

By users, for users

Empowering user choice for sustainable online advertising

User perceptions of the environmental
impact of online advertising and
sustainable advertising initiatives



Commissioned by:

**Acceptable Ads
Committee**

The logo for the Acceptable Ads Committee, featuring a blue checkmark-like shape to the right of the text.

Foreword



Terry Taouss
AAC President

At the Acceptable Ads Committee, we believe that the true impact of sustainability lies in active participation and engagement. We conducted this study to delve deeper into the perspectives of online users regarding sustainability, addressing crucial questions about their awareness levels and their views on sustainable advertising. Through these insights, we strive to shape a future where online experiences are not only acceptable but sustainable for all.

Our ultimate goal is clear: to make our sustainability initiatives a collective endeavor. Currently, the industry lacks a collective agreement on measuring advertising carbon emissions. Without reliable data, effective management will continue to become challenging. It is this need for credible information that fuels transformative actions and behavioral shifts. After all, our industry's strength lies in unity.

This report is a testament to our commitment to pushing boundaries in online media and sustainability. As we navigate this dynamic landscape, we aim to not just move the ball forward but to inspire large brands and agencies to undertake what we have pioneered. By sharing data, best practices, and collaboration opportunities, we can propel our sustainability initiatives forward. We encourage your organization to continue leading the charge and remain at the forefront of this transformative movement.

Key findings

- **59%** of Internet users do have some awareness of the environmental impact of online advertising, but they underestimate its impact.
- **24%** of ad-blocking users would accept viewing ads and another **53%** may accept viewing ads if they met clear sustainable advertising criteria set by an independent governing body.
- **25%** would accept viewing ads and another **52%** may accept viewing ads if the revenue generated from ads would be donated to a good cause.
- Ad-blocking users are open to viewing ads if they meet current Acceptable Ads criteria*: **18%** would definitely and
 - **52%** may accept viewing ads if they have been rated as 'nondisruptive' by internet users
 - **54%** may accept viewing ads if there were restrictions on the types or placements of ads shown
- **79%** of users think that it is moderately to very important that the industry focus on improving the sustainability of online ads.
- Users think improving the sustainability of online ads is as important as creating a good user experience (**81%**) and slightly more important than showing ads that are relevant to the user (**76%**).

Environmental awareness of online ads is underestimated



User awareness and perception of impact:

- **47%** of internet users have some awareness of the impact of online ads on the environment while only **12%** report being very aware of their impact.
- **73%** of internet users believe online advertising has some impact on the annual carbon emissions associated with internet use.
 - **29%** perceived it as having a moderate impact.
 - **21%** thought it had a large impact
 - **23%** believed it had a small impact.

Shift in perception:

- When informed about the actual environmental impact of online advertising:
 - **61%** thought the impact was more than they initially thought.
 - **38%** thought it was more, and **23%** thought it was significantly more.
 - **59%** expressed increased concern about its impact.

Ad-blocking users: Ad-blocking users were more likely to have some awareness of the environmental impact of online ads relative to non-ad blocking users

- A greater proportion of ad blocking users think online advertising has some impact on the annual carbon emissions associated with using the internet (80%) relative to non-ad blockers (59%).
- Most ad blocking users thought it had a moderate impact (32%) or a large impact (25%) whereas non-ad blocking users were equally likely to think it had a small (23%) or moderate impact (23%).

Users want more information on how to reduce carbon emissions from online ads

- **63%** of users have not read any articles or viewed any videos on the environmental impact of online ads
- **68%** want more information on how they can reduce their environmental impact from the ads they see online
- **66%** want to be able to easily access information about the carbon emissions of the ads they see online
- **63%** would be likely to install a free product that provides information on the carbon footprint of the websites they view.
- The majority of users think that it would be **nice (48%)** or **essential (44%)** that an independent governing body overseeing sustainable online advertising standards provide education to internet users on how they can reduce their carbon footprint from online ads.

68%

want more information on how they can reduce their environmental impact from the ads they see online



And they are willing to take action.

- **67%** of internet users agree that they want to have more control over the environmental impact of the ads they see online.
- After being informed of the environmental impact of online advertising, **66%** were more willing to take action to reduce its impact.
- **68%** would be likely to install an ad blocker if it would help reduce carbon emissions from online ads
- **66%** would be likely to install an extension that blocks non-sustainable online ads

However, users are less likely to pay to take action:

42% would be likely to

to pay for a carbon measurement tool that rated the environmental impact of the ads the user sees online

Users are likely to purchase from brands that practice sustainable advertising

Brand trust:

- **67%** of internet users agreed that they would be more likely to trust a brand if their efforts to reduce carbon emissions from online ads were verified by an independent source.

Negative perceptions:

- **60%** of internet users would think less of a brand if they knew that their ads were not carbon-friendly.

Purchase intent:

- **65%** would be more likely to buy a product or service from a brand that practices sustainable advertising

Factors influencing purchase decisions:

- If deciding between products from two brands, users would be more likely to buy from a brand if they:
 - Pledge to support sustainability efforts (60%)
 - Work with low-carbon suppliers to display online ads (57%)
 - Produce lower-emitting ad creatives (54%)
 - Only advertises its products on low carbon-emitting websites (53%)

Improving the sustainability of online ads and creating a good user experience are equally as important

Publishers would benefit from having sustainable advertising credentials verified by a credible, independent source:

- **66%** of users agree that they are more likely to trust a website is making a meaningful effort to reduce their carbon emissions from online ads if their actions are verified by an independent source
- **62%** of users agree that they would be more likely to click on an ad that has been labeled as sustainable or carbon-friendly by a credible independent organization
- **81%** of users would be moderately (30%), very (34%) or extremely willing (17%) to view ads on a website if they displayed a label from an independent organization verifying that they adhere to standards for sustainable online ads

66% of users agree that they are more likely to continue to visit a website if they practice sustainable online advertising and **60%** would reconsider visiting a website if they knew it was a high carbon-emitting website

66%

of users agree that they are more likely to continue to visit a website if they practice sustainable online advertising

Improving the sustainability of online ads and creating a good user experience are equally as important



Users are willing to support publishers that practice sustainable online advertising and would be willing to view ads on their website if they:

- **86%:** Display fewer ads than other similar websites
- **86%:** Restrict the length of video ads
- **83%:** Restrict tracking and third-party cookies for targeting online ads
- **84%:** Pledge to support sustainability efforts
- **81%:** Only display ads that have a lower carbon footprint

Users would accept viewing ads to support publishers and content-providers

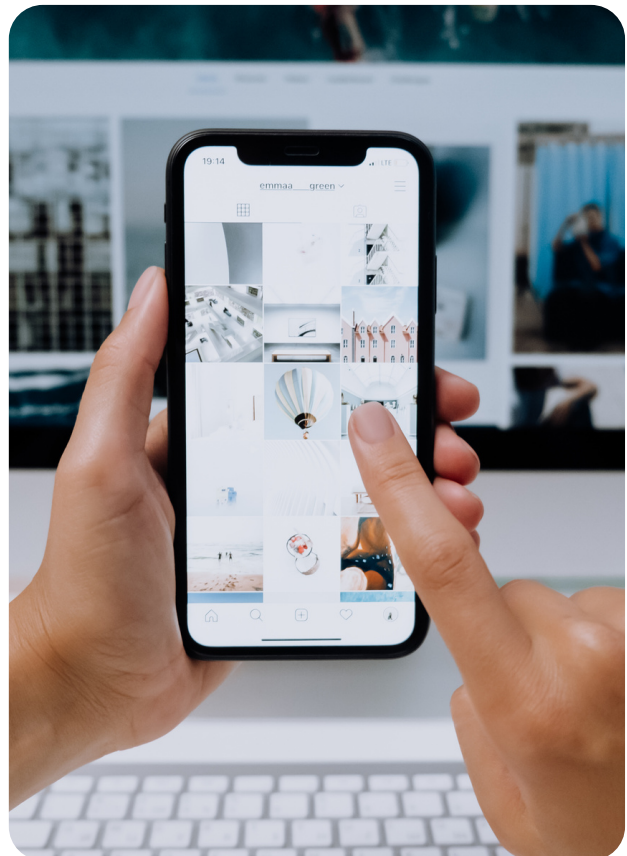
... if there were benefits to viewing ads or if they met clear sustainability standards

Ad-blocking users:

- **52%** may and **25%** would definitely accept viewing ads if, when doing so, the publisher or advertiser donated a portion of the revenue to a good cause.
- **53%** of ad-blocking users may and **24%** would definitely accept viewing ads if the ads met clear sustainable online advertising criteria set by an independent governing body
- **54%** of ad blockers may and **19%** would definitely accept viewing ads if part of the revenue generated by ads they have seen could be distributed back to organizations of content creators of their choice
- **52%** of ad blockers may and **18%** would definitely accept viewing ads if the types of ads had been rated by the majority of internet users as nondisruptive or annoying
- **54%** of ad blockers may and **18%** would definitely accept viewing ads if there were restrictions on the placements and types of ads that can be shown on a webpage.

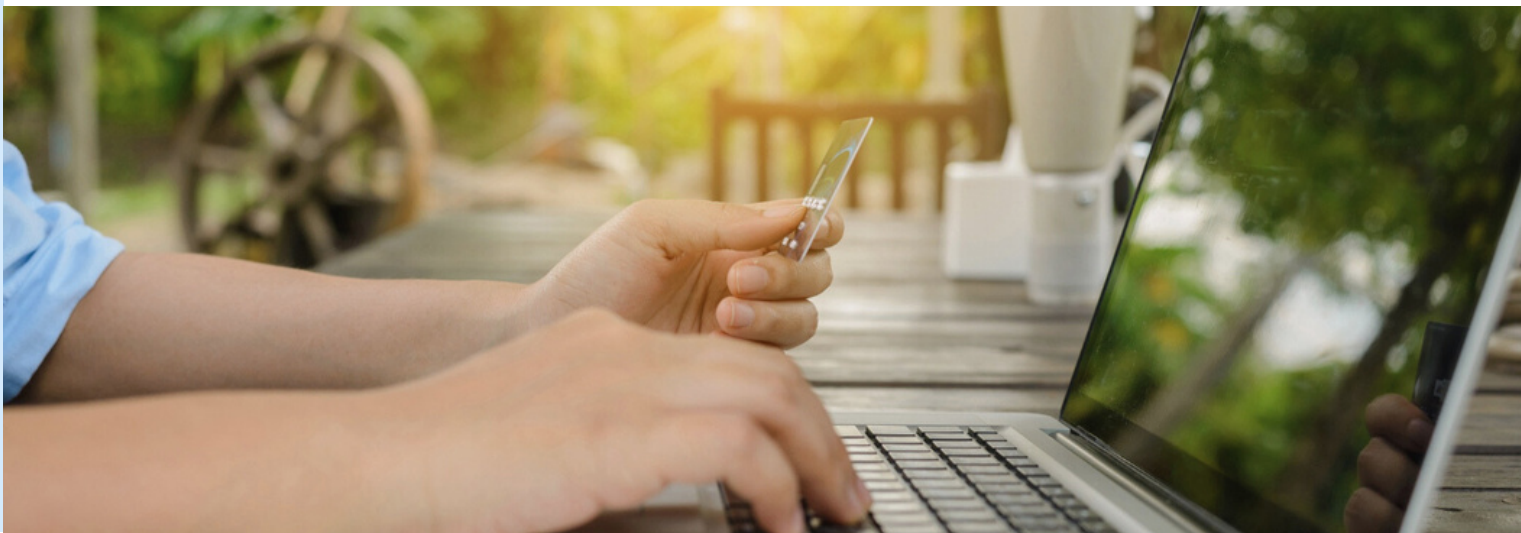
Non ad-blocking users:

- Similar results were found for non-ad blockers in relation to installing an extension that would allow certain types of ads to appear on a website.



Users would support an independent governing body that sets sustainable online ad standards

- **84%** of users think that having an independent governing body establish and enforce standards for sustainable advertising would help reduce carbon emissions from online ads, with over half stating that the initiative would be very (35%) or extremely (21%) helpful.
- **94%** of users would be willing to support publishers by viewing ads on their websites if they display a badge or label from an independent organization verifying that they adhere to standards for sustainable online ads with half of the users being very (34%) or extremely willing (17%).
- **62%** of users agree (42%) or strongly agree (20%) that they would be more likely to click on an ad that has been labeled as sustainable or carbon-friendly by a credible independent organization



And if there was an independent governing body that set standards for sustainable online advertising...

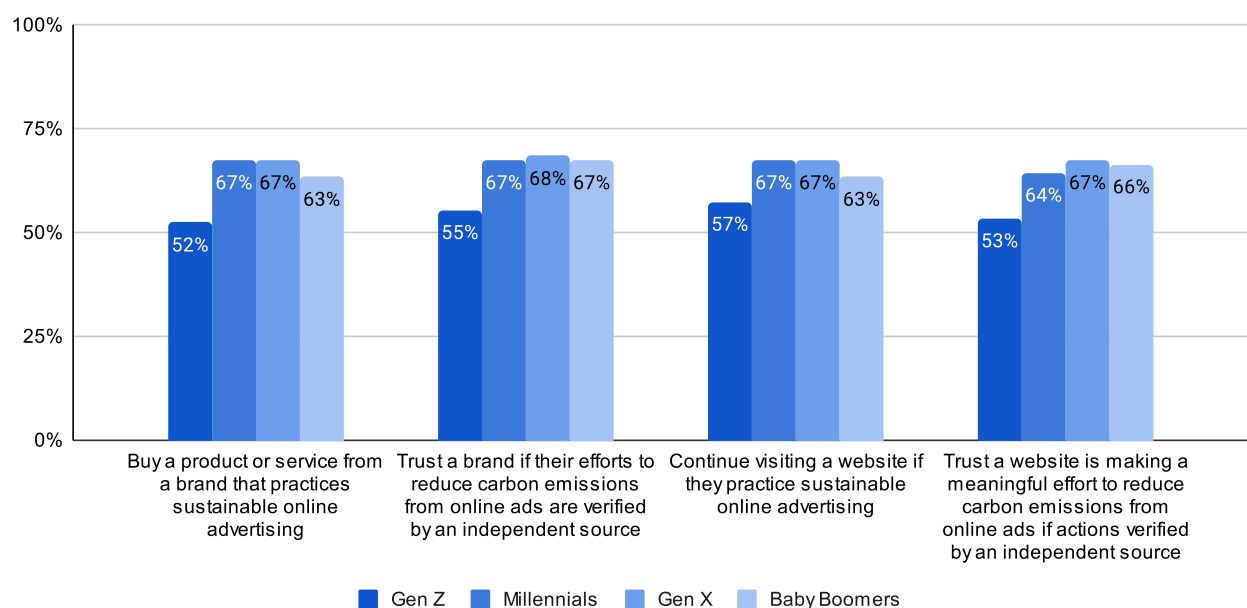
It should have multiple functions.

- Over **40%** of respondents thought it was essential that the governing body:
 - Monitor and audit publishers and advertisers to ensure they are adhering to the Standards (46%)
 - Require websites to transparently report data on their carbon emissions from online ads (45%)
 - Provide education to internet users on how they can reduce their own carbon footprint from online ads (44%)
 - Lobby governments and the public to support policies to reduce carbon emissions from online ads (42%)
 - Create easy-to-understand labels that help internet users compare carbon emissions across similar websites (41%)
- In general, **over 90%** of users thought that it would be nice or essential that the governing body should have each of the above functions.

Gen Z and Millennials are leading in awareness

- Gen Zs (63%) and Millennials (67%) were most likely to be aware of the environmental impact of online ads followed by Gen X (59%) and Baby Boomers (46%).
- Millennials were the generation who were most likely and Baby Boomers the least likely to report that they were already taking actions online for sustainability reasons (e.g., reducing the quality of music or video streaming, using more sustainable products or services online).
- Relative to other generations, Gen Zs were less likely to agree that they want
 - more control over the environmental impact of online ads (57% vs. 67-68%)
 - more information on how they can reduce their environmental impact from the ads they see online (59% vs. 68-69%)
 - to have easy access to information about the carbon emissions of the ads they see online (54% vs. 64-68%)
- Gen Zs were also slightly less likely to strongly support or trust the efforts of brands that adopt sustainable advertising initiatives relative to other generations.

Internet users would be more likely to:



Emerging markets embrace sustainable advertising

Internet users from emerging markets feel more strongly about reducing carbon emissions from online ads and would be more supportive of sustainable online advertising initiatives

Across almost all survey questions, participants from Brazil, China, India, Indonesia, South Africa, and Vietnam gave stronger responses than those from other countries.

For instance, respondents were

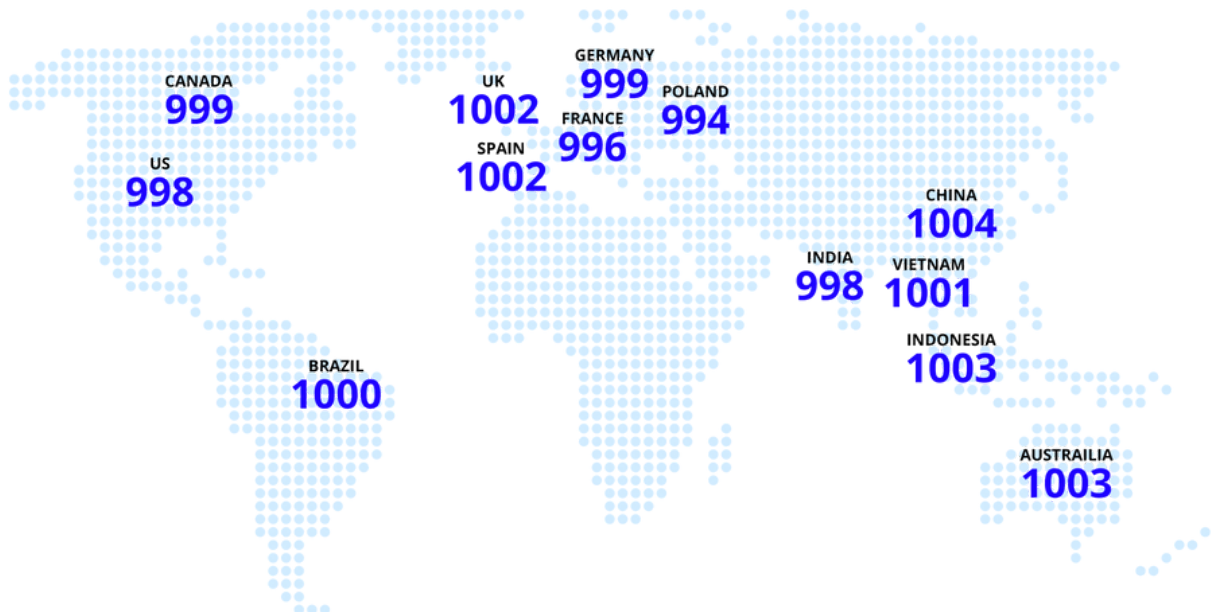
- more likely to report being aware of the environmental impact of using the internet
- more concerned about its impact and likely to take action to reduce carbon emissions from online ads
- more willing to support brands and publishers who adopt sustainable online advertising initiatives
- more likely to think that sustainable advertising initiatives would be more helpful for reducing carbon emissions for online ads, and
- more likely to consider multiple potential functions of an independent governing body as essential to help reduce emissions from online ads

While some of these countries are amongst the biggest polluting countries (e.g., China, India, and Indonesia), this general pattern is consistent with recent trends in global awareness, engagement, and action related to environmental causes in certain countries, with particularly strong growth in awareness, engagement, and action in Asian countries (The Economist Intelligence Unit Limited, 2021)



Methodology

- Study conducted in November, 2023
- 14,004 individuals from 14 countries, 16-65+ years
- Nationally representative age and gender quotas based on Census data. The sample tended to be more highly educated relative to population estimates.
- Desktop and mobile users
- 71% reported using an ad blocker
- Environmentally conscious: the majority (74%) agreed that reducing their environmental impact is important to them



About the committee

Over 250MM online users worldwide are open to receiving Acceptable Ads. Established in 2017, the Acceptable Ads Committee ("AAC") is a non-profit organization whose objective is to protect the user experience, while simultaneously providing publishers and content creators with meaningful monetization opportunities. The AAC does so by conducting independent research into the acceptability of various ad formats and codifying the results in the Standard for what constitutes an Acceptable Ad. One of the few advertising bodies that provides a voice for internet users, the AAC aims to maintain a sustainable open internet by balancing the needs of its stakeholder representatives, including users, publishers, advertisers, ad tech companies, and digital rights organizations.