
European consumers' attitudes towards their online profile

A Kaspersky study

The right to be forgotten

Introduction

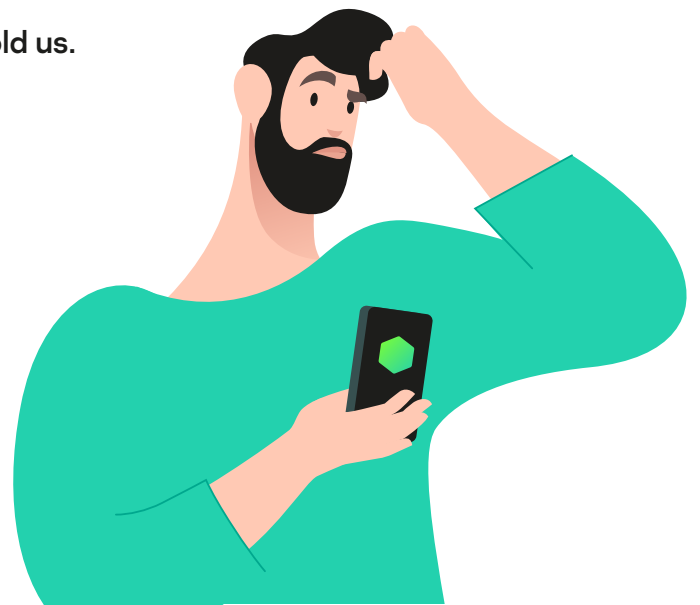
In the digital age many people have a complex online presence. From social media profiles and email accounts to secure bank and ecommerce log-ins, their digital footprint is forever spreading across the web.

It can be difficult for people to manage their virtual selves, let alone to understand what effect liking or posting potentially controversial subjects might have on their future career or relationship prospects.

And when it comes to individuals deleting something they've changed their mind about posting, many aren't sure what's possible and if it really can be deleted permanently.

To discover how consumers across Europe feel about their digital presence, Kaspersky polled more than 8,500 people aged 16 and over, in 11 countries.

Here's what they told us.



Part one: What's not to 'like'?

Consumers across Europe share an awareness that online actions can have consequences, from likes to comments and every interaction in between. Here we examine the social posts they feel are most risky, and what the outcome might be if someone takes exception to their past actions.

60%

of consumers feel more negative about individuals liking posts showing animal cruelty

Care what you share

Posts deemed derogatory towards disabled people are potentially the most harmful to someone's job prospects or relationships, according to 38% of consumers. Respondents in France (46%), Spain (42%) and Greece (also 42%) feel strongest about this; Switzerland (30%) and Slovakia (31%) the least.

Meanwhile, around 1 in 3 (34%) respondents stated that sharing anti-Covid vaccination posts, or using anti-trans language (32%), could also affect career chances.

Online red lines

Consumers reveal multiple areas that would make them react negatively to friends or loved ones who like something they don't agree with.

The most prominent issue is liking posts showing animal cruelty, with 60% stating they'd feel more negative about individuals doing this. Respondents in Italy (66%) feel most strongly about this content, followed by those in France and Greece (63% each); people in Austria (52%), Romania (54%) and Germany (56%) are the least concerned.

Close second comes liking posts with racist undertones (59%) and third (56%) is liking posts derogatory to someone's appearance.

Platform for penitence

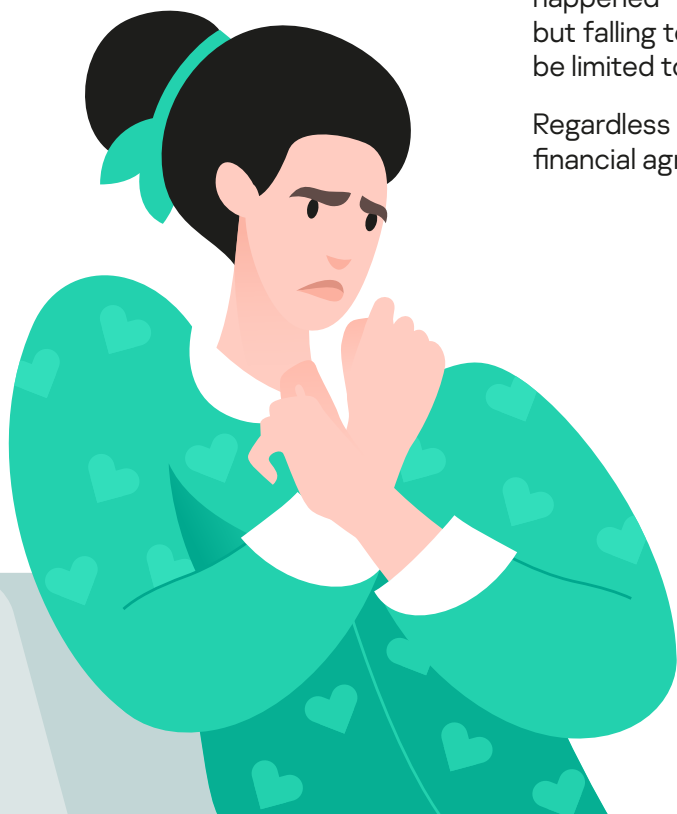
A minority of consumers on each social media platform regret being tagged in certain posts, with people feeling the most ashamed about Facebook activity (28%).

Instagram is cited as a source of shame by 22% of respondents overall, with fewer naming unwanted TikTok mentions (8%).

Counting the cost

Consumer opinion is split about whether famous figures should be held accountable for past 'problematic posts'. While 53% state high-profile people should be held accountable regardless of how long ago this happened - rising to 63% in Slovakia, and 57% in Spain and Switzerland; but falling to 46% in the Netherlands - 48% think accountability should be limited to posts from the past couple of years.

Regardless of timing, 52% say clients pulling work, sponsorship or other financial agreements is justified.

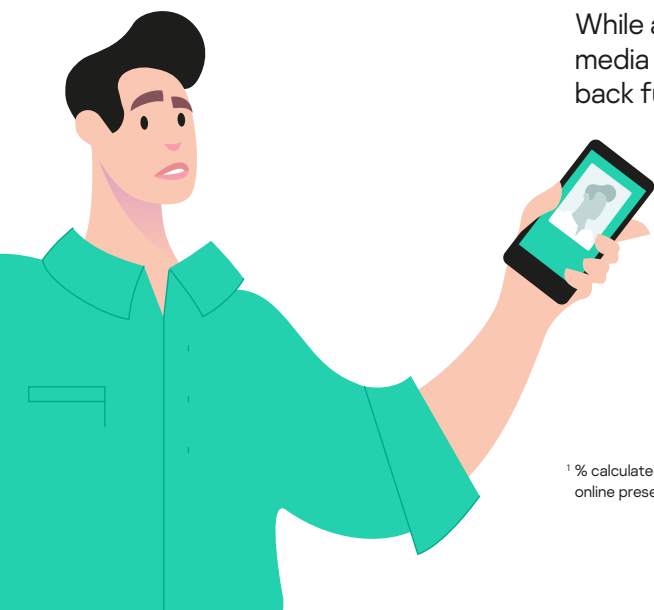


Part two: Not top for the job

Respondents revealed aspects of their online presence they'd rather delete - with many saying posts from the past have harmed their job prospects or no longer represent their point of view. Despite this desire to adapt their digital footprint few feel they're able to control what content will remain available for others to view.

42%

of respondents say their social media profiles do not represent their authentic selves



Delete, delete, delete

A huge 84% of consumers are keen to permanently delete at least one thing posted on their social media profiles over time. Meanwhile, 82% would like to erase something posted to their timelines in 2021. Gen Z consumers are most likely to want to take something down from 2021, with 86% stating this - compared to 70% of those aged 35-plus.

Most want to permanently delete a photo they deem unflattering (21%) or one they didn't want to be tagged in (20%). Slightly fewer would remove an item from their online search history which could be misconstrued (17%) or they find embarrassing (16%) such as a health issue.

Meanwhile, 76%¹ believe they have complete control over deleting their internet search history. This includes just over 81% of 16- to 21-year-olds, compared to 77% of consumers aged 22 to 34, and 65% of those aged 35 and over.

However, 24% feel they don't have the option of permanently erasing anything from their online presence.

Change with the times

More than 2 in 3 (68%) respondents say they've reviewed or deleted social posts because they considered them no longer socially acceptable, including around 1 in 6 (16%) who took down things they later decided weren't true. Meanwhile, 14% have deleted drunken photos.

Career calamities

An eye-opening 30% of respondents admit a previous social post caused problems in their career. This is true for 35% of Gen Z, plus 46% of Swiss consumers, 42% of people in Slovakia, and 32% of those in both Austria and the UK.

In addition, 42% overall state they know someone who has suffered professionally due to their historical posts. Employers aren't the only ones with an eye on past content: 40% of respondents say they have judged a colleague after searching their social media history.

Me - but not me

Perception formed from online presence is a problem for many people. In total, 42% of consumers claim their social media profiles don't authentically represent them. A further 48% state others might get the wrong idea about them from their internet search history.

While a majority (65%) of those who have reviewed or deleted old social media posts have done so in the past two years, others were willing to go back further: some 15% in total removed posts at least five years ago.

¹ % calculated by deducting the percentage that selected N/A I don't think I have complete control deleting anything from my online presence

Part three: Licence to will

Millions of people who pass away leave behind social media profiles and internet search histories. Many, of course, don't get the chance to review their digital footprint first. Our study sought individuals' views on what they would like to become of their online presence after they die.

38%

are more likely to feel uncomfortable leaving their social media details in their will than comfortable

Conclusion

Of grave concern

Overall, 70% of consumers have considered what will become of their digital footprint when they pass away. However, 27% aren't aware what happens to their online presence after death; while almost a fifth (19%) assume all of their social media accounts will automatically be deleted for good.

That said, 23% say they don't care about their social media accounts once they've passed. Some 20% would like their accounts to remain live as a memorial, on the basis they aren't accessible to other people.

Log-in as legacy

Some 39% of consumers across Europe - including 46% of those in France, 42% of respondents in the Netherlands and 42% of respondents aged 22 to 34 - are comfortable with the idea of leaving email log-in details in their will. Meanwhile, just 27% of consumers in Slovakia say they feel comfortable about this, along with 35% in both Spain and Romania.

Fewer consumers (34%) feel comfortable leaving social media account log-in details in their will, with 38% uncomfortable. They're unhappier about next of kin having access to their full internet search history: 31% say they're comfortable compared to 43% stating they are uncomfortable.

A haunting prospect

Despite clear concerns among respondents about who could access their online profiles after death - and what they might find - many people would happily log on if their parents left the details in their will.

A total of 37% say they would access a late parent's social media with comfort under these circumstances, while even more (40%) would log into an email account. Just 29% would feel uncomfortable accessing emails.

Our study of attitudes towards online profiles past and present highlights fascinating consumer insights about their key issues and concerns in this important area.

Many people are unsure or unaware which parts of their digital presence they have full control over, or what they could and should amend if they feel change is necessary with the benefit of hindsight.

As long as the right to be forgotten remains up for debate, problems await - from career problems to rocky relationships with partners, family, friends and colleagues - if consumers don't carefully consider what they like, post and share.

Appendix

Full data are available at the following links: [Q1-5](#) [Q6-11](#)

About the research

The survey was conducted among 8,519 general consumers in the UK, France, Germany, Spain, Italy, Austria, Switzerland, Greece, Slovakia, Romania and the Netherlands. Each market included a split between: 16-21 year olds (50% per market), 22-34 year olds (25% per market), 35+ year olds (25% per market).

At an overall level, results are accurate to $\pm 11\%$ at 95% confidence limits, assuming a result of 50%. The interviews were conducted online by Censuswide in December 2021. Censuswide abides by and employs members of the Market Research Society which is based on the ESOMAR principles.