding and non-response.

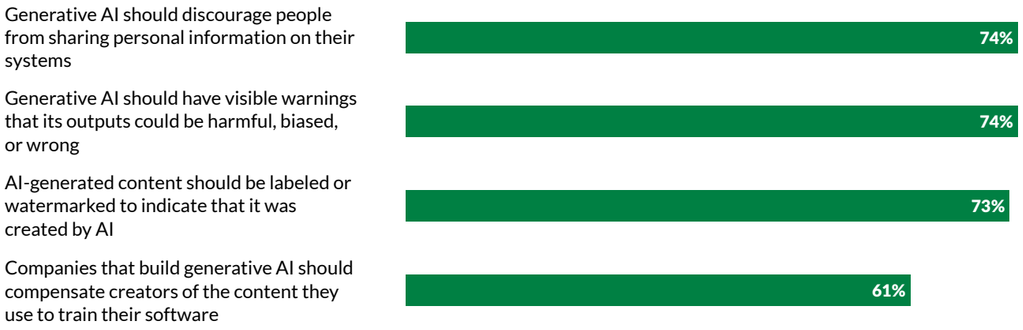
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5. Teens express strong support for safeguarding generative AI.

- Three in four teens (74%) say privacy safeguards and transparency are important measures to manage AI.
- 74% of teens say it is important that generative AI platforms discourage people from sharing personal information on their systems.
- 73% of teens want AI-generated content to be labeled or watermarked.
- 61% believe that content creators should be compensated for training data used by AI systems.

Implication: Teens' strong support for measures like watermarking, warnings, and creator compensation highlights a demand for comprehensive oversight of generative AI, even among young people. Tech companies should work collaboratively with regulators to establish clear, enforceable standards that prioritize transparency, privacy, and ethical AI usage. By aligning practices with these expectations, companies can not only rebuild trust, but also set a precedent for responsible AI governance.

Figure G: Over 7 in 10 teens point to the importance of generative AI privacy and transparency measures
% of teens who say that the following statements are somewhat to very important



Note: Q: "Here are some things some people have suggested about managing generative AI. How important, if at all, are each of the following to you?" Chart reflects "somewhat" and "very important" responses.

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Conclusion

A substantial portion of teens are wary of the visual content they encounter online, and particularly the visual content they see on social media. Against the backdrop of declining trust in the authenticity of visual content—especially on online media—35% of teens feel that generative AI systems will make it harder to trust the accuracy of online information. Given that trust in information—particularly online information—faces growing challenges amid the fast-paced development of generative AI, it's more crucial than ever to **equip youth** with the skills to "**investigate, not doubt**" the information they come across.

The ease and speed at which generative AI allows everyday users to spread unreliable claims and inauthentic media may exacerbate teens' existing **low levels of trust** in institutions like the media and government. When asked about how AI might be managed in this moment of low trust, teens point to the importance of visible warnings about the accuracy and bias in AI outputs, designs that discourage the sharing of personal data with AI platforms, watermarking to identify AI-created content, and practices that compensate creators for their content when it is used to train AI models. Looking ahead, a multi-stakeholder approach—including policymakers, tech companies, media outlets, educators, parents and caregivers, and, importantly, youth themselves—is essential to foster a culture of critical thinking and informed decision-making as we navigate our rapidly evolving digital world.

Summary of Methodology

- This data is from a nationally representative survey that includes responses from 1,045 general population U.S. adults (age 18 or older) who are parents or guardians of one or more teens age 13 to 18, and responses from one of these teenage children. All 18-year-old respondents were still in high school. The survey was conducted online, in English or Spanish.
- Paired (dyad) parent and teen surveys included responses from 1,045 adolescents age 13 to 18 and oversamples to obtain 250 Black and 300 Latino child respondents.
- Data was collected by Ipsos Public Affairs on behalf of Common Sense Media from March to May 2024.
- Differences between subgroups were tested for statistical significance at the level of $p < .05$.
- For additional details, please see the Methodology section of the earlier report in this series, "**The Dawn of the AI Era**."

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