

FROM SEARCH TO RESEARCH

How search marketers can keep up with Gen Z



GW.

 | Ambassco

Our full methodology

To understand the evolving search landscape, the Reddit Global Insights team partnered with global consumer research platform GWI, and AmbassCo, to conduct a coordinated research project tying together both qualitative survey studies and qualitative consumer video interviews.



Reddit partnered with GWI on a bespoke research study which surveyed 3,140 internet users in the UK, U.S., and Germany. Among this sample, there were 711 Gen Z respondents and 387 respondents who use Reddit to research brands and products.

For full information on GWI's methodology, please click [here](#).



This report uses research from additional GWI global studies, including the quarterly GWI Core research study, which surveys around 1 million internet users each year, and the monthly GWI Zeitgeist survey which covers different topics of interest. This report focused on results from those studies across 28 countries in North America and Europe. A full list can be found in the appendix.



Reddit partnered with AmbassCo on a custom project to conduct ethnographic research. AmbassCo curated a group of 30 Gen Z respondents to facilitate 2 panel discussions & 15 journal responses. All respondents use Reddit and all other leading internet/social platforms (for ex. Google, TikTok, Instagram, and more).

For full information on AmbassCo, please click [here](#).



TL;DR

The future of online search is undergoing a seismic shift, driven by the changing behaviors and expectations of Gen Z consumers. This tech-savvy generation, weary of traditional product research methods, is leading a charge towards curated recommendations and personalized shopping experiences. In a time where AI and influencers bring baggage in the form of distrust and skepticism in the digital channels users rely on most, shoppers are looking for real answers.

Reddit, filled with crowd-sourced advice and community-verified information, plays an increasingly important role in the way people discover, share, and consume trusted content. No matter where the purchase journey begins, all roads lead through Reddit, to get the validation and credible information people are after.



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Young shoppers don't seek out brands, brands come to them

Social algorithms have reversed the flow of content fundamentally changing Gen Z encounters with items they might buy. They're forgoing traditional search methods and discovering more brands on social media.

02

Influencer ad spend boosted consumer awareness but there is a lack of trust in these recommendations

While Gen Z might be discovering more brands through social, they have serious reservations about the quality of these recommendations when shopping.

03

Shoppers turn to traditional search for validation but face even more challenges

Consumers are increasingly dissatisfied with the search experience and seek alternatives beyond SEO. Consumers, especially Gen Z, don't feel like they're getting accurate product information; they don't want the labor of sifting through results.

04

Shoppers come to Reddit to fill the gap in their shopping journey

On Reddit, shoppers can get real, honest, human responses. Where community-driven dialogue and content created and debated provides consensus on the most trusted and quality recommendations.





**Young shoppers don't
seek out brands, brands
come to them**

Out with the old, in with the new:

Gen Z is shaping the future of search.

We took a closer look at this unique and authentic shift powered by a younger generation, steering us toward a future focused on upending traditional search methods to make way for new ones.

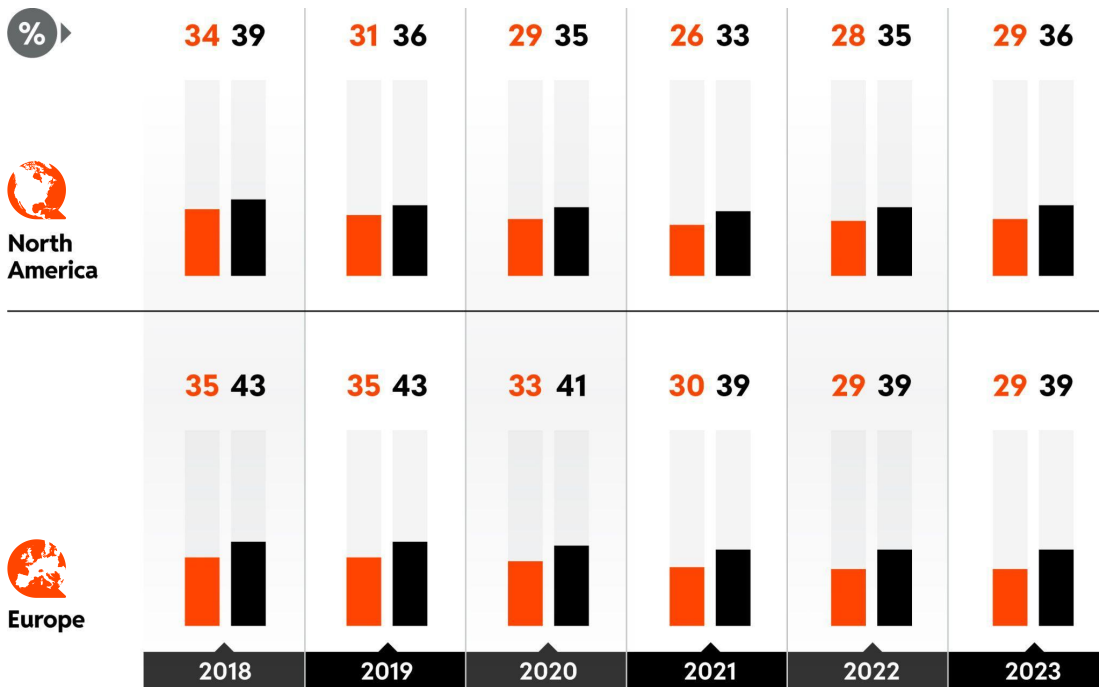


Online search is shifting particularly for Gen Z in North America and Europe

There's a undeniable decline in the use of search engines to discover new brands and products. While both regions show a decreases in traditional search, Europe is where we've seen the biggest declines since 2019.

We can attribute this to broader shifts regarding online shopping. We see steeper declines for Gen Z in Europe seeking out expert opinions and spending time looking for products. Equally, consumers in the UK/Germany show frustrations with search being less mobile-friendly, complex interfaces, and a preference for using fewer sources in the future compared to those in the US.

% of Gen Z in Europe/North America who say they use search engines for brand and product discovery



*Everyone else includes Millennials, Gen X, and Baby boomers.

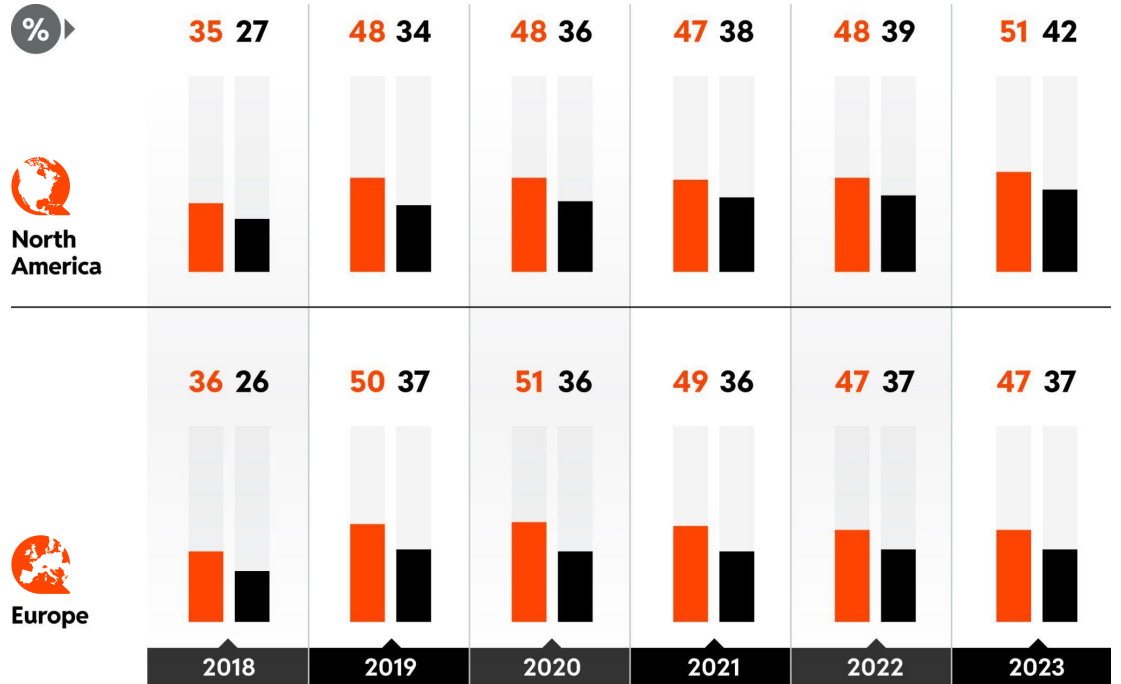
Social media reveals products to Gen Z before they even recognize a need, upending the traditional search funnel

There's an undeniable increase in social media use for brand and product discovery.

Driven by Gen Z, we've seen significant jumps in social media use as a key tool for learning about new brands and products.

% of Gen Z in Europe/North America who say they use social media for brand and product discovery

● Gen Z ● Everyone else



*Everyone else includes Millennials, Gen X, and Baby boomers.

Gen Z wants brands to make the first move

This tech-savvy generation, weary of traditional product research methods, and they're leading a charge toward curated recommendations tailored to them.

As a result, we're seeing product discovery via search engines decline, while discovery via social is up. Social media algorithms have shifted the direction of content delivery, changing how Gen Z encounters items they might buy. Gen Z want and expects brands and products to come to them.

% of Gen Z in Europe/North America who say they use discover brands/products via search engines and social media

-15%

Brand discovery via **search decreased** from 34% in 2018 to 29% in 2023.

Brand discovery via **social increased** from 36% in 2018 to 49% in 2023.

+36%

For Gen Z, style finds them

There's a generational shift toward algorithm-driven curation over traditional search, and clothes shopping is a prime example.

Gen Z is around twice as likely as older generations (Millennials, Gen X, Baby Boomers) to prefer being suggested clothing products rather than actively seeking them out. This generation is accustomed to discovering products that fit their preferences through personalized recommendations and realize that they might miss out on items they don't even know exist, making them reliant on algorithms and community suggestions to uncover new products.

2x



Gen Z are two times more likely to prefer being suggested clothing products vs. actively searching themselves than older generations.



**Influencer ad spend
boosted consumer awareness,
but it's not enough**

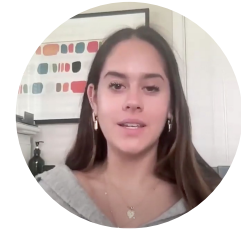
**We asked
Gen Z redditors...**

**What do you wish
could be different or
better in the future?**



“

I think that something that I wish like didn't exist was just like the **sponsored post** coming up like first in your search box, I find like, feel like it's really hard, especially with TikTok I'll search coming up and then, like Boom, it'll be like 8 videos of **sponsored post**. And you kind of have to like scroll down. And then, even once you scroll down, there's more like **secret sponsored posts**. And I wish there was a way to like filter out **sponsored comments or posts** or stuff like that.



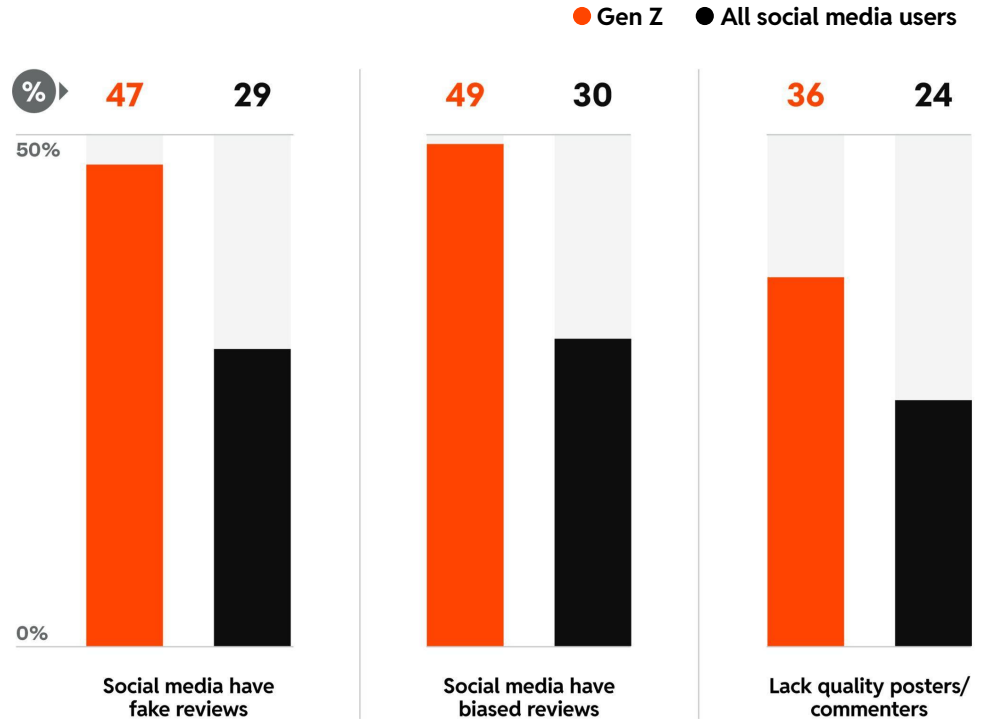
Ella, 19

▶ [Watch video here](#)

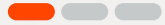


There is a **lack of trust** in recommendations found on social media platforms

% of social media users who say the following describes their experience searching for products/brands on social media platforms

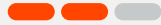


What this means for you



Recognize content saturation

Influencer and sponsored content are undermining trust, prompting a rethink on connecting with this discerning demographic on social platforms.



Think authentically

Skepticism of social content requires brands to focus on transparency and genuine engagement to preserve trust.



Foster community

Build on platforms that promote dialogue and support around shared interests related to the brand, encouraging a sense of belonging and loyalty.





Shoppers turn to traditional search for validation but face even more challenges

“

Our findings suggest that all search engines have significant problems with highly optimized (affiliate) content – more than is representative for the entire web according to a baseline retrieval system on the ClueWeb22. **Focusing on the product review genre, we find that only a small portion of product reviews on the web uses affiliate marketing, but the majority of all search results do.**



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LEIPZIG

Is Google Getting Worse?
*A Longitudinal Investigation
of SEO Spam in Search
Engines*

Janek Bevendorff, Matti
Wiegmann, Martin Potthast,
and Benno Stein.



Search has become a laborious process, increasingly polluted by paid-for results

With over 60% of internet users stressing the need for improved reliability of information, consumers want a more dependable yet simplified search experience which takes the hard work away from them. Ranked second is having to go through multiple pages of search results to find something relevant, with 48% of all internet users and 44% of Gen Z.

Consumer frustrations with the search experience clarify the cause of this concern with reliability – people are weary of too many ads and sponsored content, and irrelevant search results. Gen Z is particularly sensitive to inaccurate information and the lack of reviews, reflecting their desire for trustworthy research experiences.

% who say the following needs to be improved the most in product research

% Gen Z

% All internet users



Reliability of information



Having to look through multiple pages of search results to find something relevant



Having to go to multiple sources for information



Having to digest a lot of different information myself



Lack of personalized results

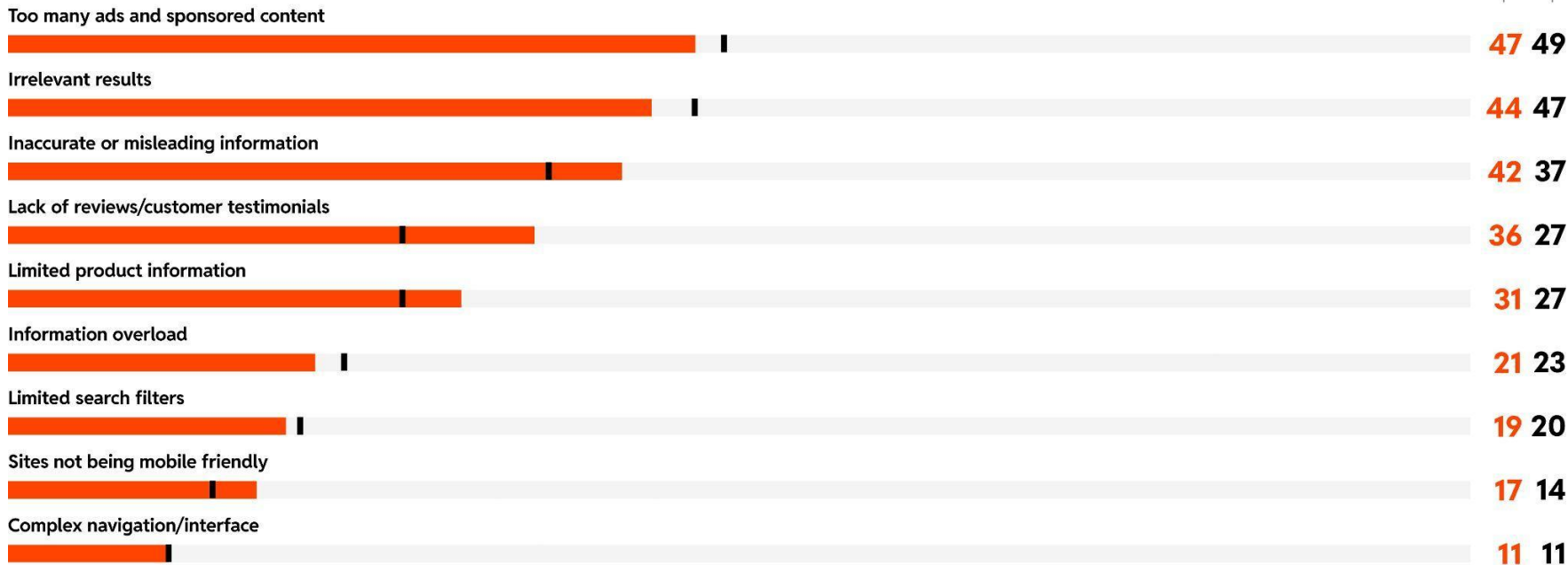


Not knowing where to start my research

Promotional content in the search experience undermines trust and exacerbates top frustrations

% of consumers who say the following are their top search frustrations

● Gen Z | I All internet users (%)



Gen Z insights
reveal further
depth and context
to how they
envision the future
search experience





We asked **Gen Z** social media users...

Could you
describe your **ideal**
search experience
of the future?



Gen Z craves quality, precision and simplicity in their searches

Quality

Quality content is in demand, and trust is a top expectation.

There is a clear demand for quality content, such as detailed product reviews and honest information, reflecting a discerning approach to the accuracy and integrity of search results.

“

Trusted reviews are a must.

Precision

Specificity and precision are highly sought after.

This group shows a preference for search engines that can provide highly specific and relevant results, indicating a need for better personalization and filtering capabilities.

“

Give precise and relevant results given my specific search criteria.

Simplicity

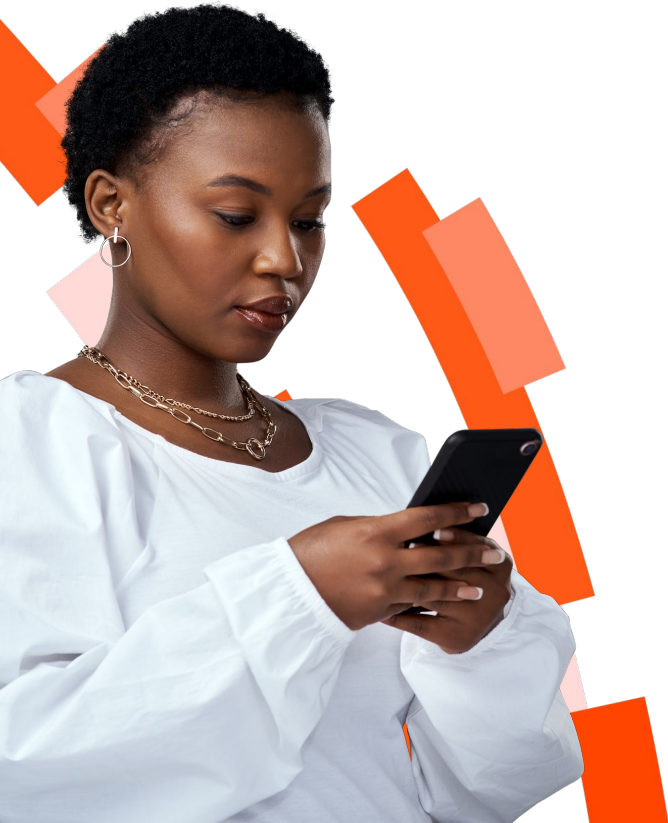
Simple, accessible, and easy to find.

There's a need for search experiences that are straightforward and less cluttered, with fewer ads and more accessible information.

“

I just want the information without a ton of ads in the way.

Along with relevance and customization



Relevance

Advanced features filter through the noise.

Gen Z expects advanced features that improve the search process. They want better filters that align with their familiarity and comfort with technology.

“

An ideal search experience would provide relevant results with customer reviews.

Customization

Customization is key.

These users express desires for improvements that make search more intuitive and user-friendly. This includes customizing how results are displayed and interacted with, suggesting a highly engaged and opinionated user base.

“

More filters to narrow down results to exactly what I am looking for.

Source: GWI & Reddit Custom Survey “Search Behaviors”; U.S., UK, DE Data, 2024.
Question: Could you describe how you would envision the ideal search experience of the future?

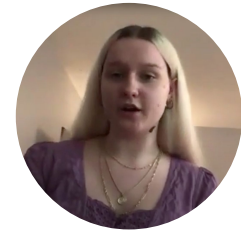
**We asked
Gen Z redditors...**

**When searching for
product advice, what
are you looking for?**



“

...When you end up searching for something on the Internet, you're filtering/searching through like 20 whole articles, blogs, whatever from random journalists who most likely might not have any experience in what you're looking for.... But Reddit, you can see like that it's **real people**. It's **real people** who **know the advice that they're giving you**.

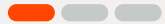


Piper, 19

▶ [Watch video here](#)



What this means for you



Think beyond key words & SEO

Get closer to consumers. Understand the types of questions they currently have or anticipate the ones they might have.



Get ahead of the curve

Cater to the expectations of Gen Z who value quick, authoritative answers over traditional, exhaustive search efforts.



Meet your audience on Reddit

There's an appetite to improve and enhance traditional search methods, alongside adding 'reddit' within searches to improve results.





**Shoppers come to
Reddit to fill the gap**



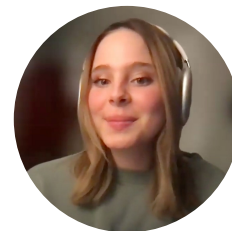
**We asked
Gen Z redditors...**

**In what ways do you
trust Reddit for advice?**



“

{Reddit} was really helpful for me to **connect with other tall girls**, because there are a lot of threads where girls will post links to their favorite work, pants or jeans, and they'll also post exactly where the pants hit them on the ankles, their inseam, their waistband measurements... **I know that I can click on that exact link and go and order a size medium and have it fit me perfectly, which is super super rare when online shopping.**



Steph, 20

▶ [Watch video here](#)

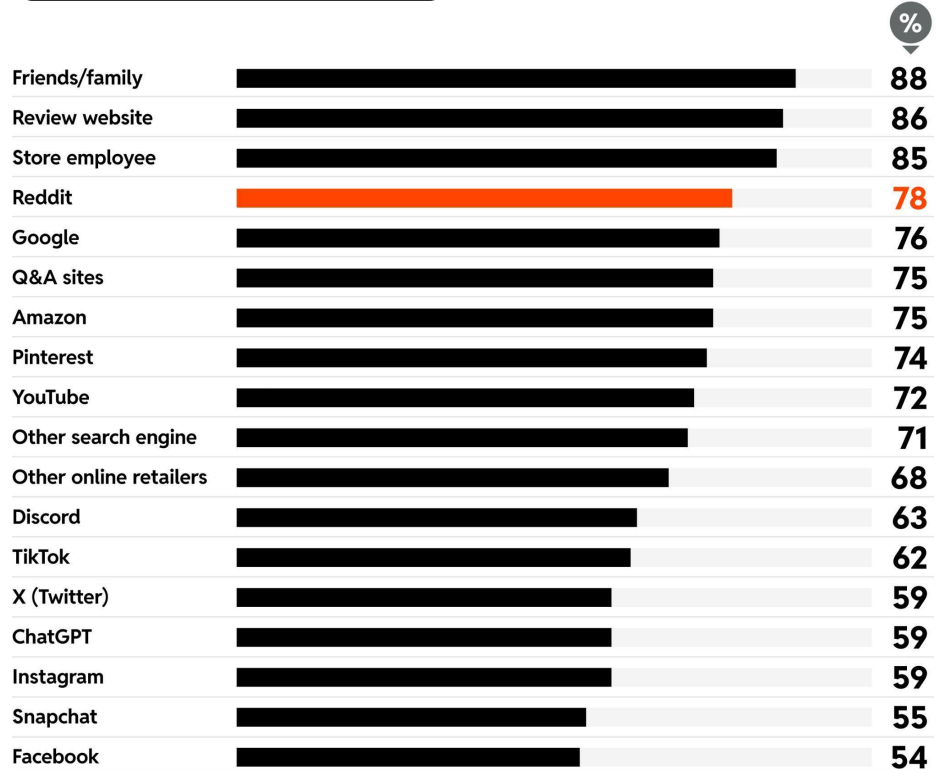


At the intersection of social and search, Reddit meets this new benchmark

Trust is not given liberally when it comes to product research tools. Traditional and community-driven sources which surface opinions from real, knowledgeable people, have much more credibility than other digital platforms where advertising or sponsored influencers form a central part of the user experience.

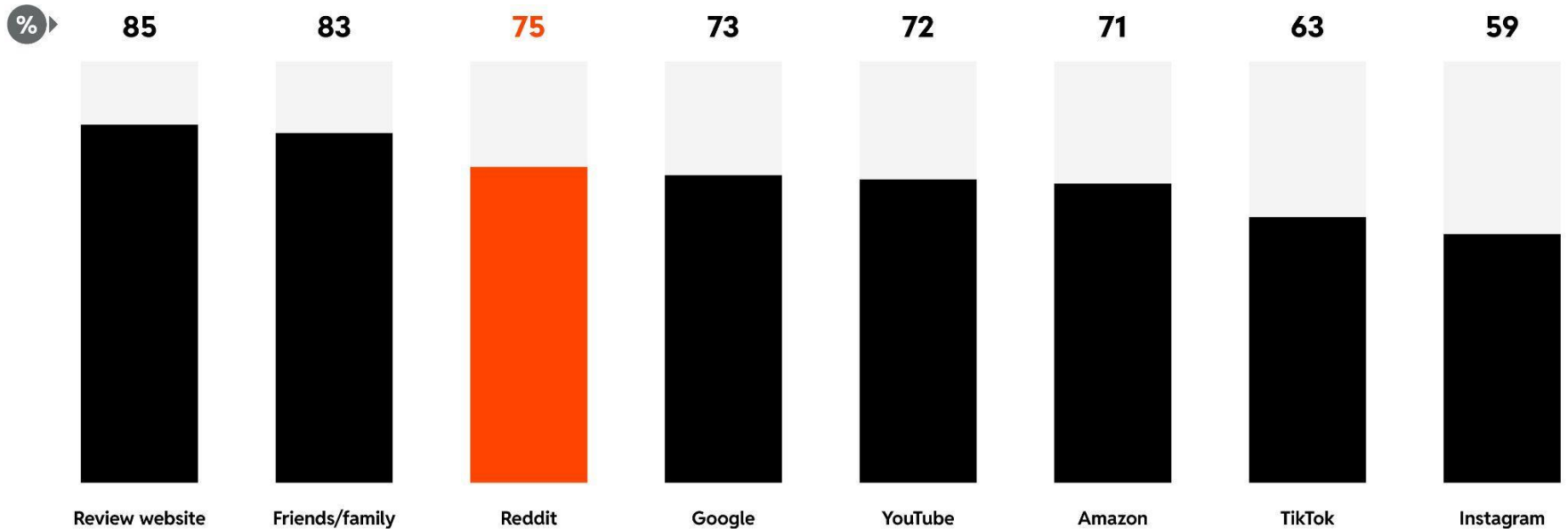
In our recent 2024 study of over 3,140 internet users in the UK, U.S., and Germany, Reddit is the fourth most trusted resource for product research (78%), only behind friends/family (88%) at #1, review websites (86%) at #2 and store Employees (83%) at #3, but above Google and all other social platforms.

% of those who use each platform for product research who say the platforms' results are trustworthy



Among Gen Z, Reddit becomes the third most trusted source

% of those who use each platform for product research who say the platforms' results are trustworthy



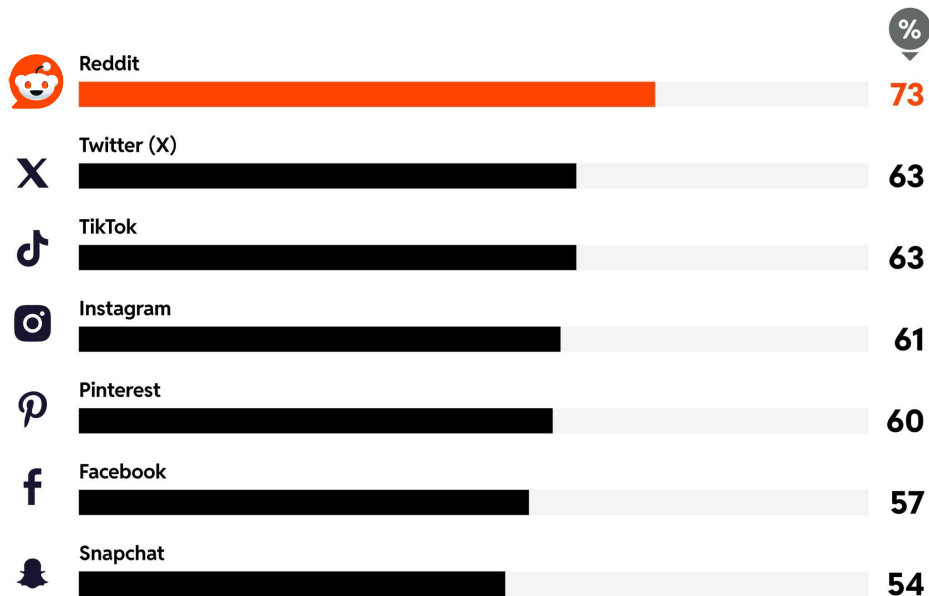
On **Reddit**, human curation makes finding the best answers convenient

Reddit is the top platform for helping its users make faster purchase decisions. Consumers are more likely to make faster vertical purchases based on Reddit users experiences, more than other social platforms across categories.

The expertise and detailed product reviews/ recommendations of Redditors speed up decision making. In a study of over 8,000 social media users in the market for a new product across 8 verticals*, they were asked how much they agreed with the statement “I can make a faster [vertical] purchase based on [x platform] users experiences.”

% of platform users that say

“ I can make a faster [vertical] purchase based on [x platform] users experiences.



Respondents were only asked about the platforms they use, and Redditors were most likely to Agree or Strongly Agree that this impacted their ability to choose a product or service.

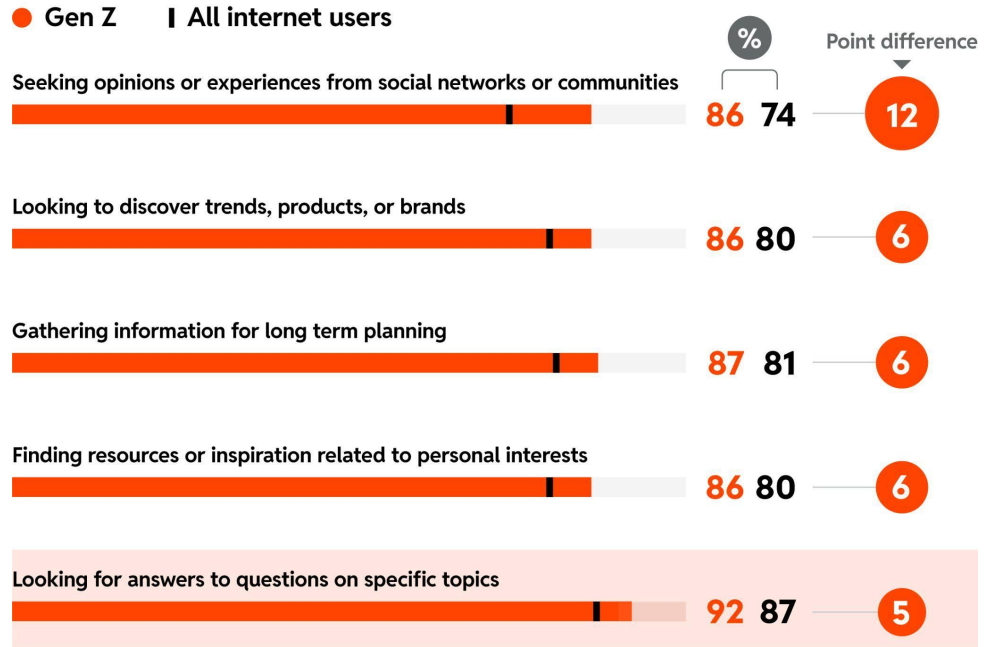


Gen Z aren't satisfied with generalized responses: they have specific questions, and they want specific answers

Accustomed to the personalized experiences from all aspects of their digital worlds, Gen Z expect the same from the search experience.

Gen Z stands out for using search platforms to seek opinions from social networks or communities, and for wanting answers to questions on specific topics.

% who use product search platforms for the following reasons
(ranked by point difference)

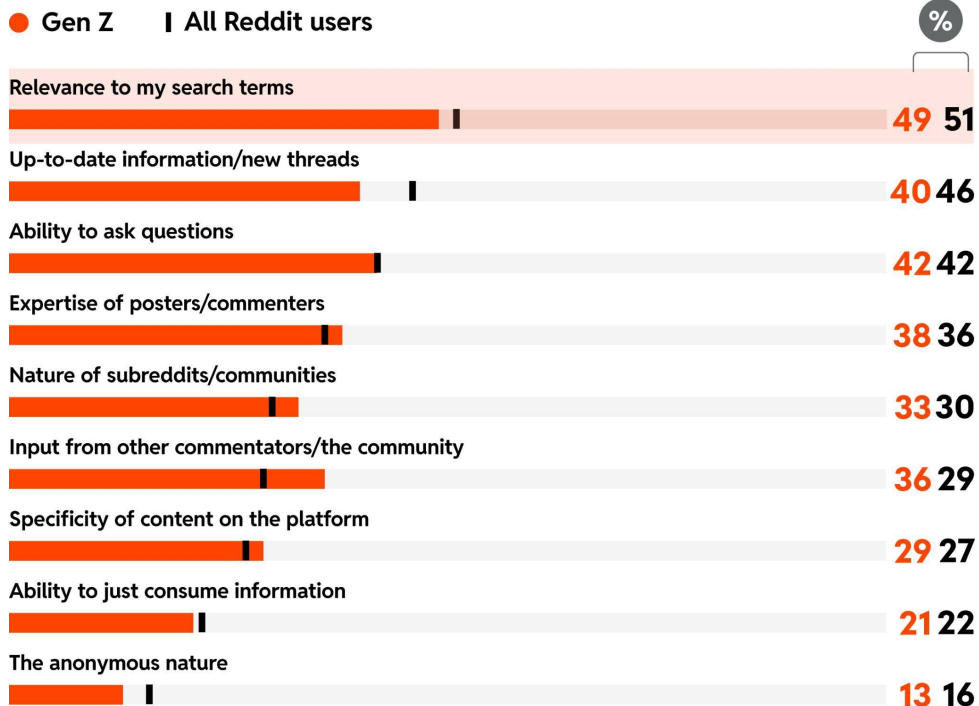


On Reddit, contextually relevant communities create clarity

51% of all redditors and 49% of Gen Z users who use Reddit for product research rank Reddit's relevance to their search terms as the most valuable aspect of Reddit, when searching for new products/brands. The ability to ask questions ranks third for 42% of all redditors and Gen Z.

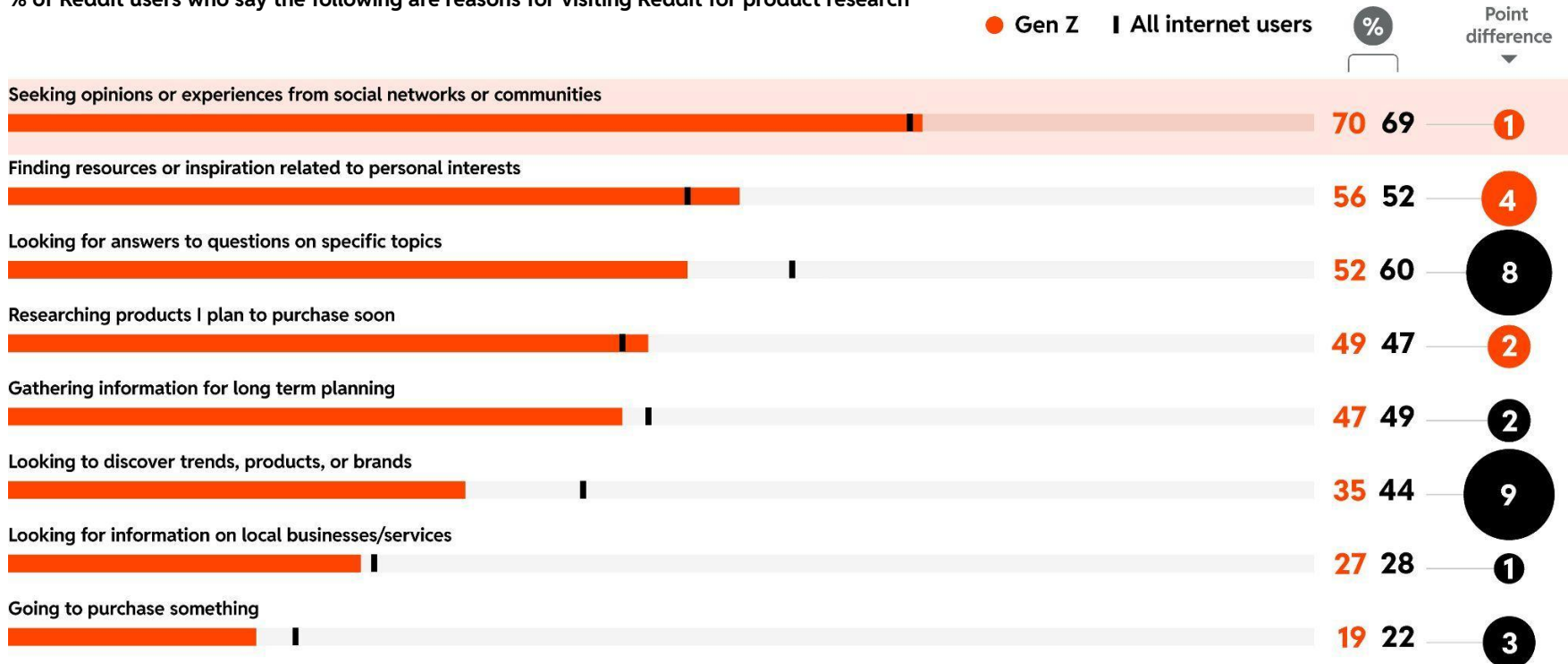
These reveal Reddit's distinctive appeal as a dynamic and responsive resource, where users can tap into the collective knowledge and opinions of diverse communities.

% of those who use Reddit for product research who rank these in the top 3 most important aspects



Content created and debated on **Reddit** creates consensus

% of Reddit users who say the following are reasons for visiting Reddit for product research



**We asked
Gen Z redditors...**

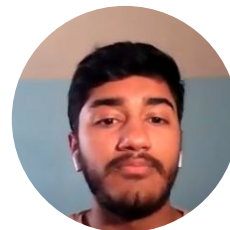
**Is there anything that
you feel like you lack in your
day-to-day life that you
turn to Reddit to fulfill?**



“

Another thing that I really like about Reddit is the **upvote** and **downvote** feature. I look at those quite a bit, just to see like what like the **general consensus is on a topic**... So we just got hardwood floors in our house... and we're trying to figure out like the best floor cleaner to use... without damaging them...

Reddit was the one that I ended up using to actually make my purchasing decision. And I just like looking at the upvotes and looking at similar questions that others had asked to finally make that decision.

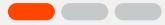


Ashvath, 21

▶ [Watch video here](#)

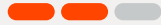


What this means for you



Leverage Reddit's trusted community

Use Reddit to gather authentic user opinions and reviews, promoting user-generated content to build credibility and trust.



Embrace transparency

Provide clear, genuine information without overly promotional content, ensuring users feel valued and informed.



Streamline and engage in discussions

Aggregate relevant information efficiently, use subreddits for specific queries, and actively participate in community discussions to foster a sense of belonging.





Summary

View redditors as your **megaphone** , not just your target

At the intersection of social media and Search, Reddit addresses the limitations that plague each channel faces independently. This unique capability is what makes Reddit so powerful. Below you will find best practices and recommendations for activating on Reddit.

Leverage communities users trust

Reddit Pro is Reddit's new free suite of organic business tools that simplifies its rich conversations into actionable insights needed to discover, join, and contribute.

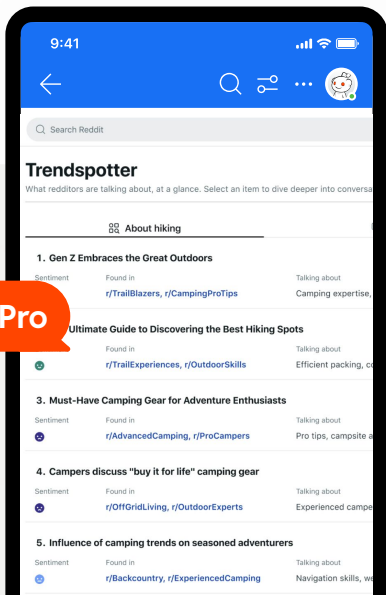
Embrace transparency

Connect with your community in a way you can't anywhere else through **Sponsored AMAs**. Here, brands can own the conversation and address fans' most pressing questions.

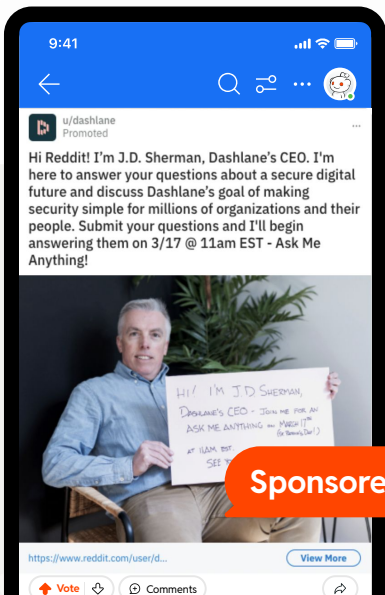
Streamline & engage in discussions

Bring your brand into the conversations that matter most with **Conversation Ads**. Be top of mind in the very conversations where people are discussing your brand.

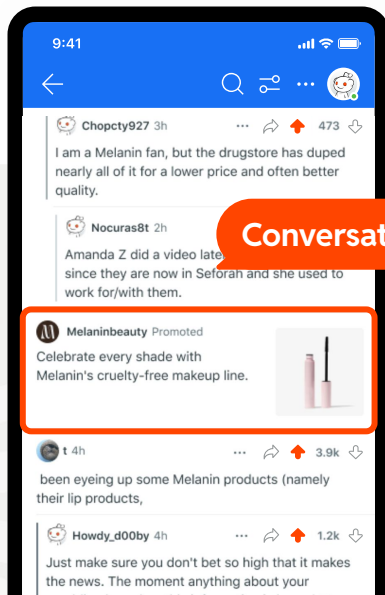
Reddit Pro



Sponsored AMAs



Conversation Ads





Thank You

Want to learn more? Rob.Gaige@Reddit.com

Appendix

Markets included in **GWI Core** and **Zeitgeist** research



North America

USA, Canada



Europe

Greece, Netherlands, Belgium, France, Spain, Portugal, Ireland, Bulgaria, Hungary, Croatia, Italy, Romania, Switzerland, Czech Republic, Austria, UK, Denmark, Sweden, Norway, Poland, Germany, Russia, Turkey

Where search needs to be improved, according to U.S. consumers



% of consumers in the U.S. who say the following needs to be improved the most in product research

● Gen Z | All internet users %

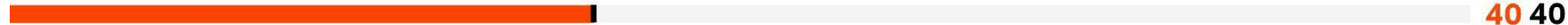
Reliability of information



Having to look through multiple pages of search results to find something relevant



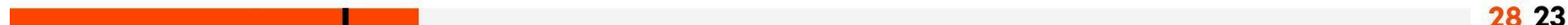
Having to go to multiple sources for information



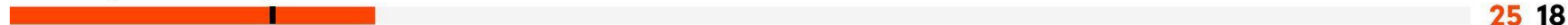
Having to digest a lot of different information myself



Lack of results



Not knowing where to start my research



Where search needs to be improved, according to **German consumers**



% of consumers in Germany who say the following needs to be improved the most in product research

● Gen Z | All internet users

%

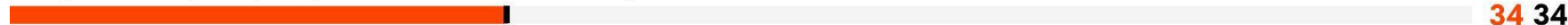
Reliability of information



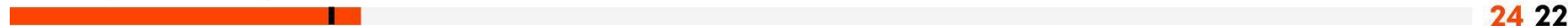
Having to go to multiple sources for information



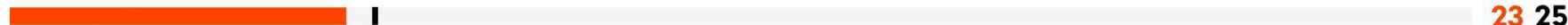
Having to look through multiple pages of search results to find something relevant



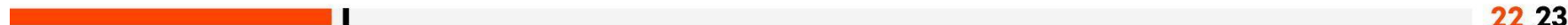
Not knowing where to start my research



Having to digest a lot of different information myself



Lack of results

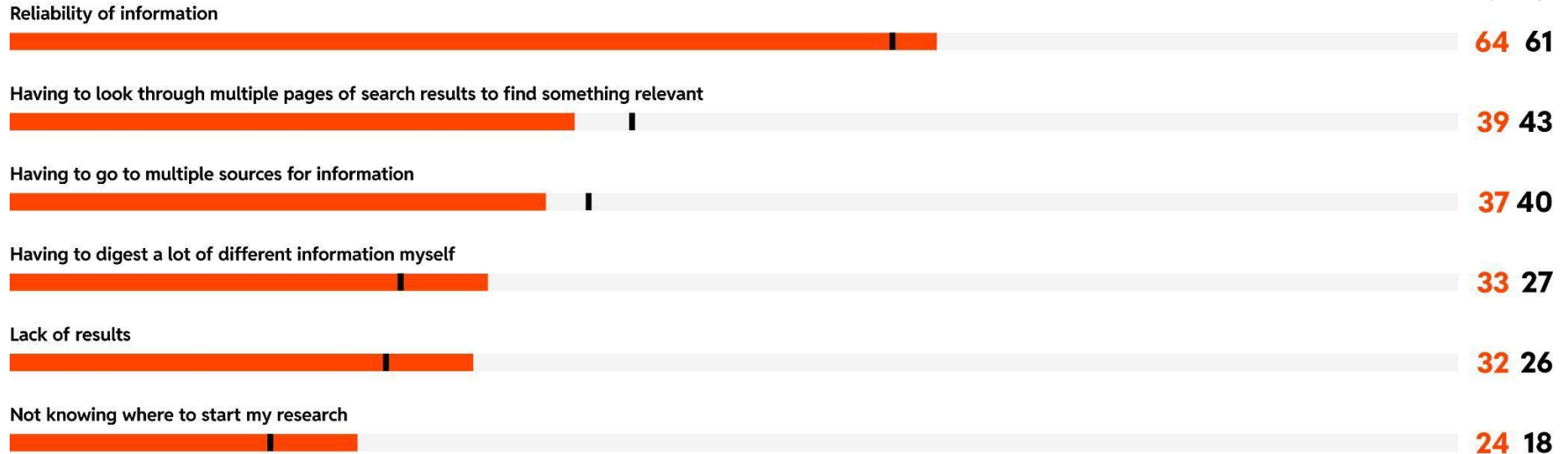


Where search needs to be improved, according to **UK consumers**



% of consumers in the UK who say the following needs to be improved the most in product research

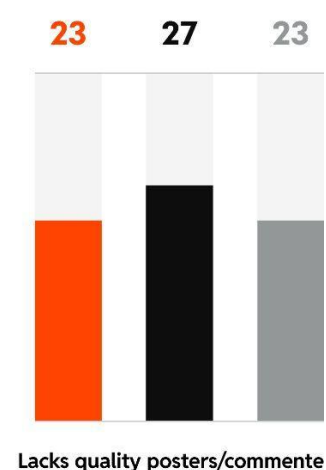
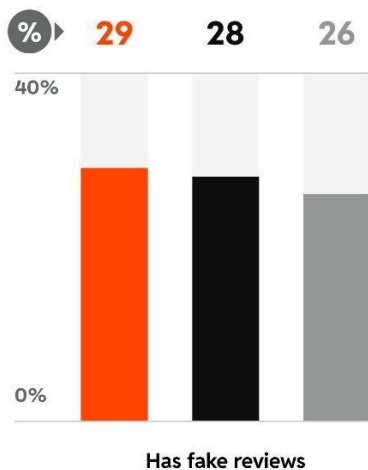
● Gen Z | All internet users %



Consumers' experience searching for products on **social media**

% of social media users in the U.S., Germany and UK who say the following describes their experience searching for products/brands on social media platforms

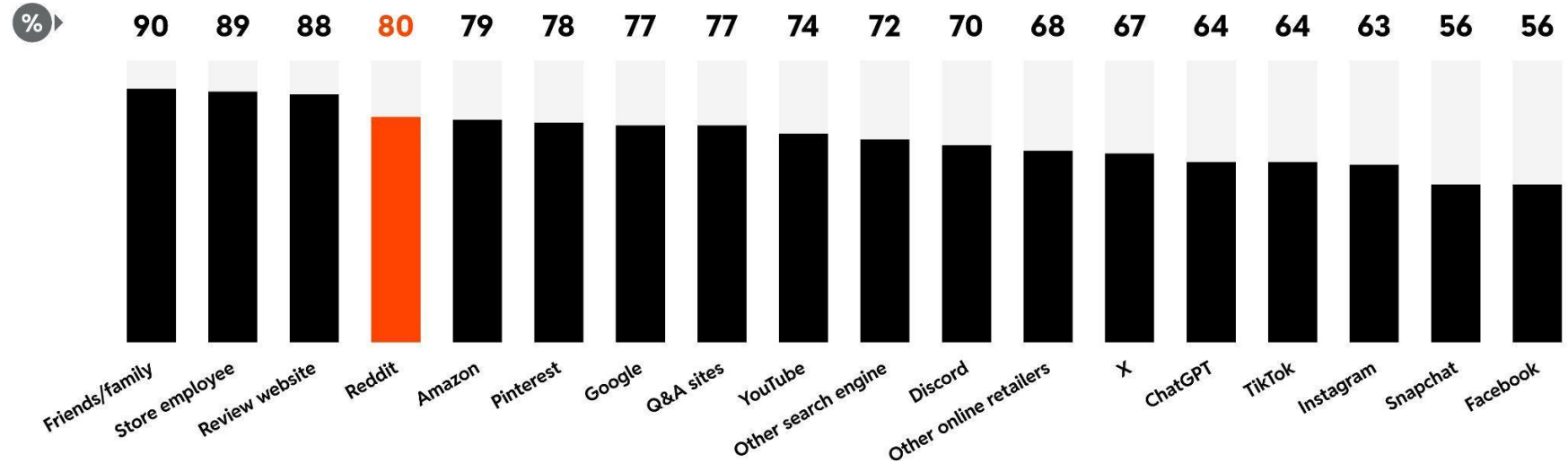
KEY



How much U.S. consumers trust different results



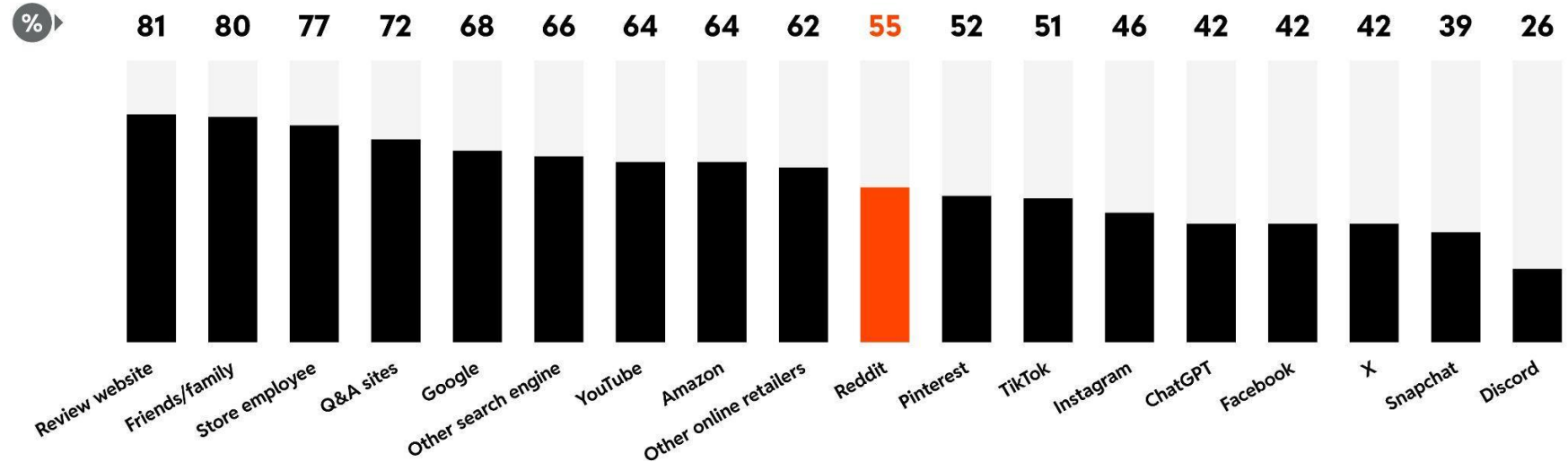
% of those in U.S. who use each platform for product research who say the platforms' results are trustworthy



How much **German consumers** trust different results



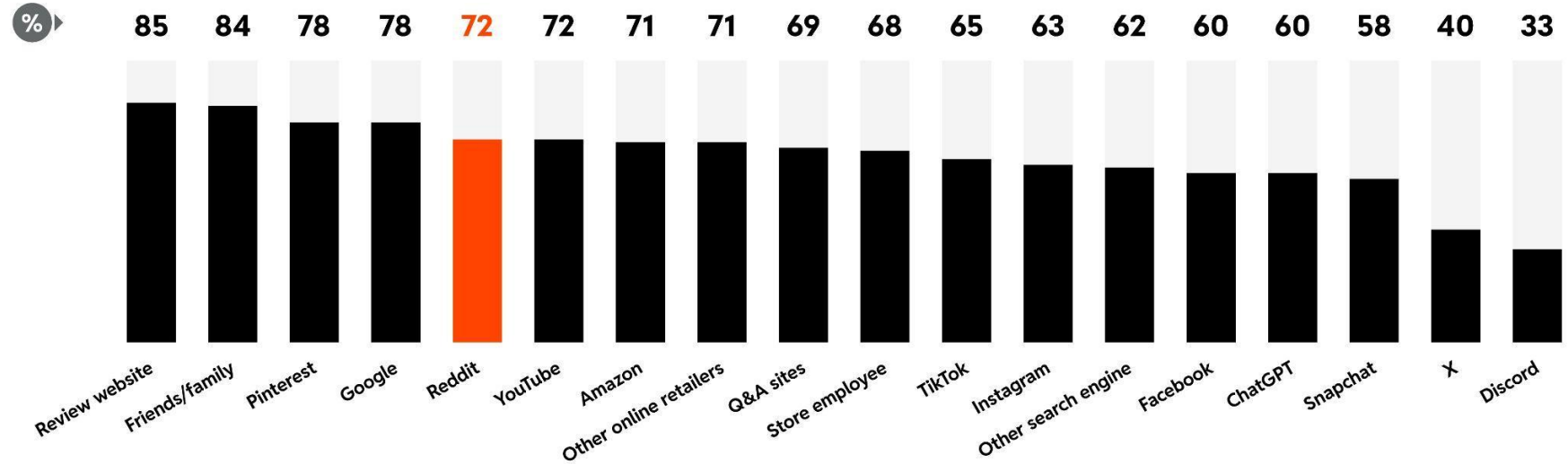
% of those in Germany who use each platform for product research who say the platforms' results are trustworthy



How much UK consumers trust different results



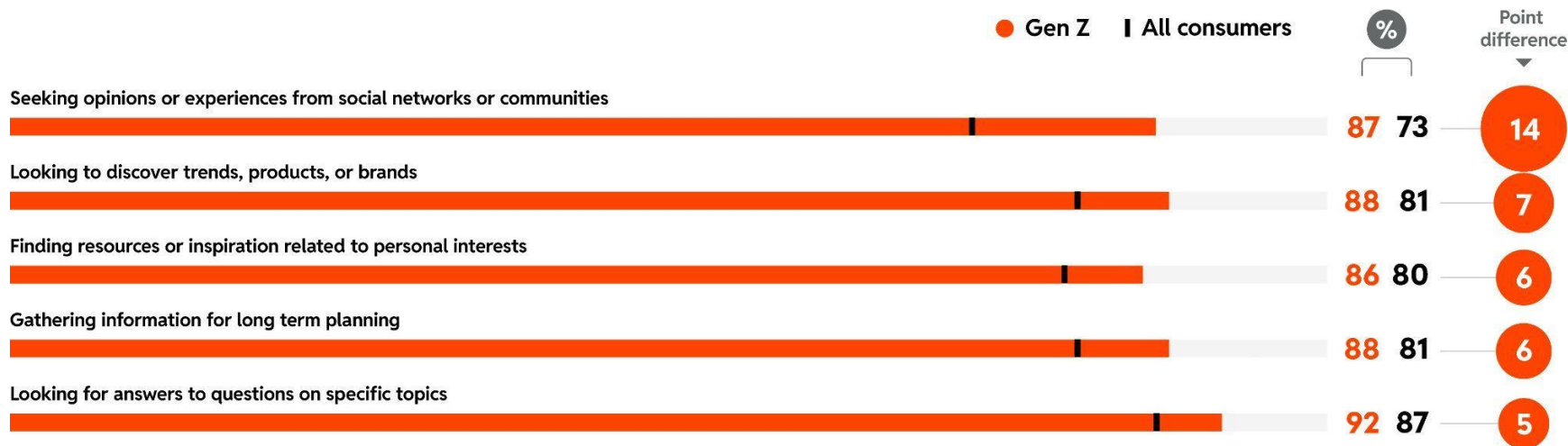
% of those in UK who use each platform for product research who say the platforms' results are trustworthy



U.S. consumers' reasons for using search platforms



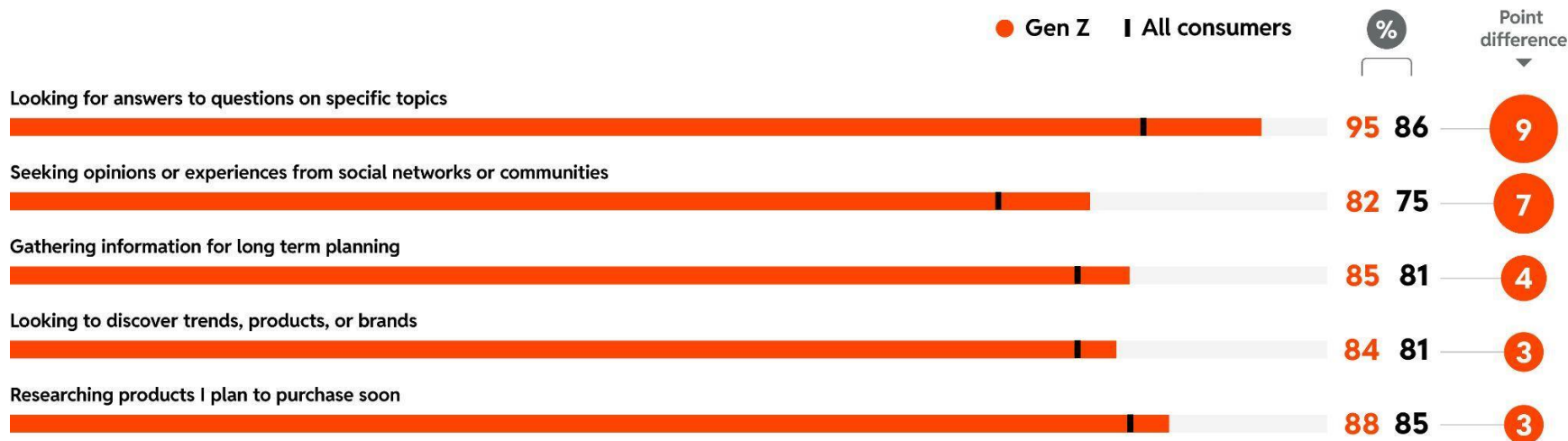
% of consumers in the U.S. who use product search platforms for the following reasons (ranked by point difference)



German consumers' reasons for using search platforms



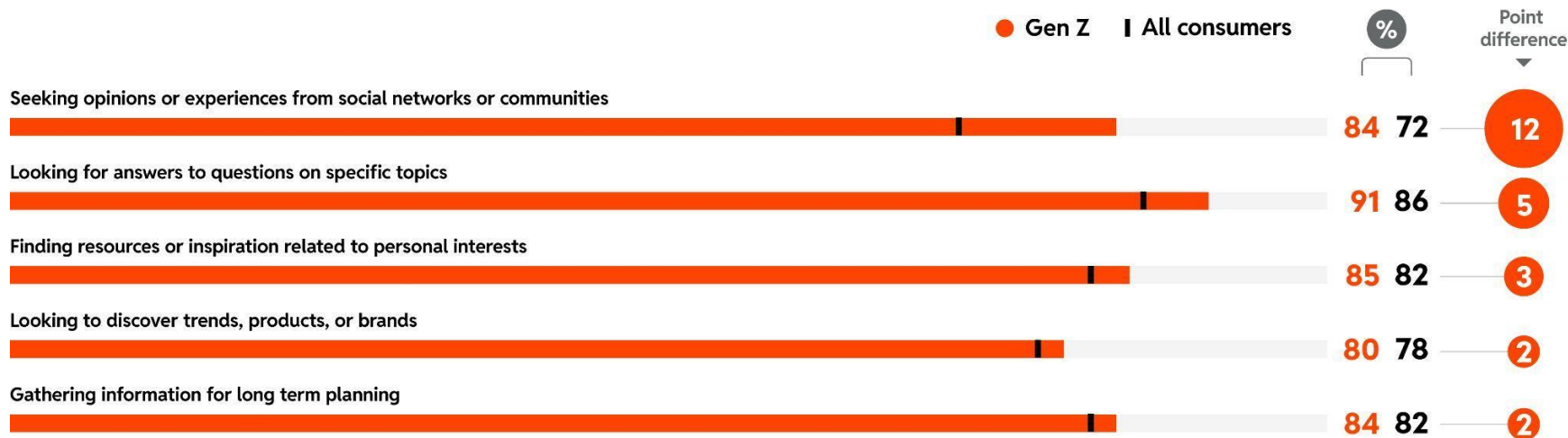
% of consumers in Germany who use product search platforms for the following reasons (ranked by point difference)



UK consumers' reasons for using search platforms



% of consumers in the UK who use product search platforms for the following reasons (ranked by point difference)



Search frustrations among U.S. consumers



% of consumers in the U.S. who say the following are their top search frustrations

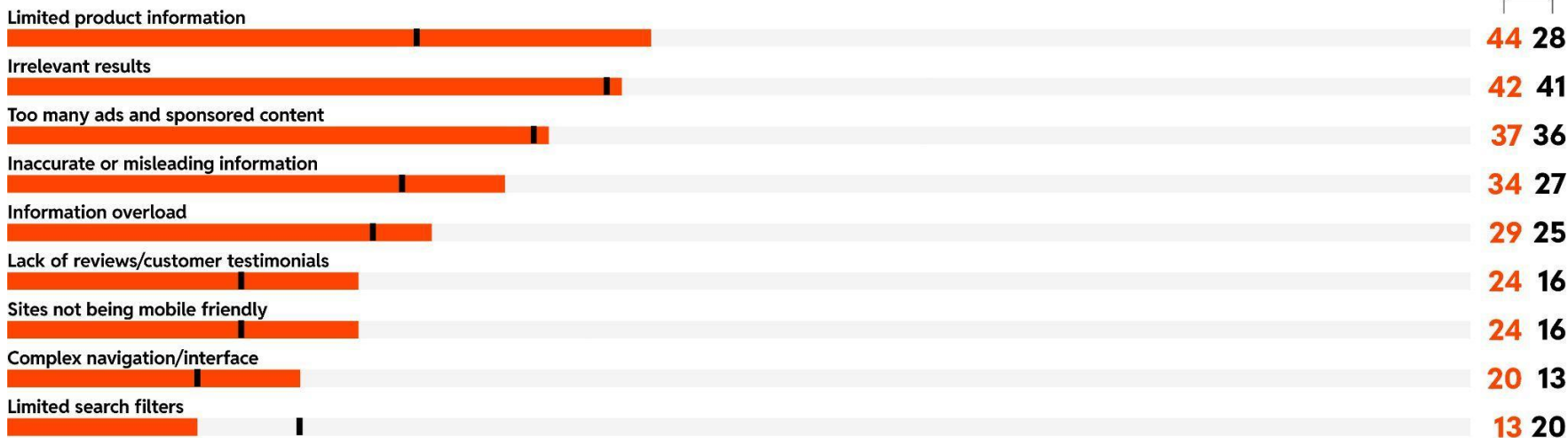


Search frustrations among German consumers



% of consumers in Germany who say the following are their top search frustrations

● Gen Z | I All internet users (%)



Search frustrations among UK consumers



% of consumers in the UK who say the following are their top search frustrations

● Gen Z | I All internet users (%)

