

Who's In the Know: The Privacy Pulse Report

Winter/Spring 2024



The Privacy Pulse Report

The Privacy Pulse Report reveals a concerning dichotomy in personal approaches to online privacy. Fueled by data from 2,000 Americans gathered through Censuswide, an accredited third-party research organization, the new insights demonstrate disparities in privacy protection, based on individuals' experience in advertising, programming, cybersecurity or data science.

The findings illuminate a stark reality: that those who understand how the online tracking ecosystem works – sometimes, even those who have designed it – are more actively protecting themselves from it than the average American.





This data confirms what we've always known: there is only one obstacle to privacy protection, and it's knowing enough about how the internet works to understand that you need it. It's quite telling that advertisers themselves are far more frequent users of adblockers than the average American. Despite benefitting from the online tracking landscape, they are simultaneously wary of it when it comes to their own data.

More optimistically, this research also shows how united we are on what we believe is ethical and just when it comes to adblocking and online data protection. Attitudes around recent big tech crackdowns on adblockers and desires for protections for adblocking tools were consistent no matter one's experience. As we fight for a future internet that reflects these values, it's critical that consumers take note of how those 'in the know' are taking action, and ensure they too are informed and protecting their data.



Jean-Paul Schmetz
CEO, GHOSTERY



Advertisers Are Heavier Users of Adblockers Than the Average American

A 2022 analysis by [Statista](#) found that 34 percent of Americans were using an adblocker. New data puts national adblocker usage at 52 percent, with the highest use in the 35-44 age group. However, usage figures increase dramatically for individuals who have experience in fields 'in the know' about online tracking, including advertising, programming and cybersecurity.



ALL AMERICANS

Using an adblocker:

52%

REASONS FOR USE:

Protect online privacy: **20%**

Block ads: **18%**

Speed up page loads: **9%**

Another reason: **5%**

Not using an adblocker: **48%**



EXPERIENCED ADVERTISERS

5+ years of experience

Using an adblocker:

66%

REASONS FOR USE:

Protect online privacy: **27%**

Block ads: **20%**

Speed up page loads: **12%**

Another reason: **7%**

Not using an adblocker: **34%**



EXPERIENCED PROGRAMMERS

5+ years of experience

Using an adblocker:

72%

REASONS FOR USE:

Protect online privacy: **30%**

Block ads: **19%**

Speed up page loads: **15%**

Another reason: **8%**

Not using an adblocker: **28%**



CYBERSECURITY EXPERTS

5+ years of experience

Using an adblocker:

76%

REASONS FOR USE:

Protect online privacy: **29%**

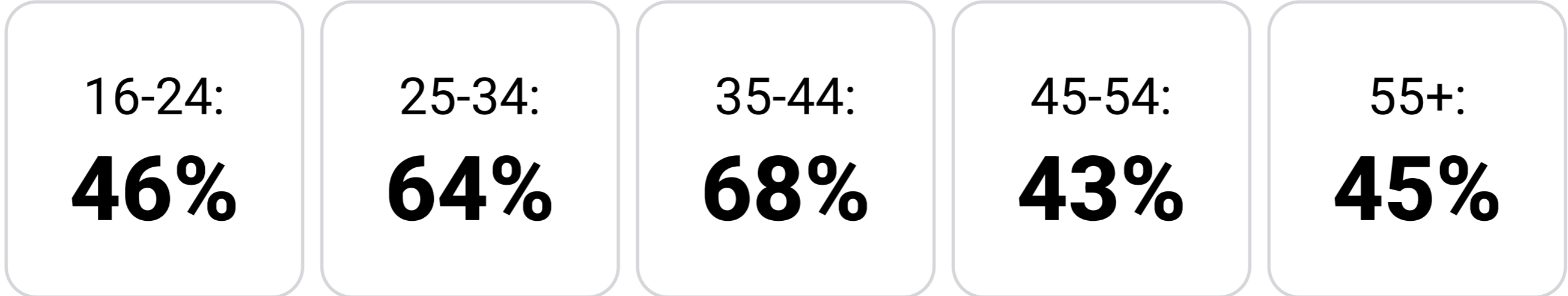
Block ads: **19%**

Speed up page loads: **19%**

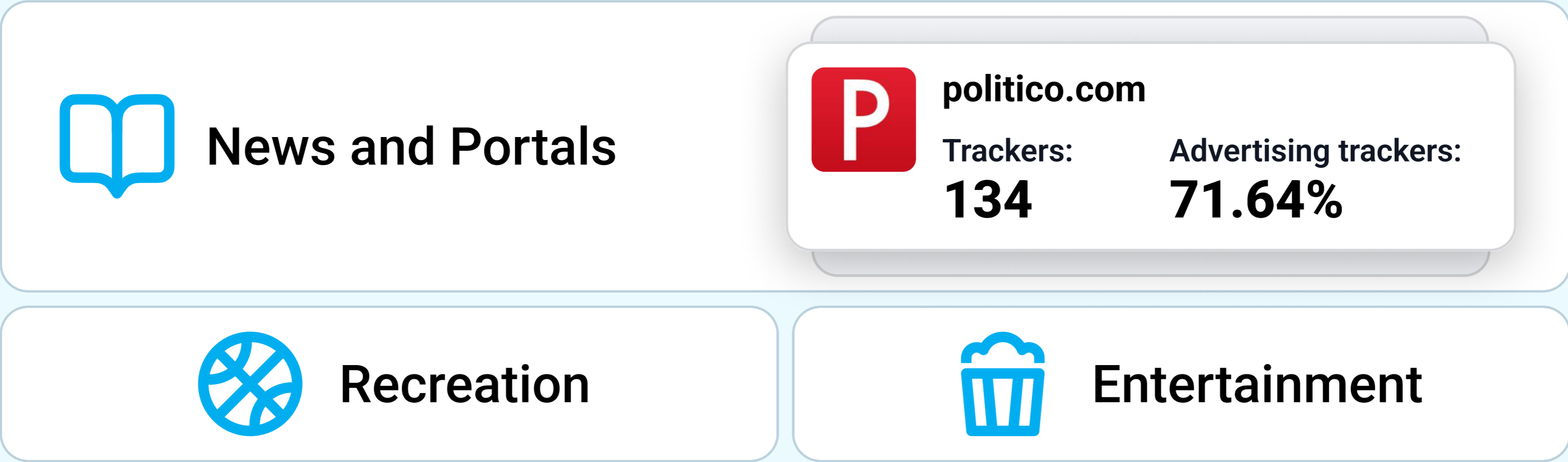
Another reason: **6%**

Not using an adblocker: **24%**

American Adblocker Usage by Age Group:



The top 3 most tracked website categories on the web



Ghostery makes your browser sprint
Browse the web 2X faster with Ghostery



Data Distressed – Where Privacy Concerns Lie

Concerns about the collection of specific kinds of data are fueling adblocker usage and consideration. New insights show that while Americans overall are primarily concerned with the collection of data such as browser, location or shopping data, professionals with expertise in fields knowledgeable about online tracking tend to cite more sensitive data as their top concern, including health data and data for political uses.



BROWSER OR SEARCH DATA

I'm concerned about my browser or search history being collected shared or sold

All Americans: 38%

Experienced Advertisers: **43%**

Experienced Programmers: 45%

Cybersecurity Experts: **41%**



LOCATION DATA

I'm concerned about my location data being tracked and/or shared without my consent

All Americans: 37%

Experienced Advertisers: **39%**

Experienced Programmers: **40%**

Cybersecurity Experts: 41%



SHOPPING DATA

I'm concerned about how my shopping data may be used to target me

All Americans: 33%

Experienced Advertisers: **37%**

Experienced Programmers: **37%**

Cybersecurity Experts: 37%



HEALTH DATA

I'm concerned about how my health data could be collected, shared, sold or used against me

All Americans: 33%

Experienced Advertisers: **39%**

Experienced Programmers: 48%

Cybersecurity Experts: **48%**



DATA FOR POLITICAL USES

I'm concerned about how I or others may be targeted by political campaigns based on our online data

All Americans: 26%

Experienced Advertisers: **35%**

Experienced Programmers: 40%

Cybersecurity Experts: **37%**



ADULT CONTENT SITE ACTIVITY

I'm concerned about my data from adult content sites being collected

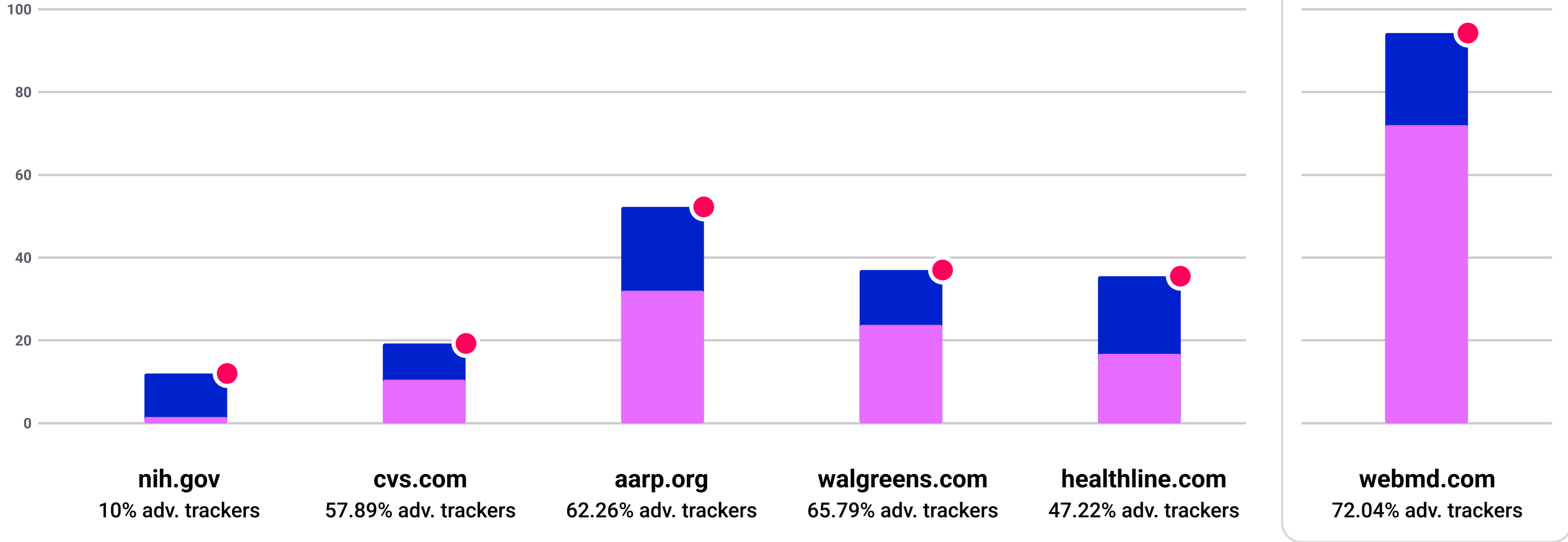
All Americans: 22%

Experienced Advertisers: **29%**

Experienced Programmers: 31%

Cybersecurity Experts: **30%**

Prevalence of Advertising Trackers Amongst Popular Health Websites



■ Total number of trackers
 ■ Advertising trackers

● Google's tracker **DoubleClick** is present on all health websites

*Most popular US health websites according to Statista; tracking data gathered via WhoTracks.Me

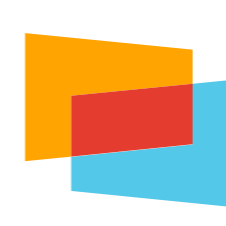
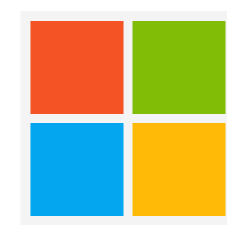
i The 4th most prevalent tracker on the web, Google's Doubleclick is present on all of the top health websites, showing a heavy degree of tracking and ability to thread sensitive information into complex user profiles for data buyers.
 ➔



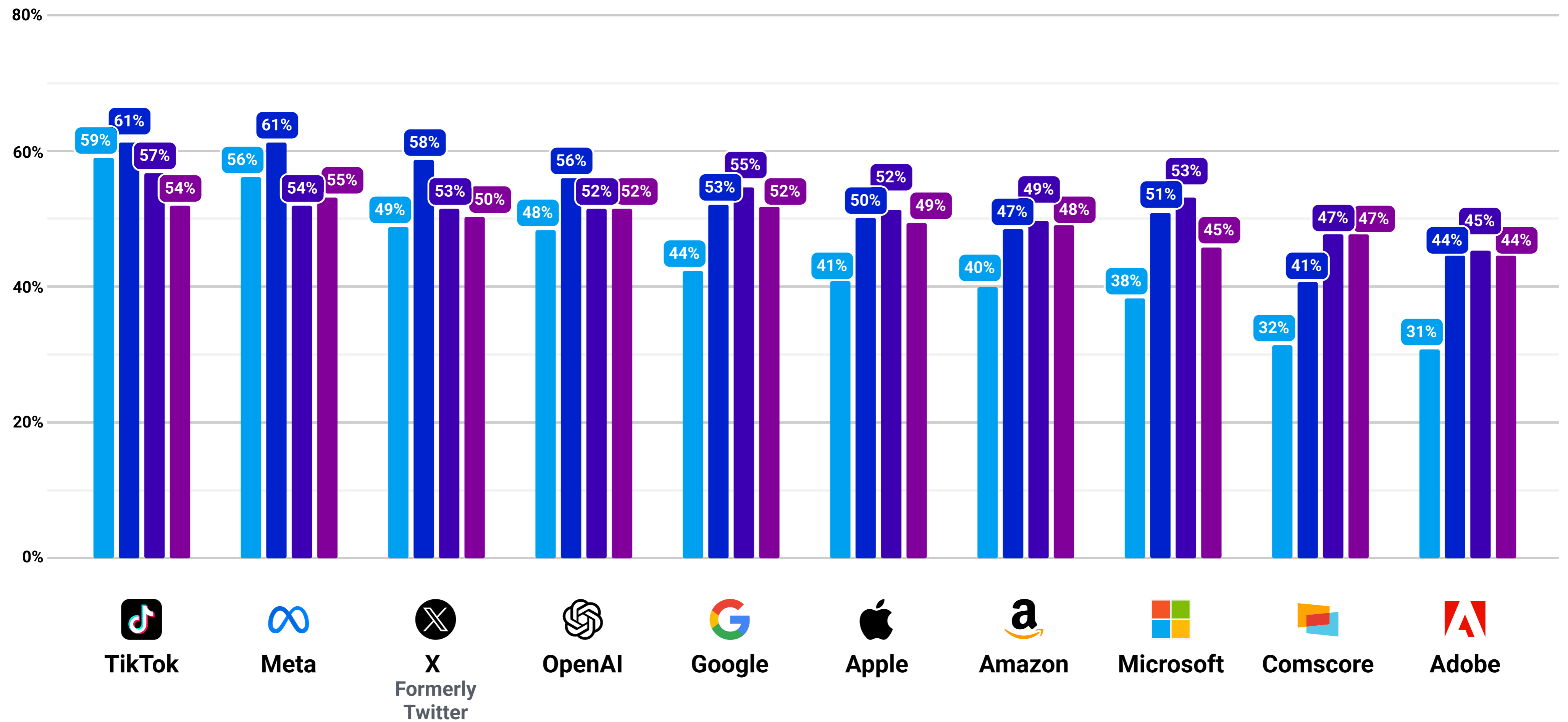
Big Tech Trust Teeters

When asked how likely they believe big tech companies are to abuse their data, Americans and professionals in related knowledge fields had concerns with similar companies. While all were most concerned about data abuse with TikTok and Meta, experts cited greater concerns with lesser known data collectors like Adobe and Comscore, than the average American.

How likely or unlikely do you think the following companies are to abuse your data?



Perceptions of Big Tech Likelihood to Abuse Data



● Americans ● Experienced Advertisers ● Experienced Programmers ● Cybersecurity Experts





These results perfectly showcase the largely unrecognized data collection that happens every day on the internet. Companies like Comscore are not known by name to the everyday person but certainly know a lot about you. Their troves of data, connected into profiles that might encompass everything from your sexual orientation, to your political affiliations, to your favorite type of food, are flying under the radar for the general population. Those who work in fields related to advertising and programming are most aware of these behind-the-scenes data collectors.



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CEO, GHOSTERY

Ghostery's lineup of most prevalent tracking companies, based on WhoTracks.Me, the largest database of trackers worldwide



Adblocker Crackdowns May Have Opposite Intended Effect

Recently, big tech companies like Google have enhanced attempts to thwart adblocking, through changes like Manifest V3 and restrictions to adblocker use on YouTube. However, data shows that these attempts may be having the opposite effect intended, frustrating users and increasing interest in adblocker usage.

49% of Americans agree:

The more big tech companies enforce advertising/tracking, the more willing I am to use an adblocker

ALSO AGREED:

54% of experienced advertisers

58% of experienced programmers

57% of cybersecurity experts

33% of Americans agree:

The more big tech companies enforce advertising/tracking, I become neither more nor less willing to use an adblocker

ALSO AGREED:

33% of experienced advertisers

32% of experienced programmers

31% of cybersecurity experts

18% of Americans agree:

The more big tech companies enforce advertising/tracking, the less willing I am to use an adblocker

ALSO AGREED:

13% of experienced advertisers

10% of experienced programmers

12% of cybersecurity experts



We're More United Than We Think

While many Americans might be frustrated to learn that experienced advertisers are often protecting themselves from ad technology more than the industry is protecting the general population, it also demonstrates a surprising unity. The belief that individuals should have control over their own data and how it's collected, is evident across all groups throughout these results.

Here's what we're all looking for regarding the future of adblocking and data protection online:

I believe I should be able to control what data is collected about me online:

Americans: **43%**
Exp. Advertisers: **39%**
Exp. Programmers: **40%**
Cybersecurity Exps.: **39%**

I believe I should be able to choose where I see ads:

Americans: **38%**
Exp. Advertisers: **31%**
Exp. Programmers: **37%**
Cybersecurity Exps.: **39%**

I believe big tech companies should be more aggressively fined for privacy failings:

Americans: **33%**
Exp. Advertisers: **38%**
Exp. Programmers: **38%**
Cybersecurity Exps.: **36%**

I believe adblockers or the ability to block ads and data collecting trackers online should be federally protected:

Americans: **33%**
Exp. Advertisers: **38%**
Exp. Programmers: **45%**
Cybersecurity Exps.: **43%**

I believe an ad-free internet should be the default:

Americans: **26%**
Exp. Advertisers: **26%**
Exp. Programmers: **27%**
Cybersecurity Exps.: **27%**





The findings of this report show that there is a dramatic gap in awareness and action between those “in the know” on online tracking and the average American. If those creating the ad marketplace are actively protecting themselves from it, the everyday person should strongly consider how they are protecting themselves as well.



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CEO, GHOSTERY

Get privacy into your life with Ghostery!



Chrome



Firefox



Safari



Edge



Opera



Methodology

The total sample size was 2,000 consumers in the United States (16+). The survey was conducted from January 10-January 12, 2024. Censuswide abides by and employs members of the Market Research Society which is based on the ESOMAR principles.

About Ghostery

Ghostery is a digital privacy company that builds products to protect, educate, and empower users to take back control of their online experiences. It is known for its popular browser extension that makes the web browsing experience faster, cleaner and safer by detecting and blocking third-party data-tracking technologies. Its mission is to build a product ecosystem that fosters an internet that does not need to harvest consumer data or attention to drive the digital economy. Launched in 2009, Ghostery has more than seven million monthly active users who access the tool via app or browser extension. With its intuitive user interface, Ghostery enables average internet users to protect their privacy by default, while expert users benefit from a broad set of features and settings.

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