

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Trust in AI Surges and Consumers Grow More Nuanced About Data Sharing, ARF Privacy Study Finds

Eighth Annual ARF Privacy Study reveals rising confidence in AI, increased willingness to share data for convenience, and persistent demands for transparency.

NEW YORK — [January 21, 2026] — The Advertising Research Foundation (ARF) today released findings from its [8th Annual Privacy Study](#), revealing a notable shift in consumer attitudes toward digital privacy, artificial intelligence and data sharing. While privacy concerns remain high, the 2025 study shows growing trust in institutions — particularly AI — and a more pragmatic, tradeoff-driven approach to personal data use.

The study surveyed **1,245 U.S. consumers**. Notably, this was the first year the research was conducted in both **English and Spanish**. The project provides eight years of trend data on privacy awareness, trust and advertising relevance.

Key Findings:

Trust in AI Rebounds Sharply

After last year's decline, trust in artificial intelligence rose **16 percentage points**, the largest increase of any institution measured. Trust levels returned to — and in some cases exceeded — pre-2024 levels, suggesting growing normalization of AI tools in work and daily life.

Consumers Are More Open to Data Sharing — With Conditions

Willingness to share data for convenience and personalization continued to rise. Nearly **60% of consumers** said they would share their data to receive personalized shopping recommendations, signaling momentum for retail media and first-party data strategies. At the same time, consumers expressed greater caution around location data, reinforcing the importance of perceived sensitivity and context.

Privacy Awareness Is Increasing, Not Declining

Nearly **half of consumers (48%)** now report feeling well informed about their online privacy — an increase over recent years. Adults aged **35–54** remain the most proactive in managing privacy settings, while younger consumers increasingly rely on anonymity strategies such as providing false information.

Targeted Advertising Still Misses the Mark

While social media continues to outperform other channels on ad relevance, **47–50% of ads** on major digital platforms are still perceived as “sometimes” or “frequently” irrelevant. Local television fared worst, with **65% of respondents** reporting irrelevant ads.

Transparency Is the Price of AI Acceptance

Despite rising trust and widespread AI usage — with **more than 75%** of consumers having used AI tools — expectations for disclosure are clear. **Eighty-five percent** of respondents believe companies should be required to disclose when AI is used, prioritizing transparency around **data collection, use and sharing** over explanations of how AI systems work.

“This year’s findings show consumers are no longer reacting to privacy in black-and-white terms,” said **Paul Donato, Chief Research Officer at the ARF**. “People are weighing value, convenience and trust — especially with AI — but their expectations for transparency and control have never been higher.”

About the Study

The ARF’s [8th Annual Privacy Study](#) is based on a quota-balanced national sample and analyzed at a **95% confidence level**. All eight years of historical data are available to ARF members for longitudinal analysis and benchmarking.

About the ARF

Founded in 1936, the Advertising Research Foundation (ARF) is the leading authority on research quality, standards and innovation in advertising, media and marketing. With more than 400 member companies, the ARF advances the practice of marketing research through education, collaboration and unbiased thought leadership.

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Media Contact:

Philip Perry
Senior Content & Communications Manager
The Advertising Research Foundation
pperry@thearf.org
(212) 751-5656 ext. 5757