

8. STRENGTHENING TRUST

8.5 | Online social networks

Online social networks and media have become an integral part of the daily life of billions of Internet users. Such platforms, particularly popular with the younger generation, enable individuals to interact with each other through a range of “free” online services. They also enable access to news and to information on a range of goods and services available online while generating advertising revenue for the social networks themselves and incremental revenue for businesses through sales driven by online advertising and influencing consumer purchasing behaviour.

The provision of personal information is a starting point for individuals’ interaction on social media. In 2015, 30% of Internet users in the EU28 did not provide personal information to online communities due to security concerns with notable cross-country differences. This ratio was above 40% in most Northern European countries but less than 10% in the Czech Republic, Lithuania and Turkey. In a majority of countries included in the sample, the percentage of individuals with such concerns remained stable between 2010 and 2015, but doubled in others such as Estonia and Greece.

Individuals do not always have control over the personal information they are requested to provide on social media, including its use and re-use by third parties. This can raise concerns over a perceived lack of control and over monitoring of online activities that could lead to online profiling and targeted advertising. In 2016, only 26% of individuals in the EU28 reported being comfortable with social networks’ use of information about their own online activities to tailor advertisements. Individuals in Denmark (41%) were most likely to be comfortable with this practice, while those in Latvia (14%) and the Czech Republic (13%) were least comfortable.

Online platforms and other Internet services provide individuals with new ways to connect, debate and gather information. However, the spread of news designed to intentionally mislead readers has become an increasing issue that can affect people’s understanding of reality and the functioning of democracies (European Commission, 2018). In 2018, the level of trust in online social networks and messaging apps was generally similar to that in video-hosting websites and podcasts.

Across the EU28, only 26% of respondents reported trusting the news and information they accessed through online social networks and messaging apps, with the level of trust ranging from 41% in Portugal to 17% in Austria and Germany. Online social networks and messaging apps were one of the two least-trusted sources of news and information (along with video-hosting websites and podcasts) in most of the countries included in the sample.

DID YOU KNOW?

In 2015, 30% of Internet users in the EU28 did not provide personal information to online communities due to security concerns.

Definitions

Online social media refers to forms of electronic communication (e.g. websites for social networking and microblogging) through which users create online communities to share information, ideas, personal messages and other content (e.g. videos).

Personal information refers to information that the user considers private and would not necessarily disclose to the public, such as personal, contact and payment details or other individual information.

Online advertising is a marketing strategy that involves the use of the Internet as a medium to obtain website traffic and target consumers with marketing messages.

Measurability

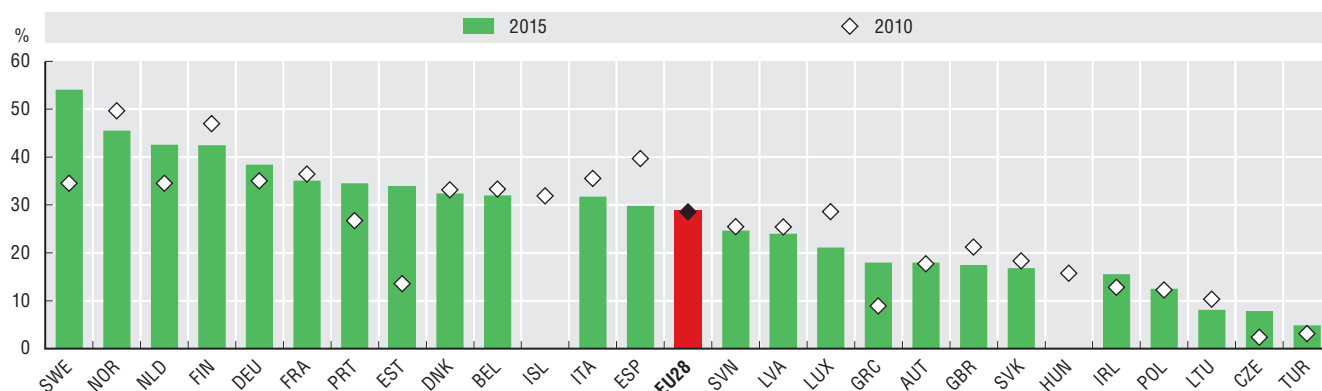
The special module on “Internet Security” of the 2015 European Community Survey on ICT Usage in Households and by Individuals provides comparable data on security concerns preventing individuals doing a range of online activities: ordering or buying goods or services for private use, carrying out banking activities (e.g. account management), providing personal information to online communities for social and professional networking, communicating with public services or administrations, downloading software, music, video files, games or other data files and using the Internet with a mobile device (e.g. laptop) via wireless connection from places other than home.

Eurobarometers are thematic public opinion surveys conducted at the request of the European Commission that obtain relatively rapid results by focusing on a specific target group. Different social and demographic groups are interviewed via telephone in their mother tongue. The Flash Eurobarometer survey on fake news and disinformation online (European Commission, 2018) was carried out in the EU28 countries in February 2018 and covered a sample of 26 576 individuals aged 15 years and above. The Special Eurobarometer survey on online platforms (European Commission, 2016) was carried out in the EU28 countries in April 2016 and covered a sample of 27 969 individuals aged 15 years and above.

As is the case for all public opinion surveys, interpretation of the results is subject to caution. As the samples used are relatively small (about 1 000 respondents in each country), marginal differences observed across countries might be the result of sampling errors or differences in respondents’ understanding of the questions and may not necessarily represent differences in the underlying population.

Individuals who did not provide personal information to online communities due to security concerns, 2015

As a percentage of Internet users

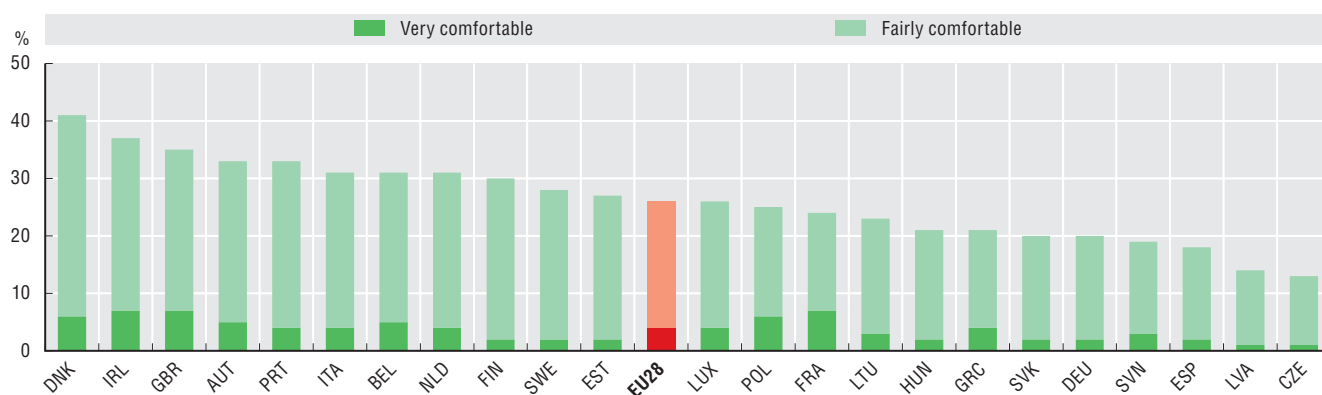


Source: OECD, based on Eurostat, Digital Economy and Society Statistics, Comprehensive Database, September 2018. See chapter notes.

StatLink <https://doi.org/10.1787/888933931352>

Attitudes towards online advertising on social media, 2016

Percentage of respondents, "To what extent are you comfortable or not with the fact that online social networks use information about your online activity and personal data to tailor advertisements or content to what interests you?"

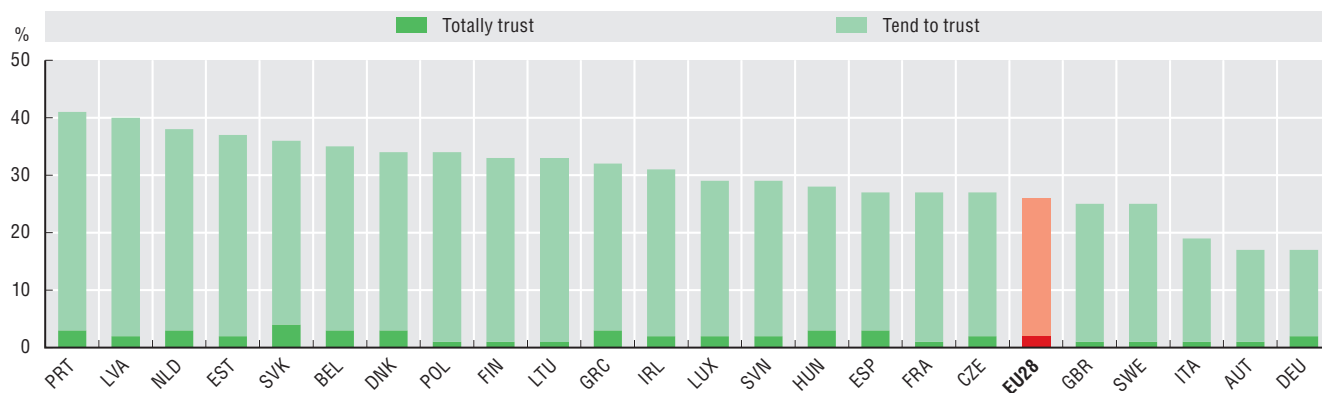


Source: European Commission (2016). See chapter notes.

StatLink <https://doi.org/10.1787/888933931371>

Trust in information accessed on social networks and messaging applications, 2018

Percentage of respondents, "How much do you trust or not the news and information you access through online social networks and messaging apps?"



Source: European Commission (2018). See chapter notes.

StatLink <https://doi.org/10.1787/888933931390>



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