

Research Report

Managing the Narrative: Young People's Use of Online Safety Tools

2021 Annual Conference
November 15





Research Objectives

This study seeks to dive deeper into the attitudes, beliefs, and behaviors of young people regarding online safety. Specifically, the survey results summarized here seek to better understand:

- ✓ Overall **online safety concerns** - attitudes, emotions
- ✓ Knowledge of and experience with **online safety tools**
- ✓ Perceived **pros and cons** about tools and how they should be improved
- ✓ Different **experiences and expectations** using online safety tools
- ✓ Observations/Experience with **online “bad” behaviors**
- ✓ Understanding responsibility in managing online behaviors; personal responsibility and the concept of **digital citizenship**



METHODS

QUALITATIVE

Mode: Online Bulletin Board Discussion with N=24 Gen Z (Teens (13-17) and young adults (18-24))
Field: June 22-24, 2021

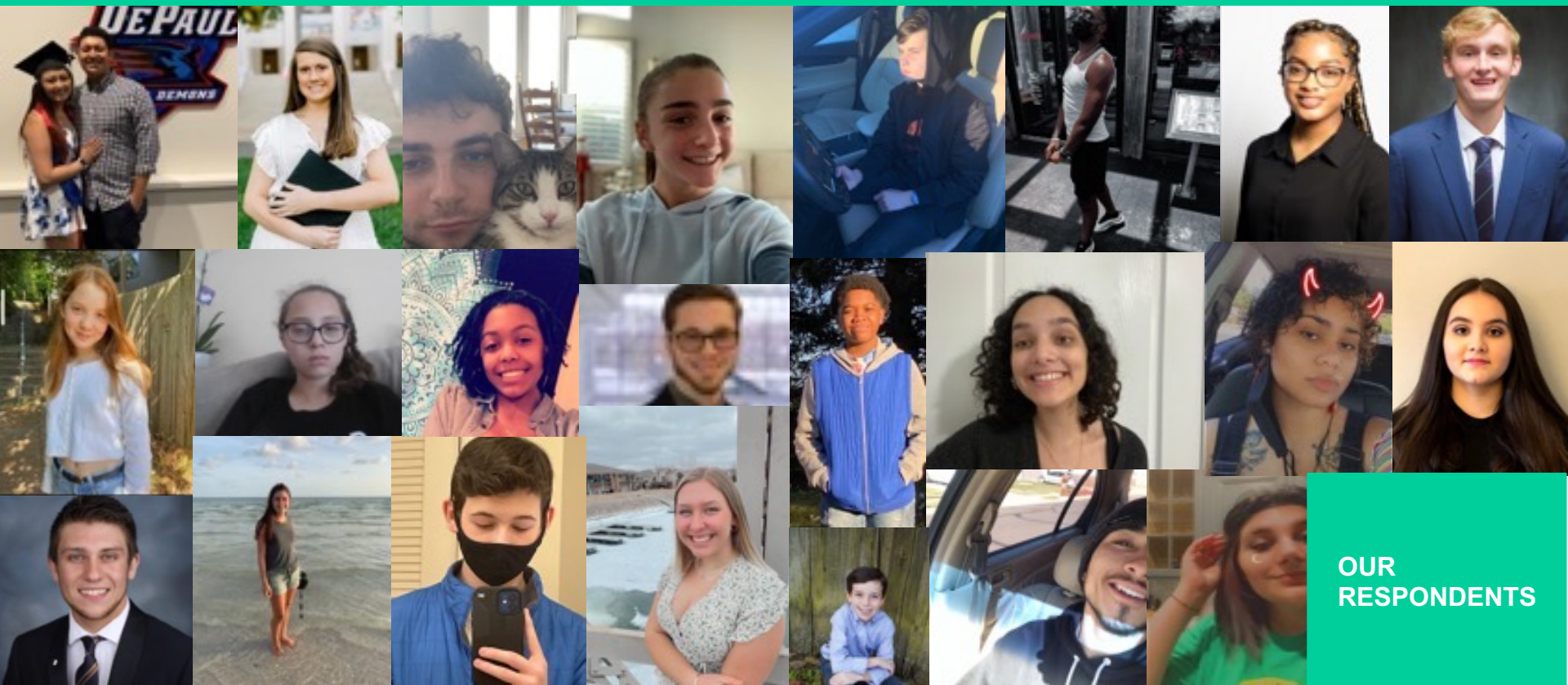


QUANTITATIVE

Mode: Online surveys with N=1,000 Gen Z and N = 548 Parents of children online.
Field: August 11 – September 2, 2021



Qualitative Phase Discussion Group



OUR RESPONDENTS

Gen Z embraces tech, but questions safety



1

Gen Z embraces tech, engages daily, feels confident online and views their online world as an extension and integral part of their real life.

2

Most see positivity and kindness online. 80% kind behavior, 20% unkind.



Social Media
connection and
inspiration



Zoom
meetings,
classes, learning



Gaming & Videos
entertainment



Streaming Music
personalization



Text & FaceTime
bond with friends
and family

3

Most do not feel fully safe online. Top concerns include password protection, data breaches, hackers, location tracking, scams and identity theft.

“

I use social media quite a bit. Lately I spend most of my time on Reddit, Instagram and Tik-Tok. I also watch YouTube a lot. I stream music through both Spotify and Apple music. I stream tv through HBO max and Hulu, mostly. I sell clothes online as a side job so for that I use eBay, Mercari and Depop. On top of all of that, I work and go to school online. So I also have to use Outlook, Word, Excel, Google Docs, Gmail, Slack, Teams, Canvas and more. I'm sure that sounds like a lot. But on any given weekday, I use almost all of these websites at least once.”

Eve, 18

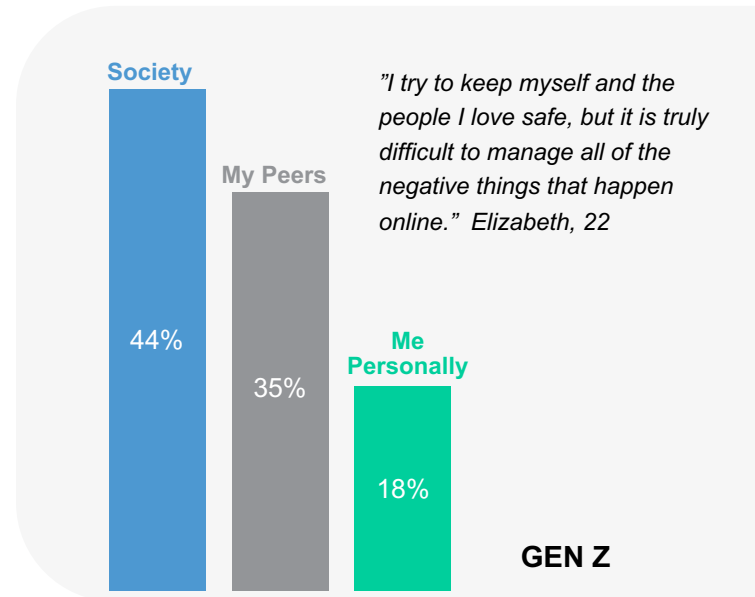
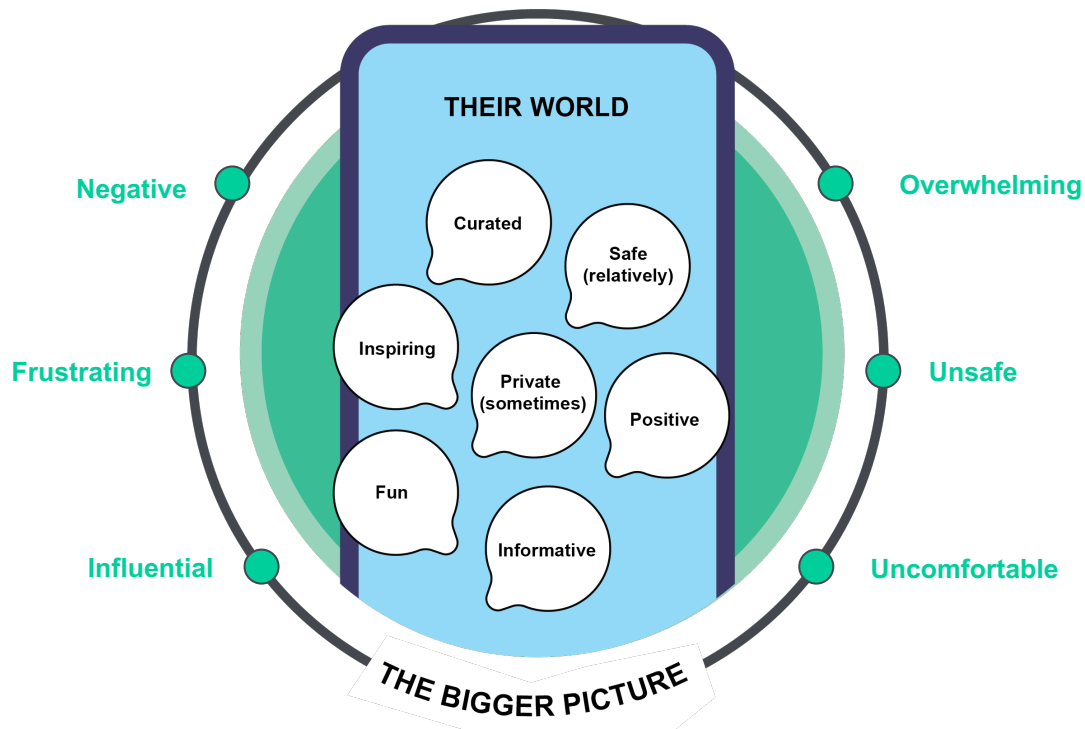
“

“I am most concerned about getting scammed from an online website or app that I thought I could trust.”

Nolan, 13



Gen Z experiences a disconnect between their world and the wider world, as social media is primarily perceived to be a threat to others more than self



Social Media Has A Negative Impact On...
(% Somewhat/very negative)



Gen Z faces real world consequences to online actions and believes platforms should do better

1

Real world consequences impact choices

- Fear of being ostracized or offending someone for taking action.
- It's easier to block vs. report someone.
- Mute = a way to quickly silence, but not lose the relationship!



"I might not leave a conversation because I don't want to be confronted by the people who started the group. Because the people in the group chat will get a notification if I left then it will be very obvious."
Eve, 18

2

Gen Z does not believe that platforms always take action

- Unless it's a "big" problem, platforms do not always take action.
- Reporting tools are often intimidating, time consuming and confusing.
- No follow-through on the part of platforms if bad behavior is reported.



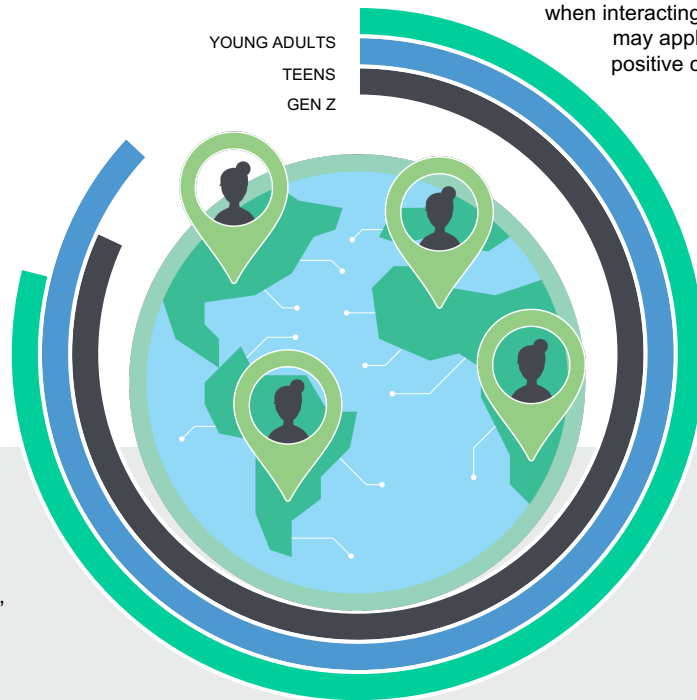
"I might. if it gets really bad and it is also affecting multiple people then yes. But when it comes to reporting I feel as though it doesn't get handled with unless it is a big problem."
Isabella, 15



Gen Z overwhelmingly supports the definition of digital citizenship, but finding the tools to support it is challenging.

- The concept of digital citizenship is **new to most Gen Z respondents**.
- Once they understand it, they embrace the concept of digital citizenship.

At a high level, **digital citizenship** is defined as the responsible use of technology (e.g., digital devices, internet, computer software) when interacting with others. That responsibility may apply to safety, privacy, or kind and positive conduct when using technology.



Agree digital citizenship is important to them

IT'S A SHARED RESPONSIBILITY



Users

behave nicely,
respect the rules
of engagement



Platforms

promote a positive environment,
set clear expectations and
enforce tangible consequences
for bad behavior

82% TOTAL GEN Z

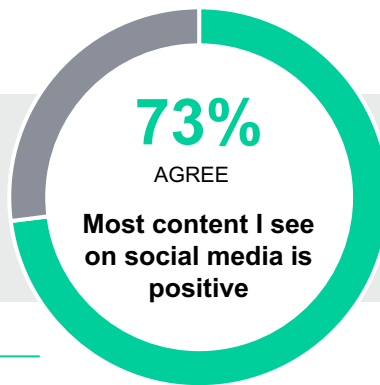
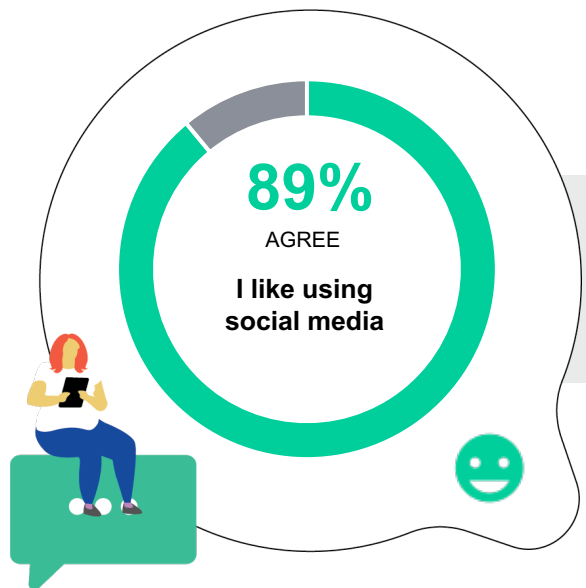
87% TEENS

79% YOUNG ADULTS

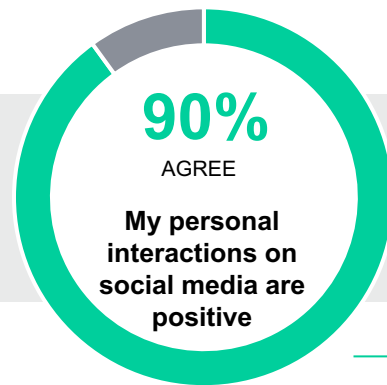
Attitudes About Internet and Social Media



Nearly all Gen Z'ers enjoy social media and say they have a generally positive experience



While 56% say they ***somewhat agree*** with this statement, only 17% ***strongly agree***.



While 51% say they ***somewhat agree*** with this statement, only 39% ***strongly agree***.



However, discomfort remains widespread, and around half still worry about the risks of being online

I'm uncomfortable at least some of the time I'm on social media



I'm not comfortable with the level of information (e.g., depth, amount) that is available about me online



Online Safety and Individual Actions



In general, Gen Z'ers have a lukewarm sense of comfort spending time online; but only 1 in 5 feel very safe and nearly half fear their safety is at risk

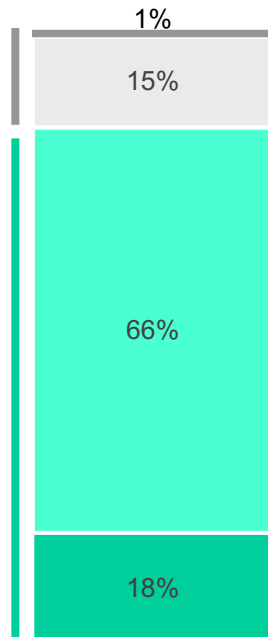
SAFETY

In general, how **safe or unsafe** do you feel when spending time online (e.g., using social media, making a purchase from a website)?

- VERY SAFE
- SOMEWHAT SAFE
- SOMEWHAT UNSAFE
- VERY UNSAFE

17%
DISAGREE

83%
AGREE



BUT

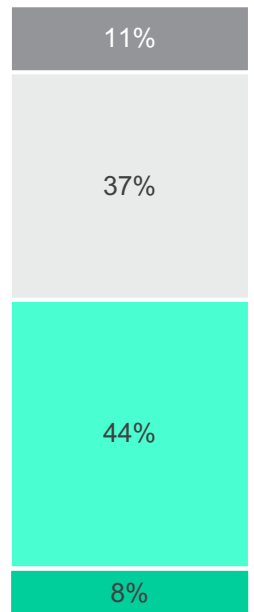
RISK

“Overall, I don’t believe that my overall online safety is at risk”

- STRONGLY AGREE
- SOMEWHAT AGREE
- SOMEWHAT DISAGREE
- STRONGLY DISAGREE

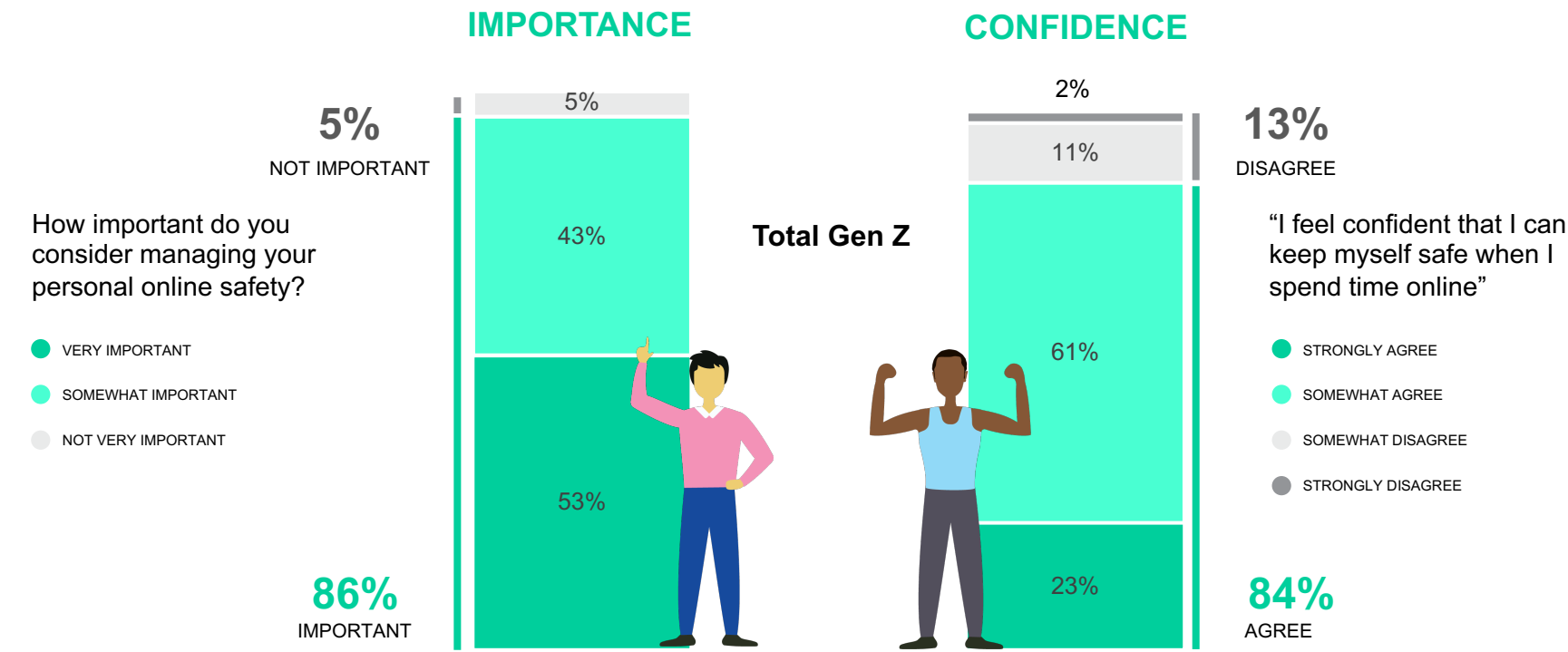
52%
DISAGREE

48%
AGREE



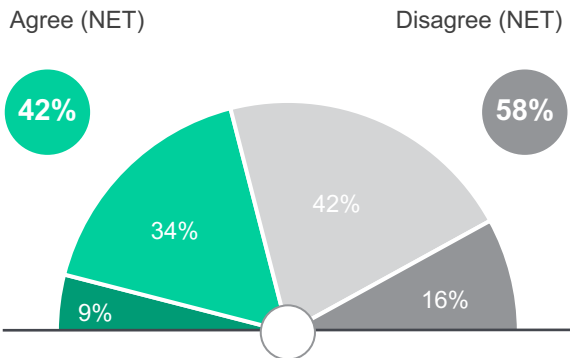


Nearly everyone sees the importance of managing their personal online safety; over half think it's crucial

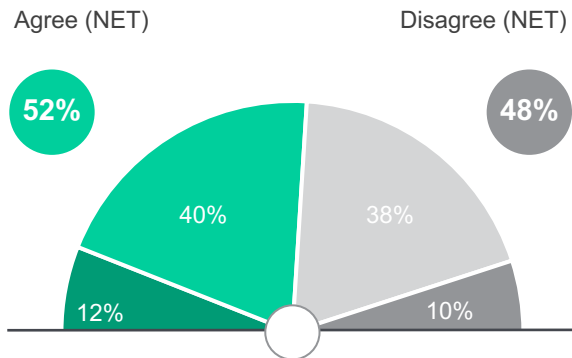




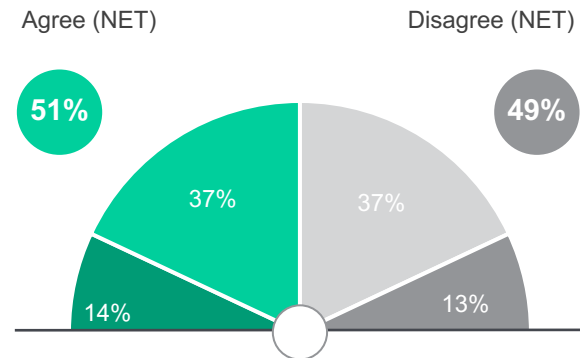
But, about half are overwhelmed and unprepared to take action to manage their online safety



I don't feel that I have *access to the resources* that I need to manage my personal online safety



Managing my personal online safety is *overwhelming*



When I spend time online, I am *more concerned about my personal safety* (e.g., mental health, harassment) than I am about the safety of my data

● STRONGLY AGREE
 ● SOMEWHAT AGREE
 ● SOMEWHAT DISAGREE
 ● STRONGLY DISAGREE

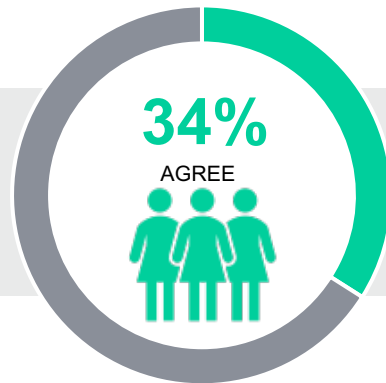


There are clear social dynamics at play; advocacy is higher for others, not self, and one-third worry what others will think if they take action

“I’m more comfortable taking action against bad behavior (i.e., inappropriate or hateful posts/messaging) that I see happening to others compared to bad behavior that I personally experience”



“I’m worried about what my friends will think if I take action against bad behavior on social media (i.e., inappropriate or hateful posts/messaging)”

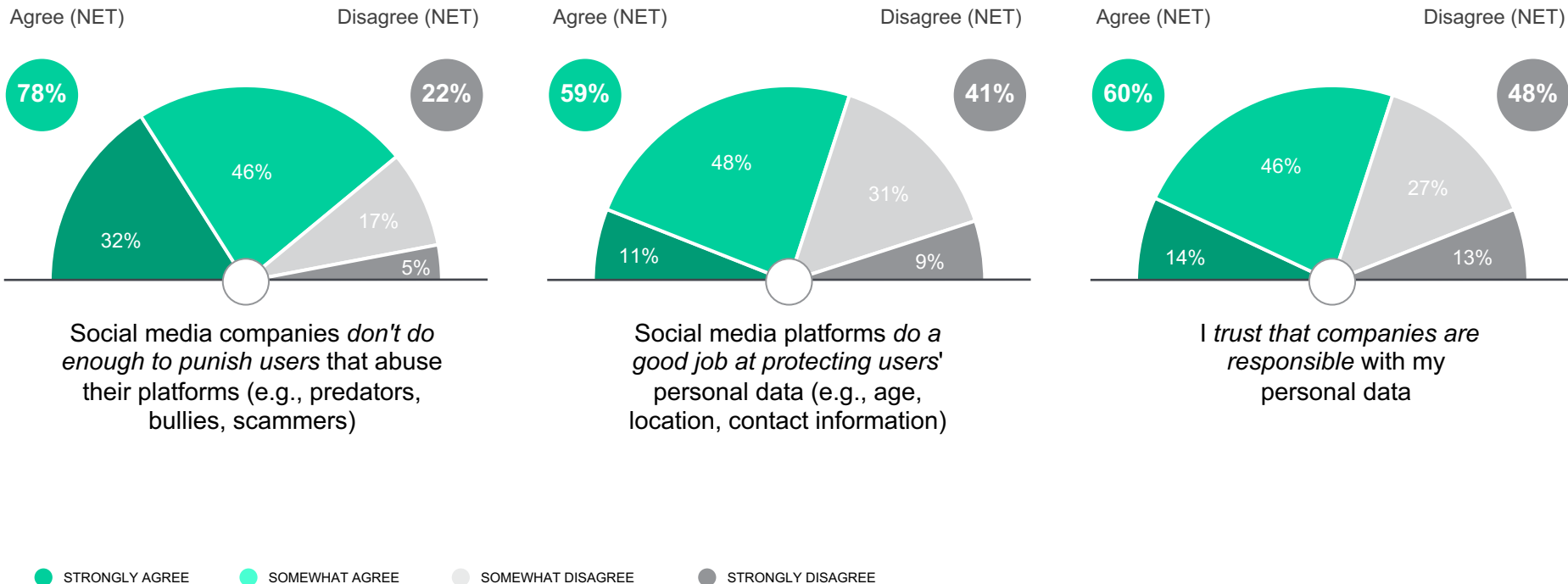


● AGREE ● DISAGREE

Actions Taken By Social Media Companies

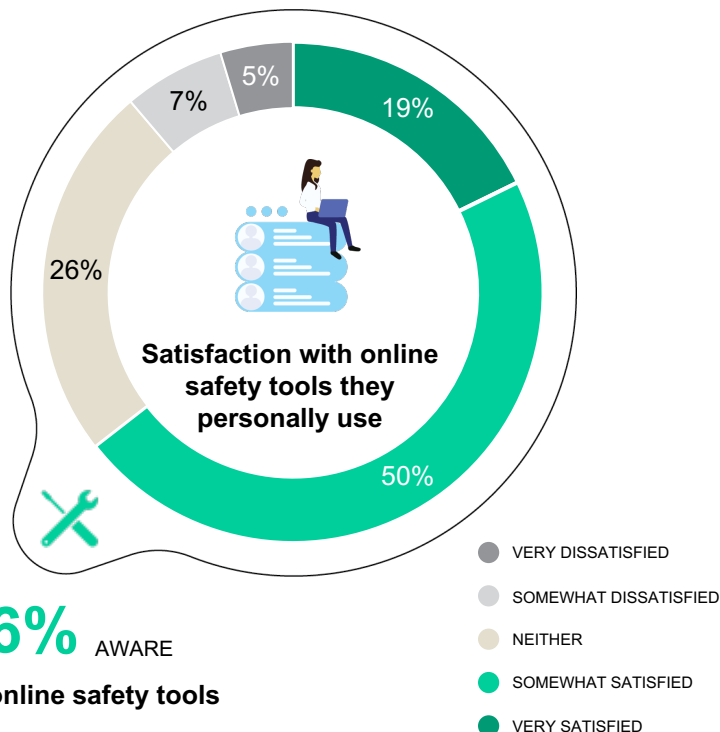


Despite some trust in social media companies, almost eight in ten agree social media companies don't do enough to punish bad behavior





Just over half of Gen Z'ers are aware of online safety tools. Among those, satisfaction is good, with room for improvement



FUTURE IMPROVEMENT WISH LIST

- Age restrictions or age-appropriate sides of different platforms
- Classes in cyber security
- Location settings where friends/family can see your location, but others cannot
- Easy to block button vs. many steps
- More transparency in how these companies are using my data
- Make me “unmonitorable” – I don’t want to be tracked at all
- Really strict and customizable privacy settings
- Refine and make tools that exist today more apparent and easy to use
- Find better ways to get rid of scammers and hackers online

Role and Responsibility of Parents



Teens, young adults and parents agree that right now parents are less online-savvy than kids – and are learning more than they teach in return

“I believe I am more online-savvy than my parents”

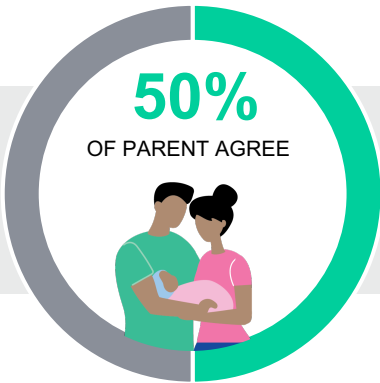


74%
TOTAL
GEN Z

81%
TEENS

65%
YOUNG ADULTS

“When it comes to online safety, my children teach me more than I teach them”



“When it comes to online safety, I teach my parents more than they teach me”



61%
TOTAL
GEN Z

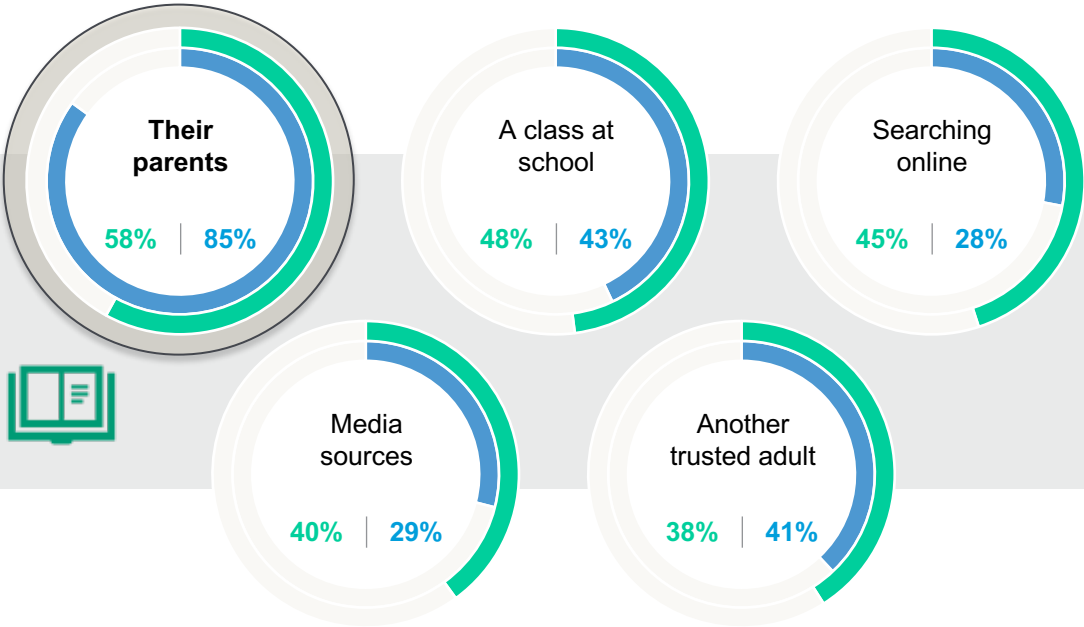
69%
TEENS

51%
YOUNG ADULTS

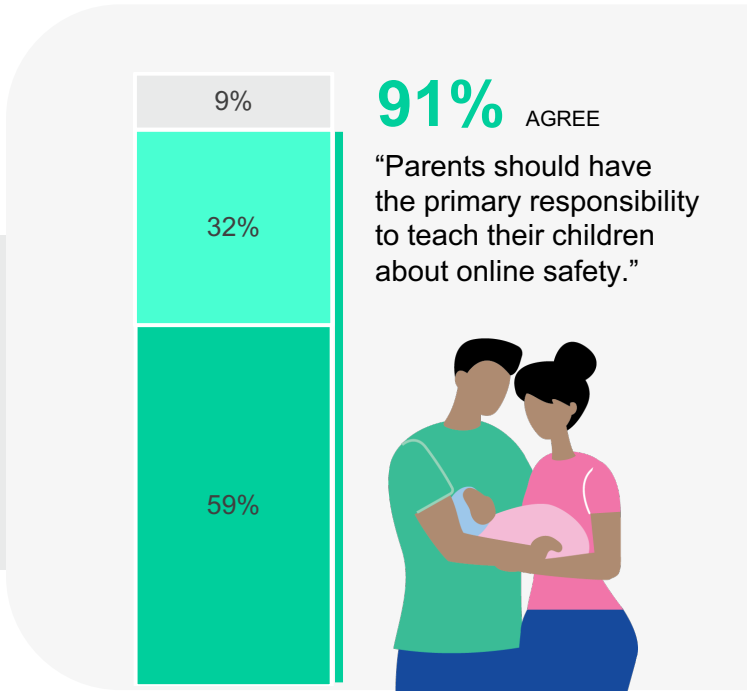


Parents, young adults and teens agree that parents have the largest role in teaching children about online safety

Most relied on resource to learn about online safety



● YOUNG ADULTS ● TEENS * AT LEAST SOME OF THE TIME



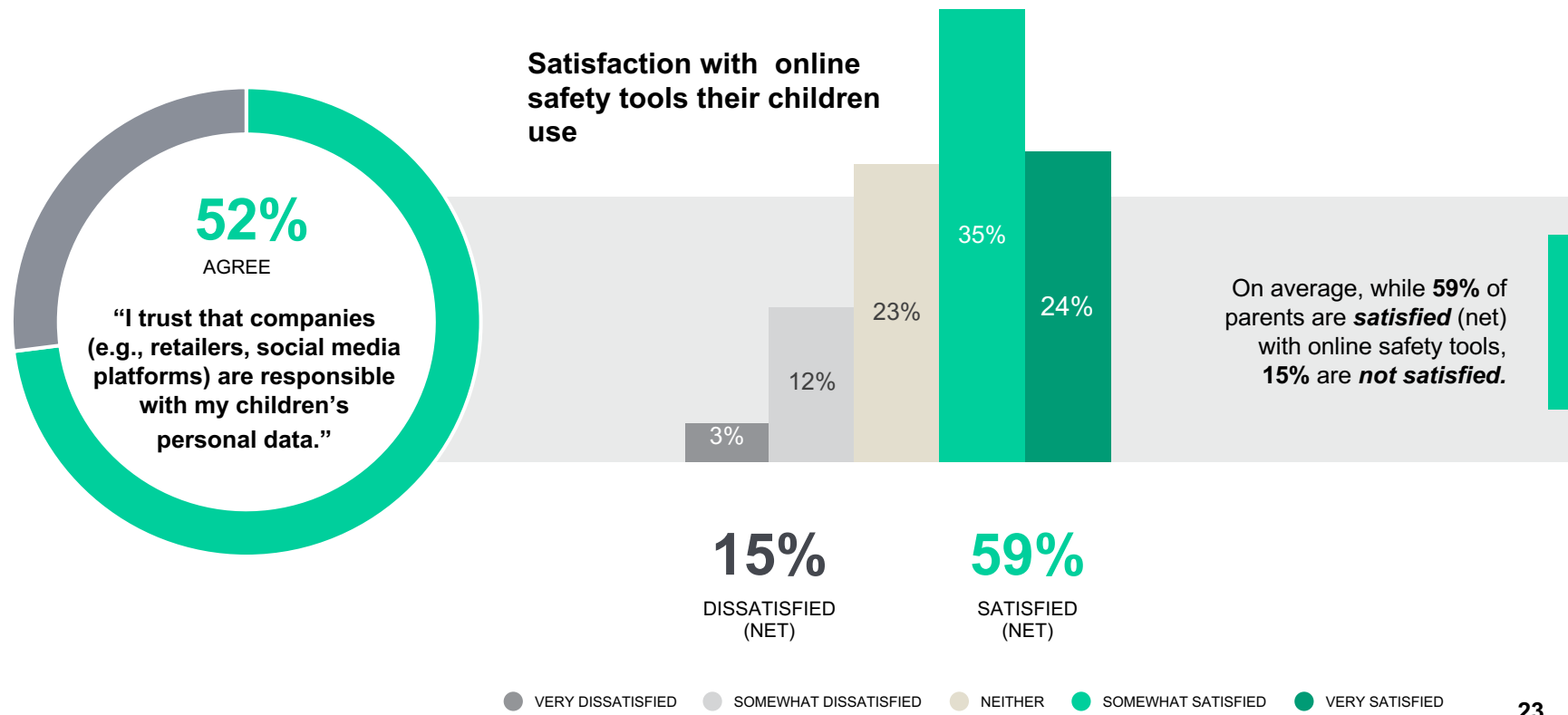
91% AGREE
"Parents should have the primary responsibility to teach their children about online safety."



● STRONGLY AGREE ● SOMEWHAT AGREE
● SOMEWHAT/STRONGLY DISAGREE



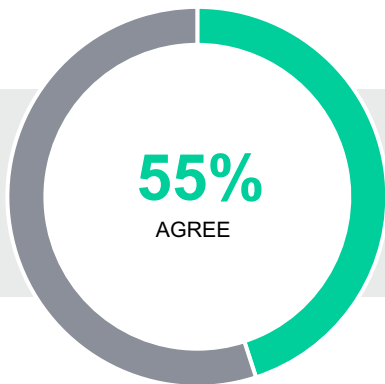
Parents are torn on whether social media companies can be trusted with data use; only about one-quarter are *very* satisfied with available tools



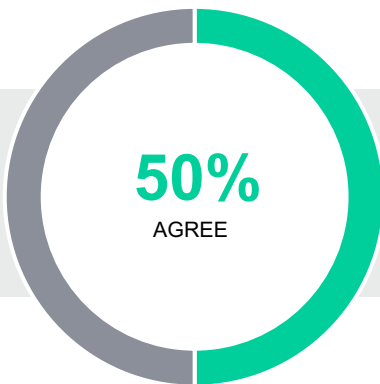


Parents need help; about half find the process of managing online safety overwhelming and need more information

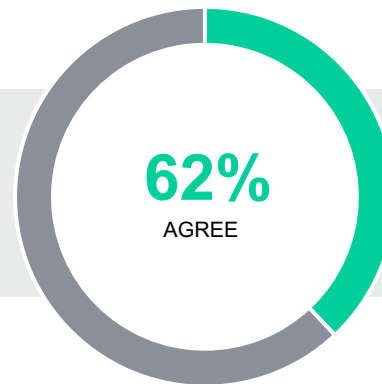
“Managing my children's personal online safety is overwhelming.”



“I don't feel that I have access to the information that I need to manage my children's personal online safety.”



“I can't keep up with all the changes happening online.”





IN CONCLUSION ...

As we've noted, this study sought to explore in detail the attitudes, beliefs, and behaviors of Gen Z regarding their use of technology, social media and use of online safety tools.

Overall, the research conveyed a relationship between Gen Z and technology that is positive though complicated.

- ✓ *Some disconnect appears between what Gen Z feel is happening in the “bigger picture” of the digital world versus what’s happening their own experience.*
- ✓ *Encouraging Gen Z to protect themselves online present some unique challenges, but there is certainly interest and aptitude to make the online world a better and safer place.*
- ✓ *Interestingly, social dynamics among Gen Z play a key role in the use of online safety tools.*
- ✓ *While there is an acknowledge level of satisfaction with what the social media platforms are doing to make users feel safe, but there is still room for improvement.*





Thank You!