



Supporting a safe and secure world for adolescents

Building consumer trust in changing technology

BSI report to mark the ISO COPOLCO plenary 2025

May 2025

Foreword



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Consumer protection is at the heart of BSI's work. By partnering across society to support high standards of safety, quality and sustainability of products and services, our focus is on protecting consumers from harm, improving their experiences and building trust. Increasingly, this includes building trust in digital products and services and ensuring safety and privacy for consumers online and in the digital sphere.

Digital Trust relates to all groups across society, from vulnerable adults to the youngest children. It is well-documented that today's teenagers are growing up in a deeply digital world, with social media, online gaming and the burgeoning power of artificial intelligence all coalescing to shape their lives. That's why, to mark our hosting of the ISO Consumer Policy Committee (ISO COPOLCO) global plenary 2025, we have chosen to explore their experiences using the internet, social media, smartphones and other technology, to understand how best BSI and other partners can facilitate a safe, secure and supportive space for all.

Our findings show that three quarters of young people say Covid-19 drove them to spend more time online, and that this cohort live, study and socialize in this space. They are optimistic about their ability to protect themselves, with 61% saying they are extremely or very confident of how to check and change online privacy settings. Yet they are also engaging in risky behaviours such as location sharing. Tellingly, four in five (79%) say technology companies should

be required by law to build robust privacy safeguards into technology and platforms used by children and teenagers, such as age verification or identity checks.

The research findings show the importance of protecting consumers' privacy and data in Information and Communications Technology (ICT) products, while still enabling and encouraging innovation. BSI is proud to hold the Secretariat for the new JTC1/SC44 Privacy by Design for consumer products and services committee. We believe we have a vital role to play in bridging the advancement of consumer-facing technology in tandem with stepping up the industry's care and diligence in embedding the core tenets of privacy into the product and software lifecycle. In essence, this means privacy by design, and having organizations factor privacy into the product lifecycle from the outset across all consumer products and services.

The technology we have at our fingertips today – let alone that which is yet to emerge – presents enormous opportunity for society. It stands to transform healthcare, education, transport and every aspect of life. Yet it can only be a force for good if it is underpinned by trust that our privacy, security and safety will not be compromised in the process. Building consumer trust in our digital future is vital and all of us, from consumers to the companies creating these innovative tools and technologies, have a stake in achieving this.

In focus - research findings

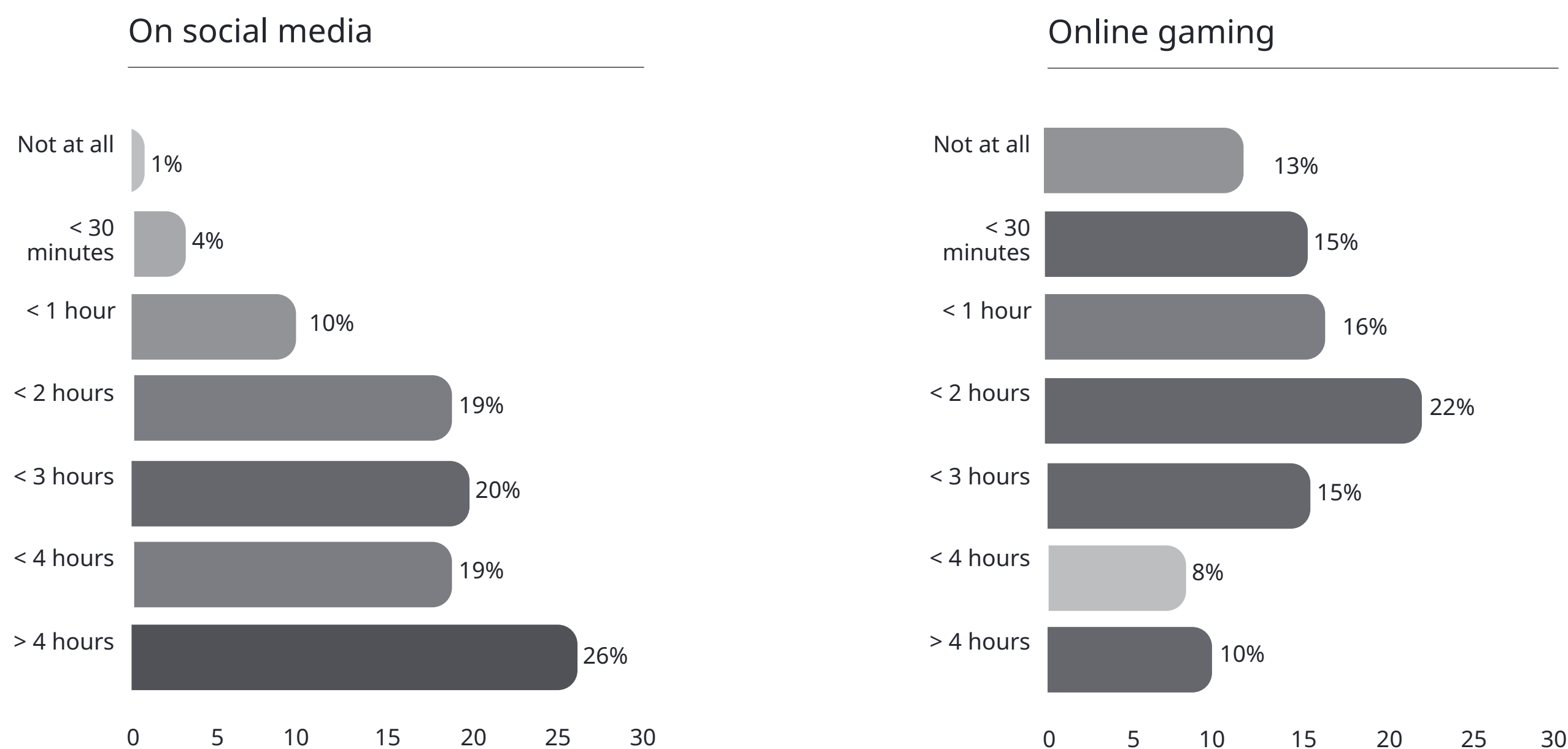
01

They live in an online world

Young people spend a significant proportion of time online – **45%** say they spend three hours or more a day on social media, while **34%** say they spend more than two hours a day gaming. In contrast, nearly half (**49%**) say they spend less than two hours a day on hobbies such as sport or dancing, and **38%** spend less than two hours a day with friends and family, outside of school.

What's more, they have been living online throughout their adolescence. Two thirds (**66%**) say they were gaming before they were 13 and **43%** say the same of social media. While some of this would have occurred prior to the pandemic, three quarters told us they spent more time online because of Covid-19, which hit when this cohort were between 11 and 16 years old. And yet, tellingly, nearly half (**47%**) said they would rather be young in a world without the internet and **27%** would rather social media did not exist.

Figure 1: Hours per day spent doing the following activities



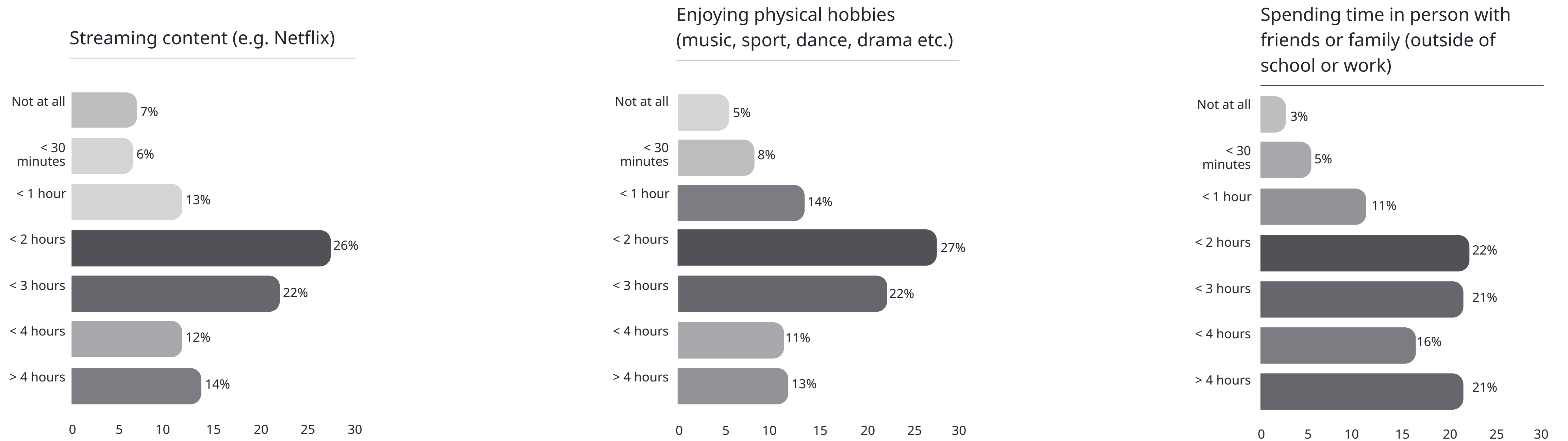


Figure 2: Would rather be young in a world without the internet

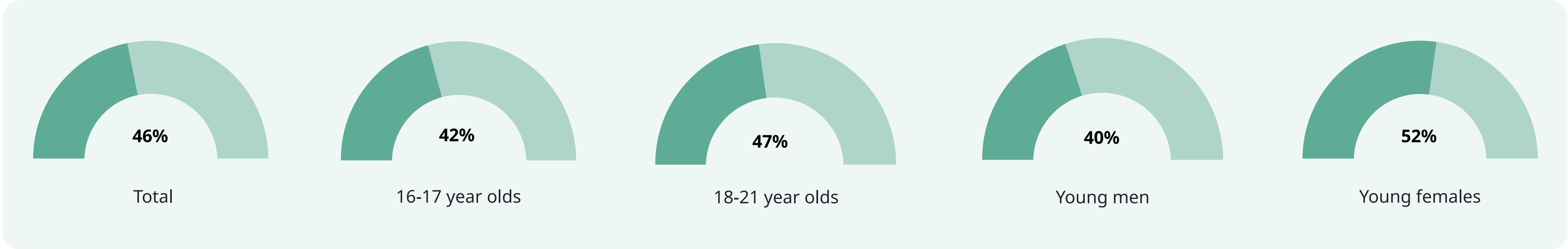
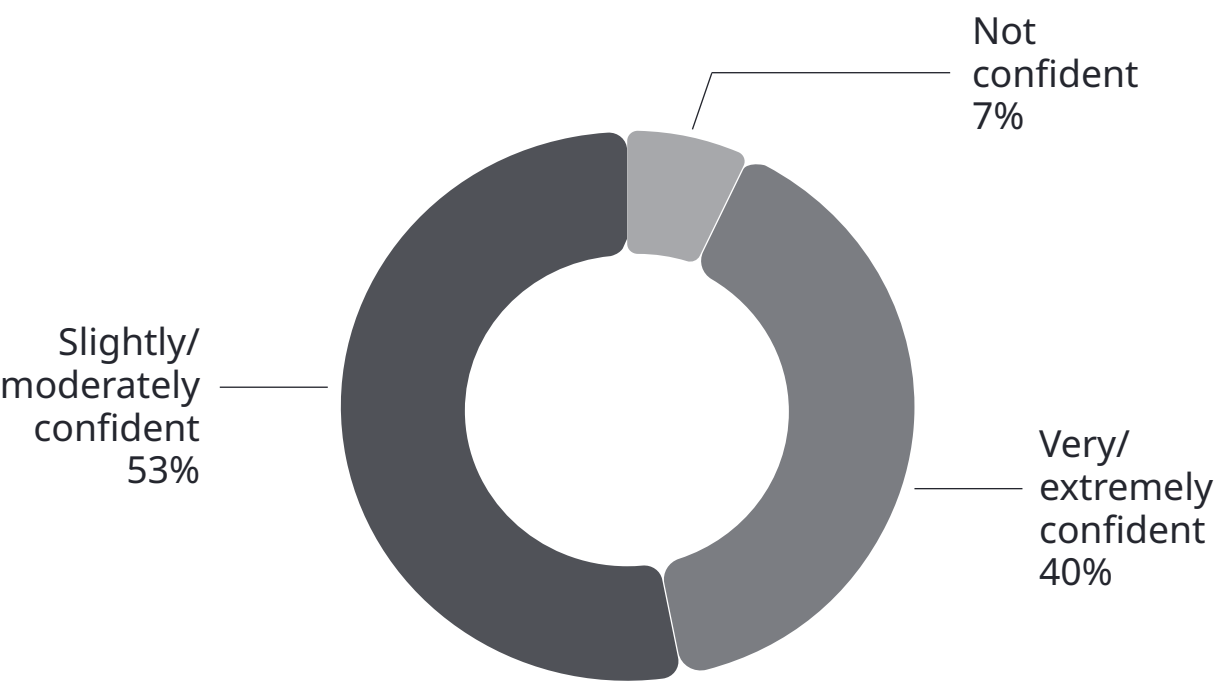
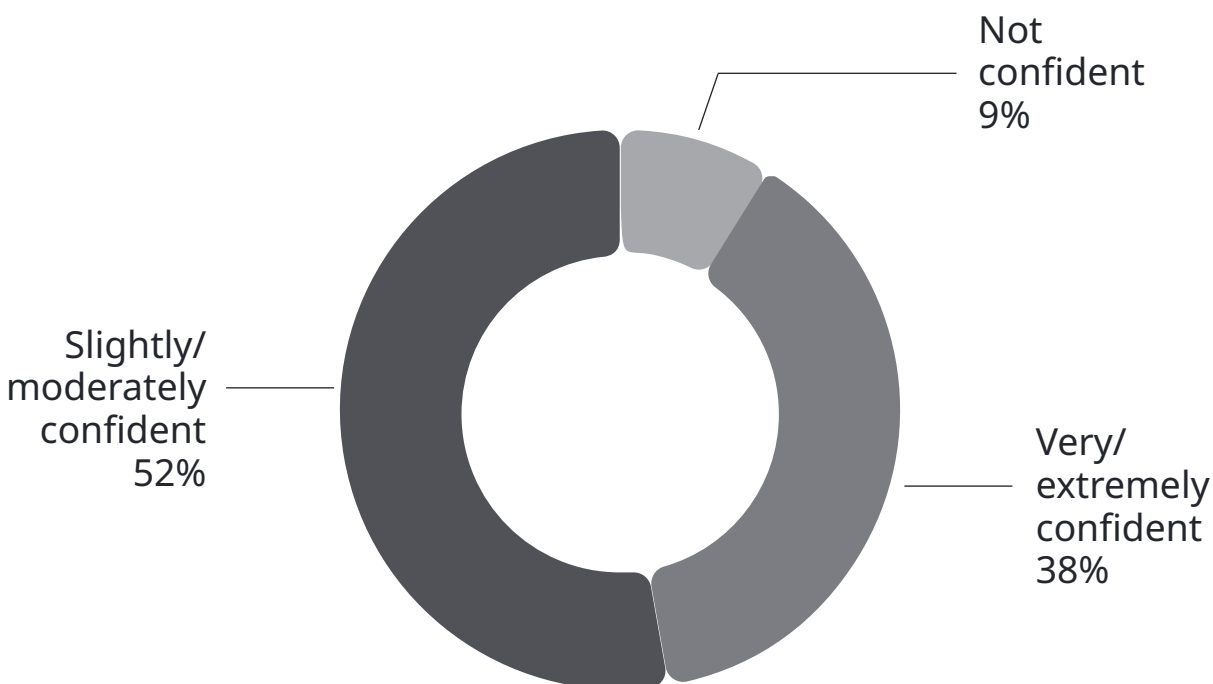


Figure 3: Awareness and understanding of online life

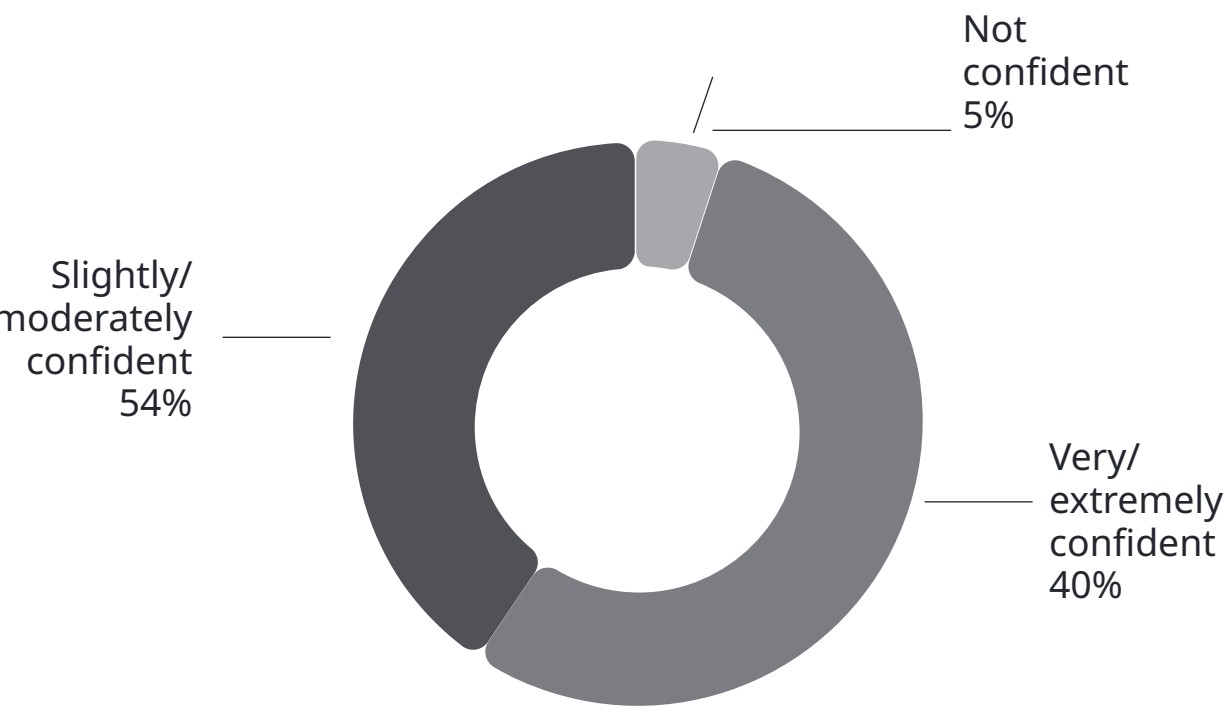
I can spot a fake account / catfish



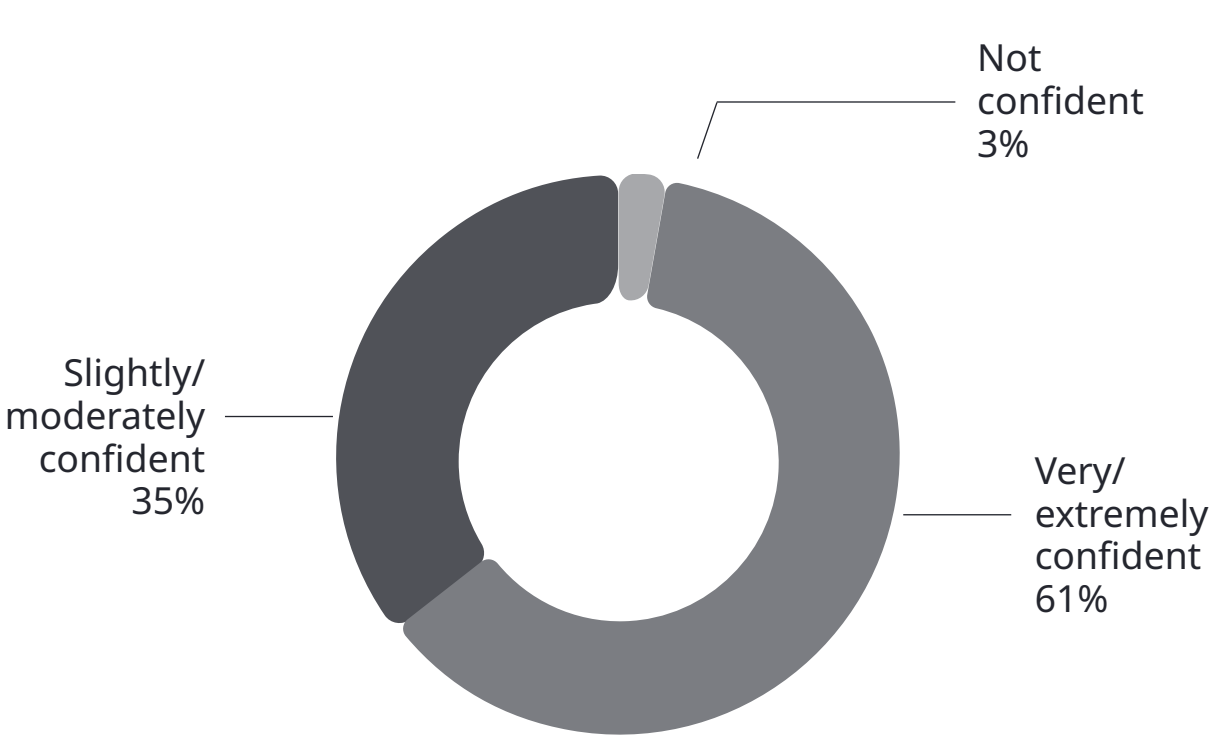
I understand how my personal data is used online



I know what an algorithm is and how it affects what I see online



I know how to check and change online privacy settings



02

High levels of confidence about online safety

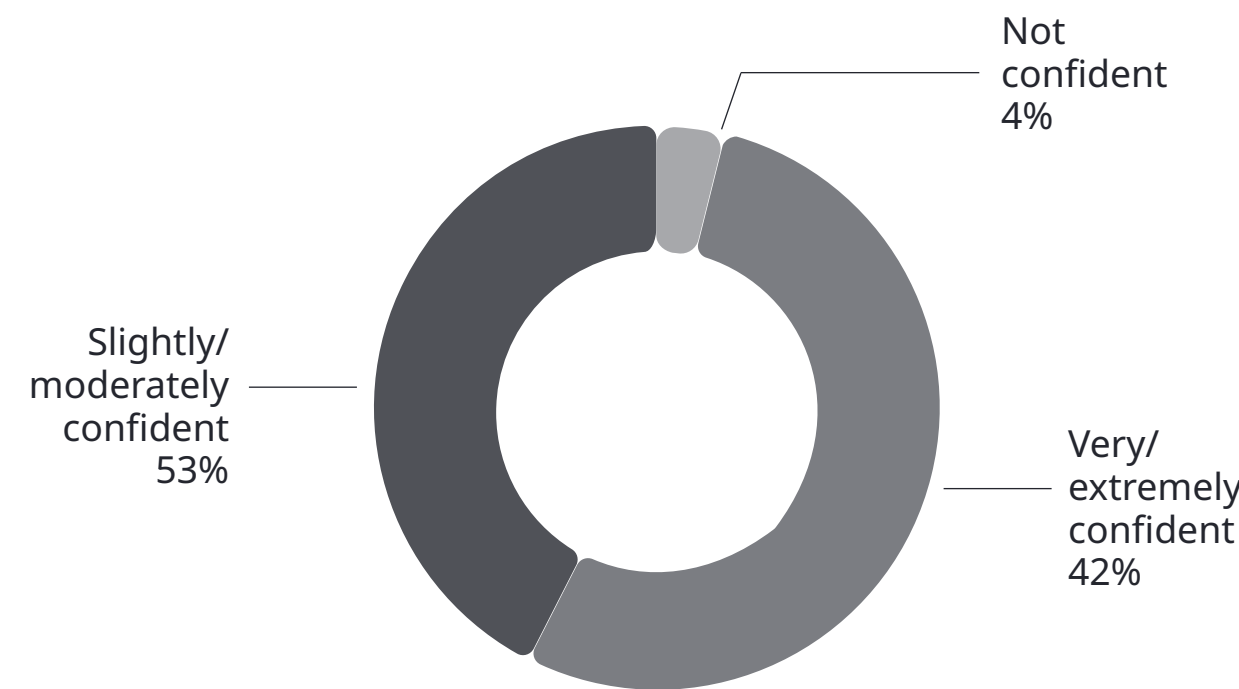
As online natives, adolescents appear largely confident about managing their digital lives, with six in ten (**61%**) saying they are extremely or very confident of how to check and change online privacy settings. Three quarters (**74%**) say they have checked their privacy settings on social media or gaming in the past six months.

They express an understanding of how technology works, with more than half (**53%**) confident they understand how their online behaviour influences what they are shown online, and **55%** confident they know what an algorithm is and how it affects what they see. **47%** show this confidence in how social media tracks personal data such as likes / dislikes, location, age and so forth. While this confidence is reassuring, there are limits; just a quarter (**26%**) are extremely confident they are safe online and know how to report it when they see something inappropriate.

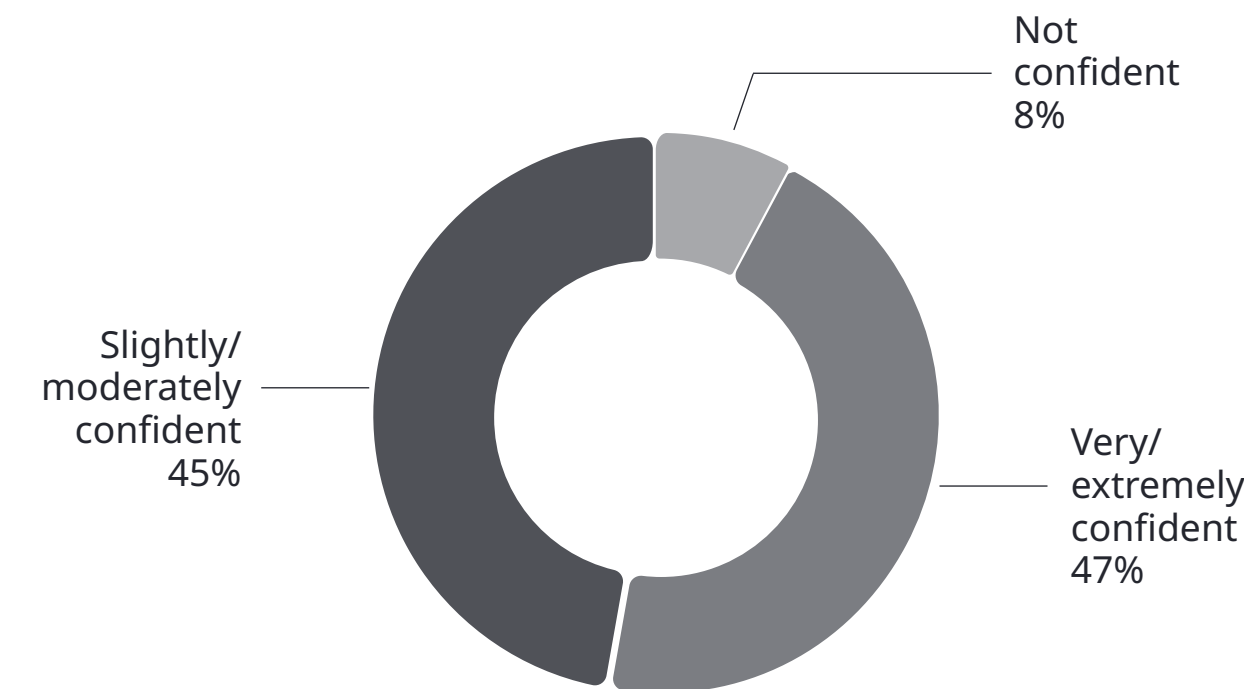


Figure 4: Attitudes towards safety and privacy

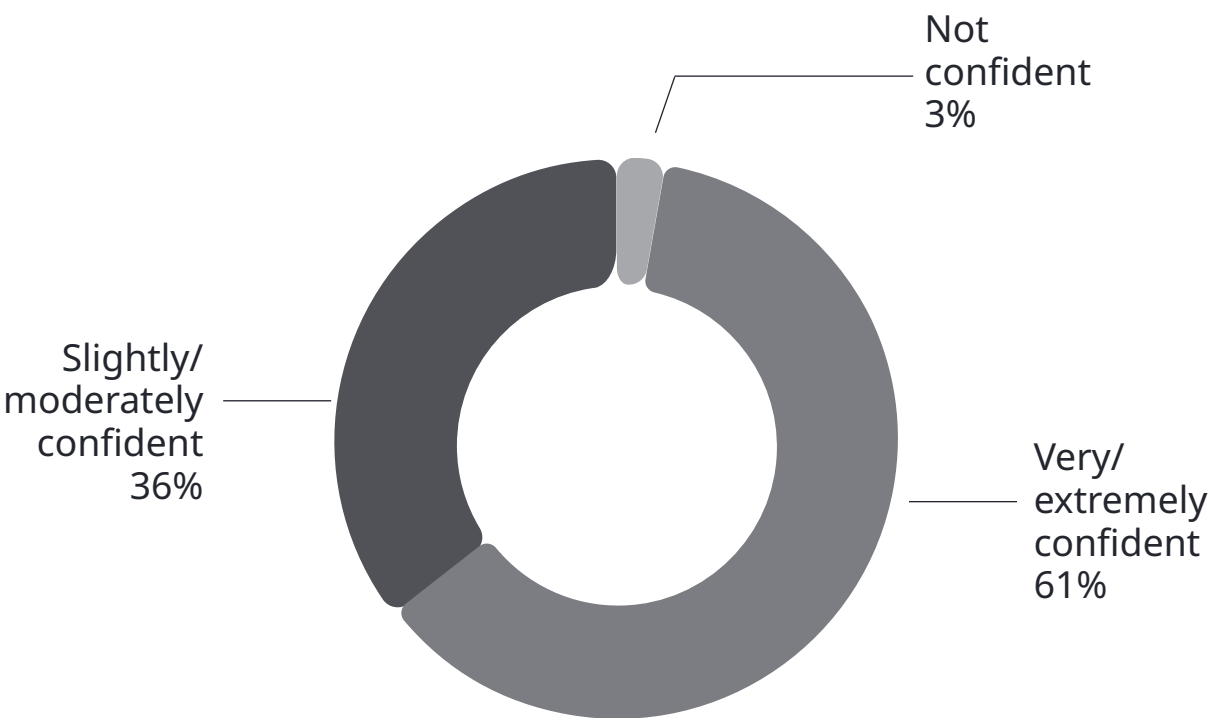
I understand how my online behaviour influences what I am shown online



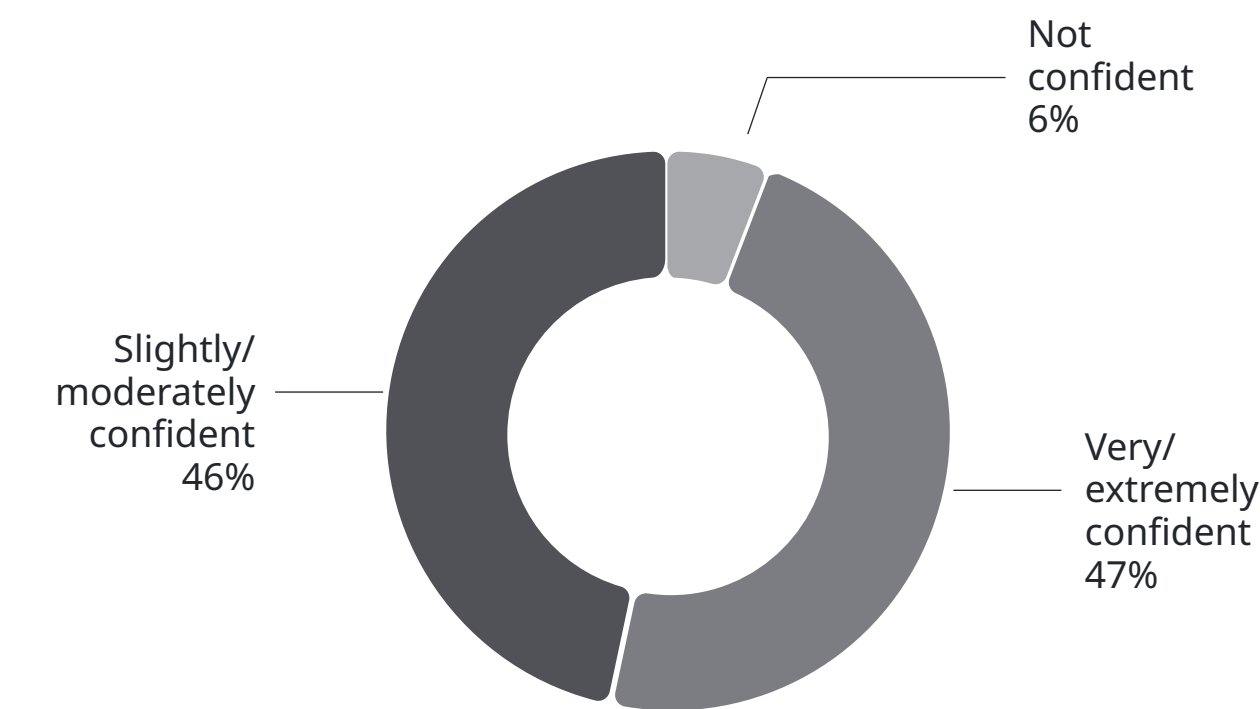
The people I am engaging with online are who they say they are



I am safe online and know how to report it when I see something inappropriate



I understand how social media tracks personal data such as likes / dislikes, my location, age, who I follow...etc.



03

They don't necessarily put in place guardrails to protect themselves

While young people are generally confident online, they are prone to risk taking and not necessarily putting in place key protections. In particular, they are comfortable sharing their location on apps such as SnapChat, with two thirds having done so (**67%**) and **29%** saying they have shared their location with someone they have never met. **27%** of those who have shared their location say they have subsequently received unwanted attention.

In a world without strong identity verification, more than two fifths (**42%**) admit to having pretended to be a different age online, and **27%** say they have pretended to be a different person online. **40%** have set up a fake or decoy account.

Figure 5: Online risk-taking

Shared your location with someone you've never met					
	Total	16-17	18-21	Male	Female
Yes	29%	29%	29%	31%	28%
No	68%	67%	68%	64%	70%

Pretended to be different person online					
	Total	16-17	18-21	Male	Female
Yes	26%	24%	27%	28%	25%
No	70%	71%	69%	67%	71%

Pretended to be a different age than I am online					
	Total	16-17	18-21	Male	Female
Yes	42%	42%	42%	43%	42%
No	54%	50%	54%	52%	55%

Set up a fake account / decoy account					
	Total	16-17	18-21	Male	Female
Yes	40%	38%	40%	36%	43%
No	56%	54%	56%	59%	54%



04

A desire for technology companies and policymakers to step up

Adolescents live online; they socialize there, learn there and build relationships there. Yet they remain vulnerable consumers in this space, and many of them acknowledge this. Over a quarter (**27%**) argue phones should be banned in schools – something many campaigners and politicians across the spectrum are calling for – and half back recently suggested ideas of a social media curfew where platforms are inaccessible after a certain time in the evening. A fifth (**22%**) say their lives would be better without access to online gaming.

They identify a role for policymakers and technology companies to step up and support privacy and safety by design. **79%** say technology companies should be required by law to build robust privacy safeguards into technology and platforms used by children and teenagers, such as age verification or identity checks. Half think there should be stricter age verification for online platforms and **32%** think there should be stricter age verification for use of smart assistants such as Alexa or Siri. And for an age group not known for asking for help, **48%** expressly say they want support on how to keep themselves safe online.

Figure 6: Would like stricter age verification for online platforms

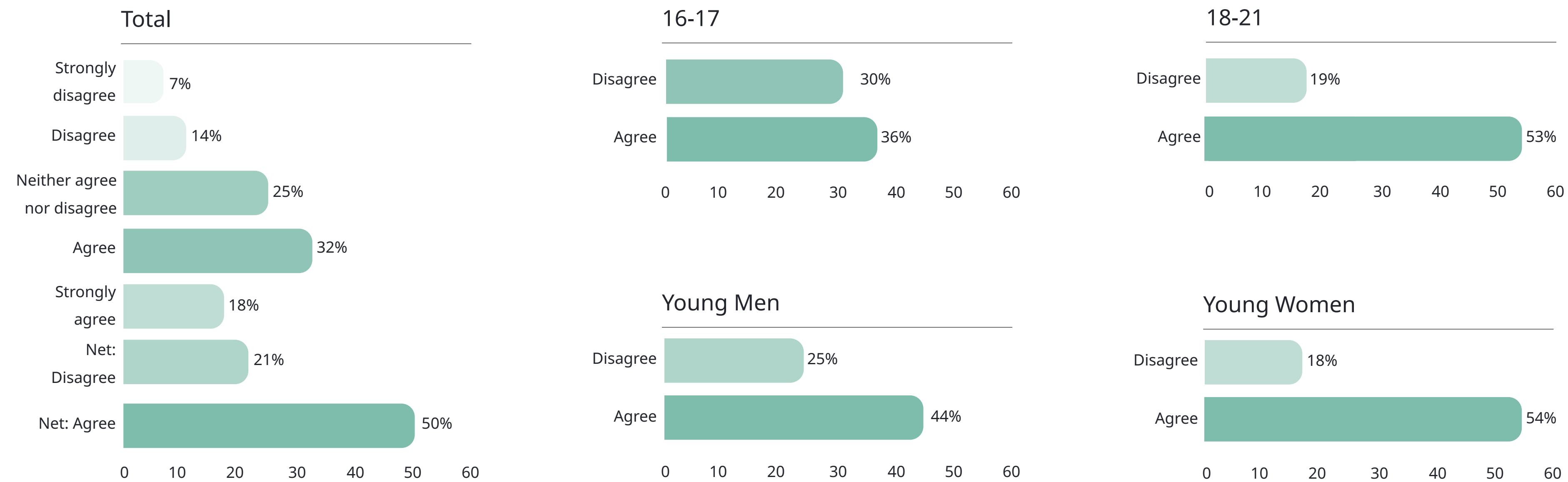


Figure 7: Would like stricter age verification for use of smart assistants such as Alexa or Siri

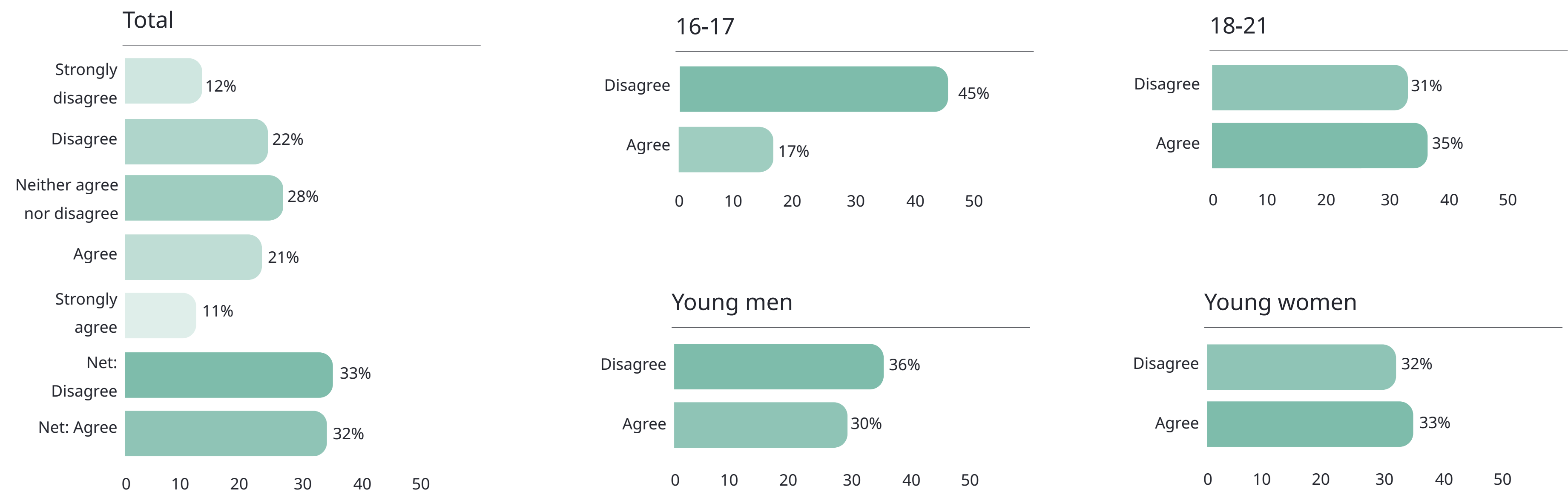
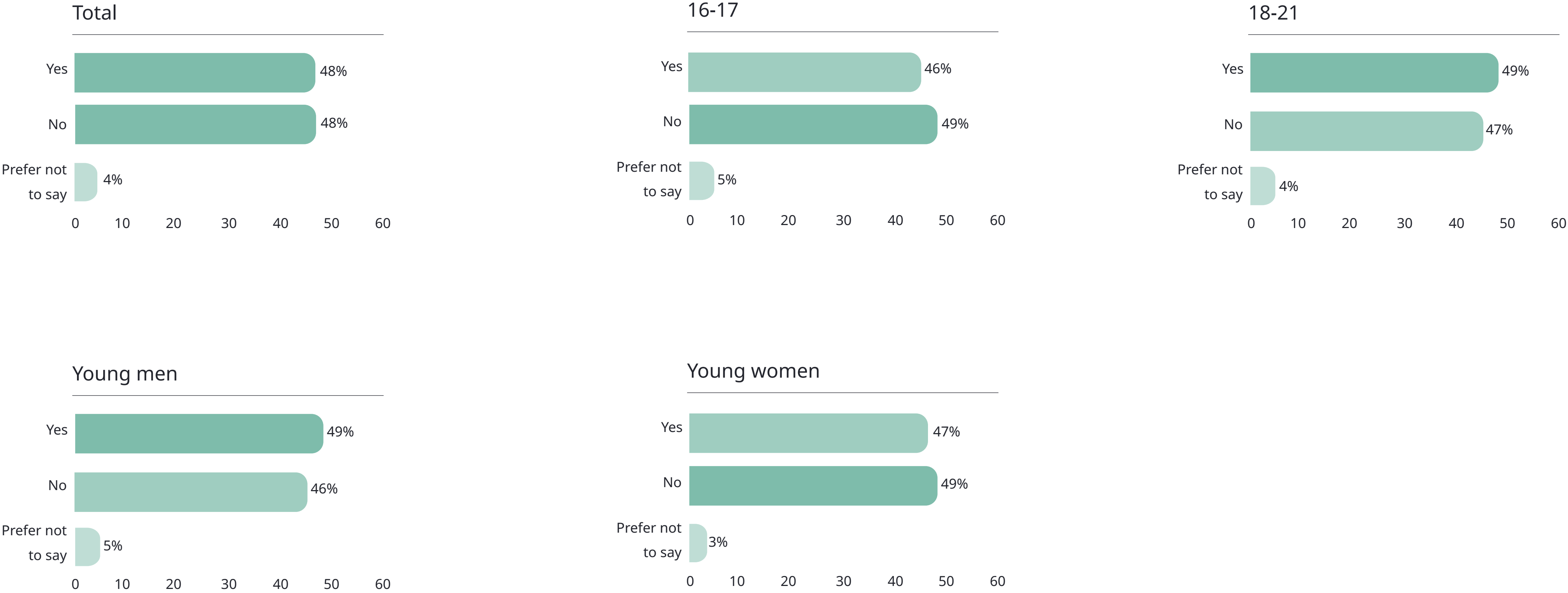


Figure 8: I would like support on how to keep myself safe online



About COPOLCO

ISO's Committee on Consumer Policy is a governance level Committee, reporting to the ISO Council. ISO COPOLCO has several functions that play their role in supporting the consumer stakeholder voice as part of ISO's 'all voices heard' objective.

BSI is proud to be hosting the Committee's plenary meeting in May 2025 in London, and marking the 40th Anniversary of the UN Guidelines for Consumer Protection, which form the basis of the UK Consumer Rights Act.

Get involved

Have a direct say in developing standards which places consumers at the heart of technology by joining the national mirror panel ICT/1/-/1 Privacy by Design. Apply through our Standards Makers Portal: **Standard Makers Application Form Survey**.

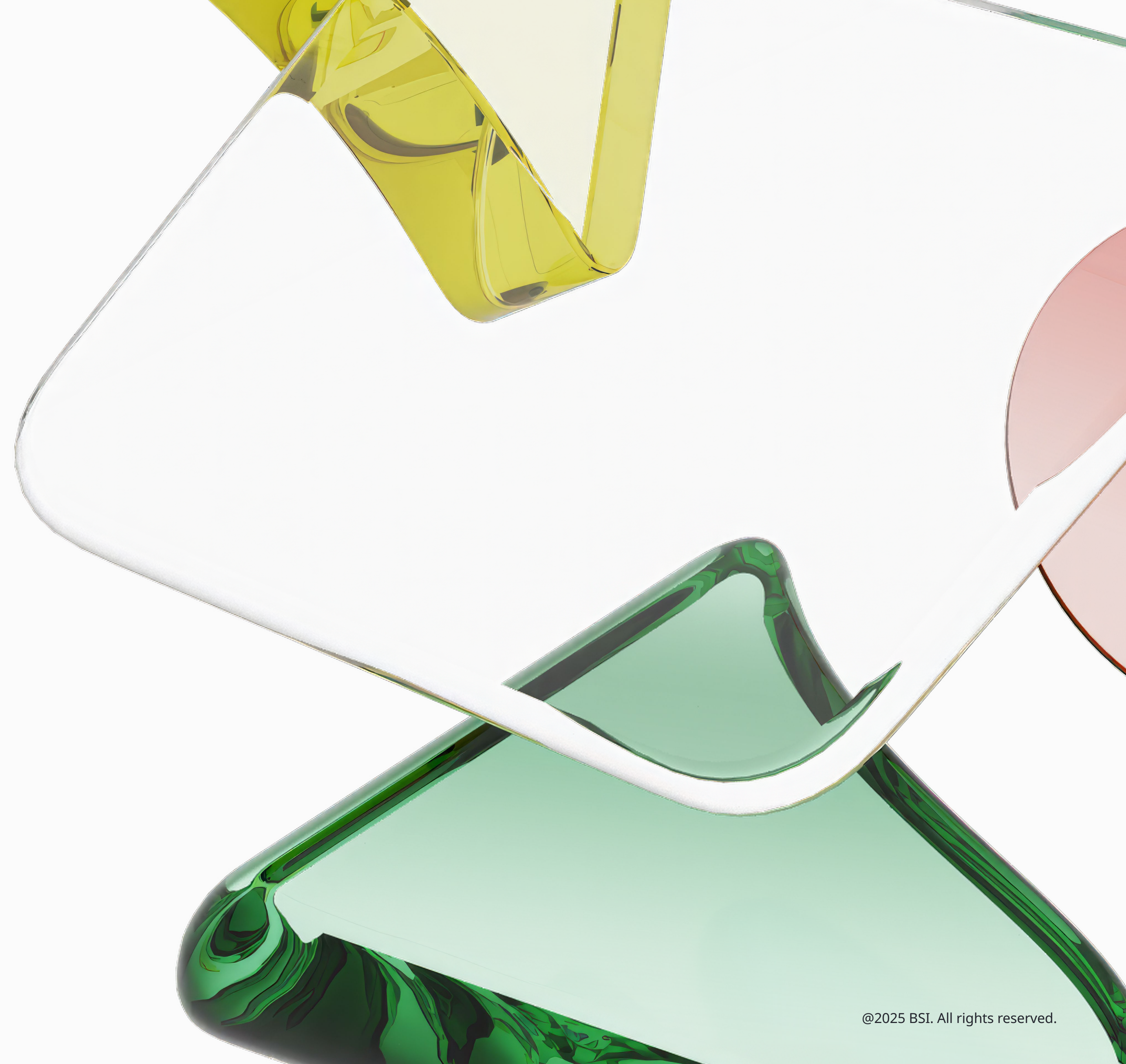
To find out more about consumers and standards, including how to get involved with the Consumer and Public Interest Network, please see **bsigroup.com/consumers**.

Get a head start at building your organization's processes and procedures in tackling privacy risks with **Consumer protection — Privacy by design for consumer goods and services (ISO 31700-1:2023)** and **Use Cases (ISO 31700-2:2023)**.





Your partner
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