



# Global Tech Support Scam Research



Global report, September 2018



# The state of tech support scams in 2018

- **Consumers reduced their exposure and losses from tech support scams\*:** Over six-in-ten consumers experienced a tech support scam down 5-points since 2016 driven by a decline in pop-up ads/windows, the most common type of tech support scam (49%). Scammers most often tricked consumers into downloading software (44%) or directing them to a specific website (34%). Fewer consumers reported losing money directly as a result of the tech support scam; 6% vs. 9% in 2016.
- **Tech support scams cause more than financial losses:** An additional 8% of consumers who didn't directly lose money to scams spent time and money checking and repairing their PCs. The combination of monetary and time losses produced high levels of stress as 76% of consumers who encountered tech support scams said they suffered moderate to severe stress from the scam.
- **Consumers were more suspicious of potential tech support scams:** Heightened skepticism and distrust about potential tech support scams contributed to better outcomes for consumers. 75% of consumers believed it highly unlikely that a reputable company would initiate unsolicited contact and 83% would distrust that type of communication, up 12 and 17-points respectively. Only 41% of consumers who experienced a tech support scam would trust companies not to sell them unnecessary support or repair services. Over seven-in-ten consumers who experienced scams lost trust in software and technology companies ability to protect them from tech support scams.
- **Scammers most often requested consumers to download software or visit a specific website:** Unfortunately, consumers took these two actions most often during a potential tech support scam interaction. In response to a hypothetical unsolicited contact, 38% reported they would try to block the company from contacting them while 33% would spent time researching the problem. Search engines (46%) and company websites (31%) were employed most often to learn and get help with tech support scams.
- **Gen Z, Millennials and Males were the most vulnerable to tech support scams:** These groups were the most likely to lose money after continuing an interaction. They engaged in riskier online behavior such as visiting torrent sites, have a greater familiarity with technology companies than older generations and were potentially hurt by overconfidence in their device and Web expertise. Telephone tech support scams were the one area experienced more by Boomers/older consumers than by younger internet users.
- **The future of tech support scams:** This research suggests that both education and technology can play a role in reducing consumer's vulnerability to tech support scams. A 12-point drop in scammers asking for social security numbers (or their international equivalents) reflects the power of awareness building and education while increased adoption of ad-blocking technology in recent years potentially contributed to a significant decline in pop-up ads/windows scams.

\*A tech support scam is a phone call, email or online interaction which appears to be from a reputable company, claiming that your computer is infected with a virus

# Study overview

- Examines the incidence and consequences of tech support scams worldwide
- Web based survey of 16,048 adult internet users in 16 countries worldwide (1,000 per country)
- Sampled users 18 and older, proportional to internet user population. Equally divided between males and females\*
- Updates a twelve country study done in 2016
- Participating countries: *(those added in 2018 shown in italics)*

Australia	Denmark	Japan	South Africa
Brazil	France	<i>Mexico</i>	<i>Switzerland</i>
<i>Canada</i>	Germany	<i>New Zealand</i>	United Kingdom
China	India	Singapore	USA
- Changes seen in 2018 vs 2016 results remain consistent even if new geos are excluded

\*Within each country readable samples of Gen Z, Millennials, Gen X and Boomers were gathered.  
Worldwide sample is weighted 36% ages 18-34, 30% ages 35-49, and 34% ages 50+.  
Exact percentages in each geo reflect that nation's internet population.

# Glossary of terms

## **Types of tech support scams**

- Email: An unsolicited email that appears to be from a reputable company which claims that your computer is infected with a virus and that they can help resolve the issue.
- Pop-Up: A pop-up window or advertisement online that appears to be from a reputable company which claims that your computer is infected with a virus and that they can help resolve the issue.
- Phone: An unsolicited telephone call from someone claiming to be from a reputable company where the caller told you that your computer may be infected with a virus or some other security or network problem, and that they can help resolve the issue.
- Redirect: Been redirected to a website that appears to be from a reputable company which claims that your computer is infected with a virus and that they can help resolve the issue.

## **Types of actions taken after encountering a tech support scam**

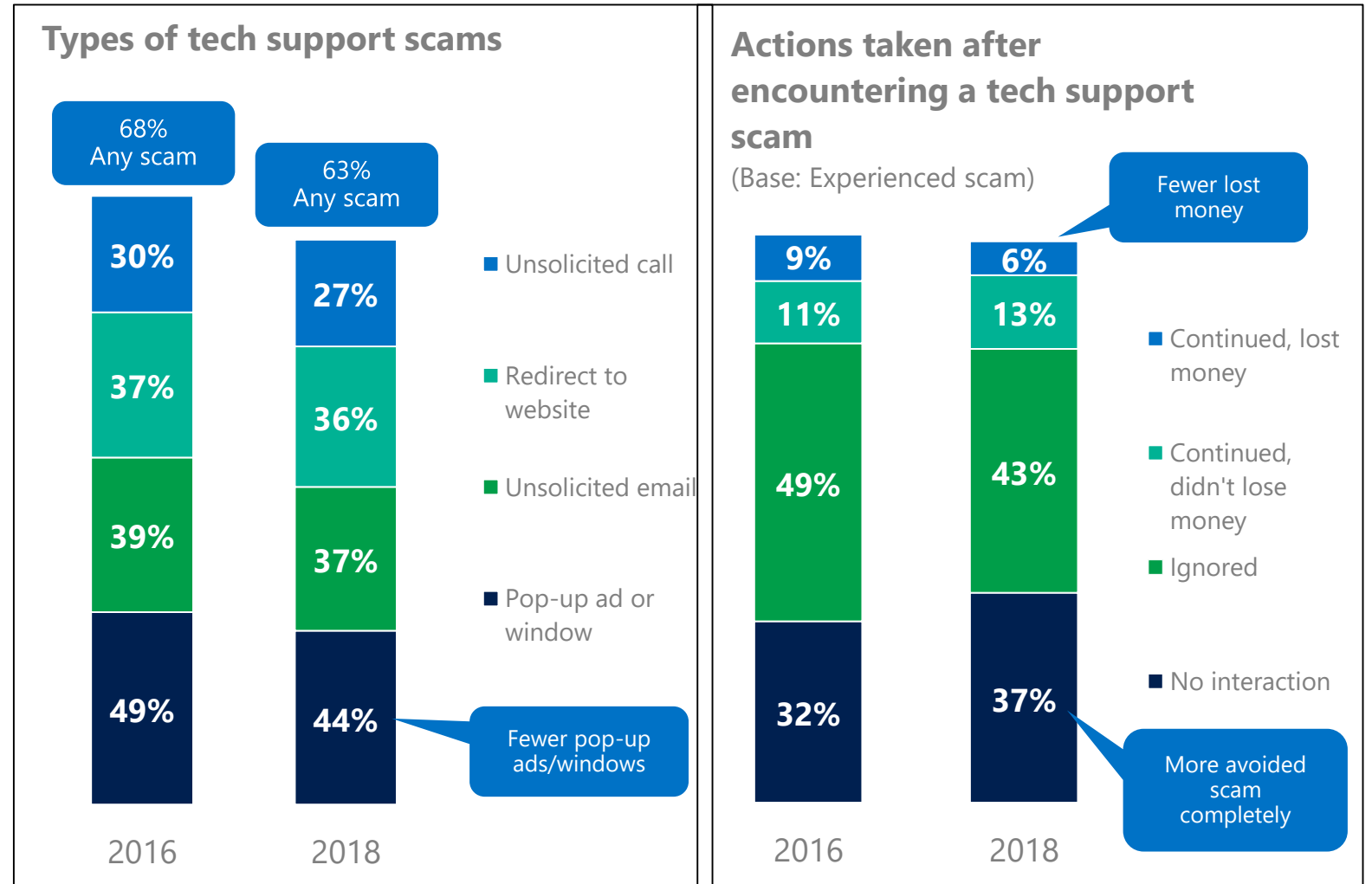
- Ignored the interaction completely
- Continued with the interaction:
  - Continued with the interaction and took the recommended actions
  - Initially continued with the interaction, but then did not take further action

## **Online activities description**

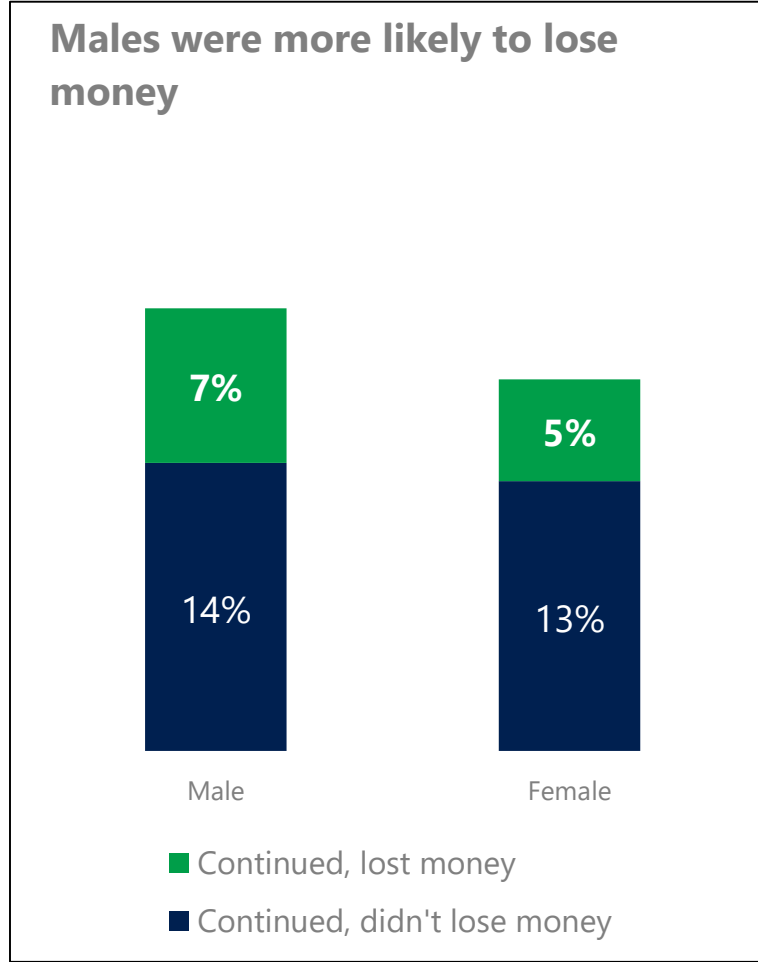
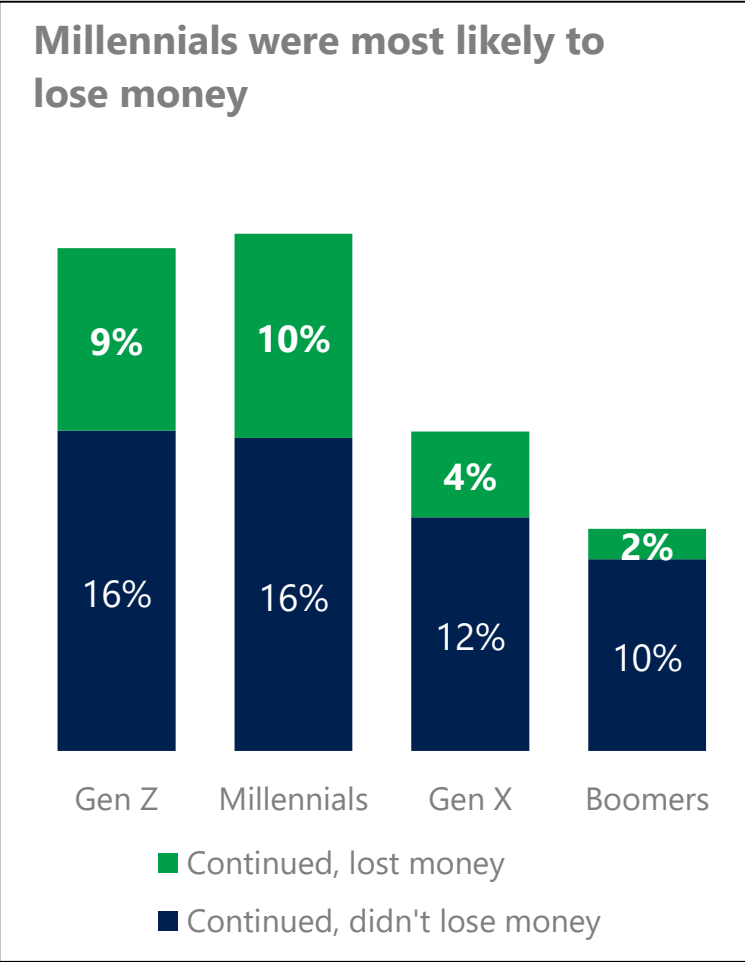
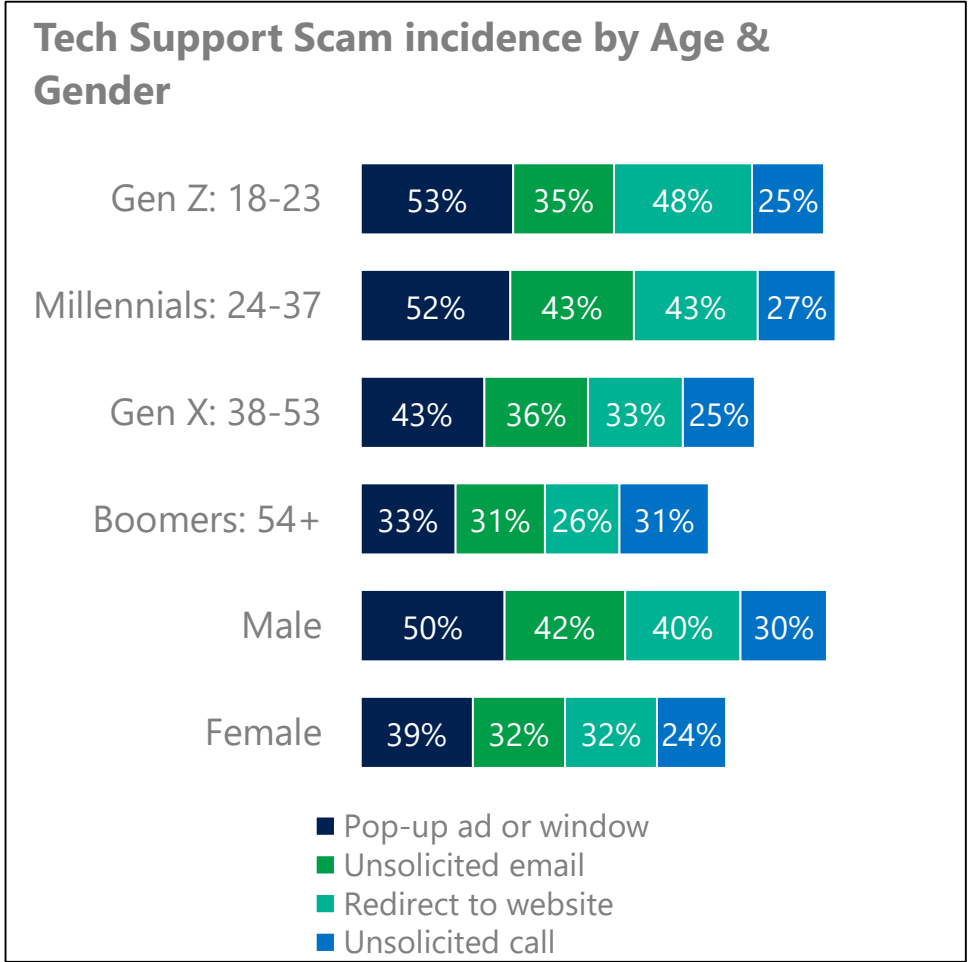
- Access my bank accounts and/or credit card accounts online
- Change passwords for email, social media and financial accounts
- Share my email address in exchange for access to website content
- Use a social media site (e.g., Facebook, Snapchat, Instagram, etc...)
- Download the latest software updates shortly after they are made available
- Download movies, tv shows, music, other video
- Use torrent sites
- Buy products online (includes online auctions and classified ads)

# How pervasive are tech support scams today?

- The percentage of consumers who reported experiencing a tech support scam was 63%, down from 68% in 2016. Fewer pop-up ads/windows fueled the decline.
- Those who lost money directly from a tech support scam fell 3-points to 6%.
- Consumers successfully migrate their response to tech support scams from ignoring (-6) to avoiding the scam completely (+5) potentially via increased deployment of pop-up ad-blockers.
- Scammers were successful in tricking nearly one-in-five consumers into continuing with a potentially fraudulent interaction about the same as in 2016.



# Millennials, Males & Gen Z had the highest exposure to tech support scams

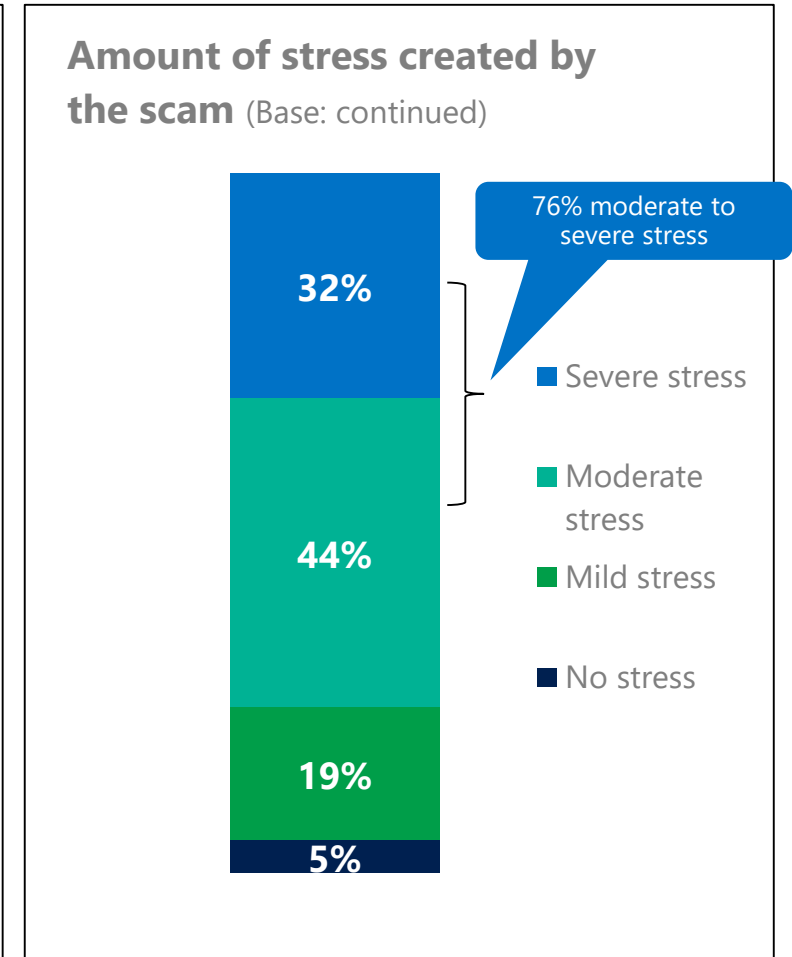
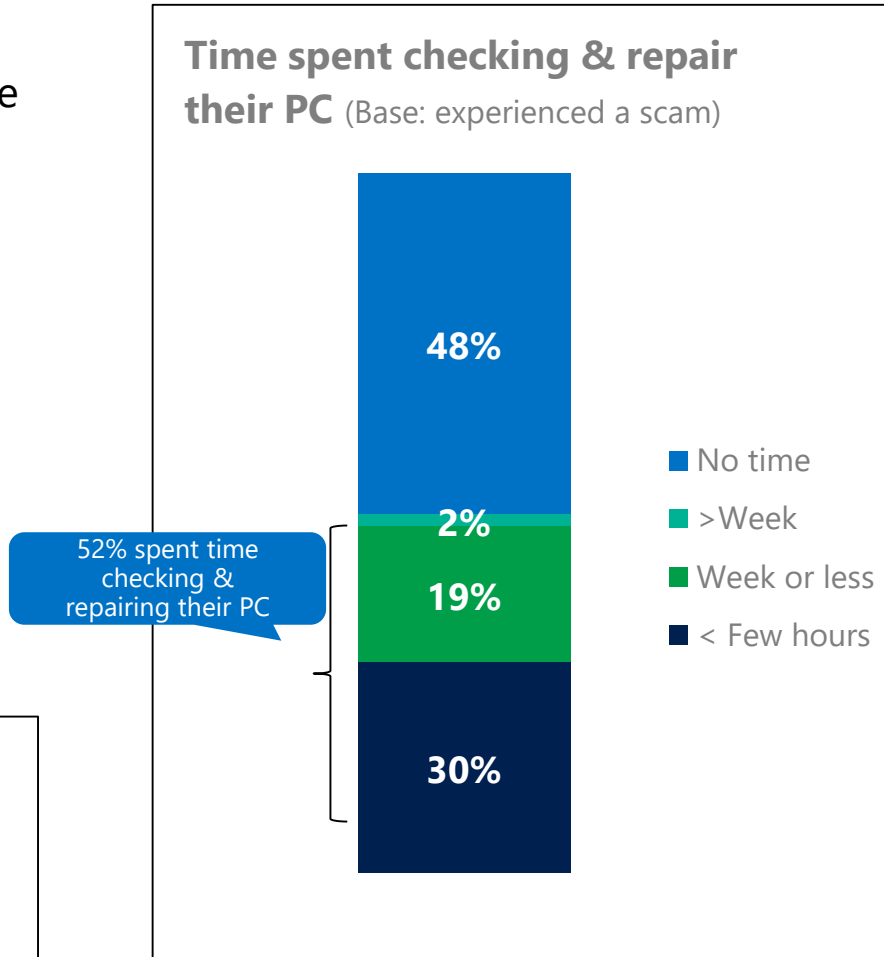


Q1a. Please indicate whether you have experienced any of the following in the last year or so (2017 and later).  
 Q2. For each of the interactions you experienced, please indicate which actions you took  
 Q8. As a result of this interaction, have you lost any money?



# Tech support scams cause more than financial losses

- Among those who experienced a scam, 52% ended up spending time checking and repairing their PC.
- Over three-in-four consumers who continued with a scam\* reported suffering from moderate to severe stress due to the fraudulent interaction.



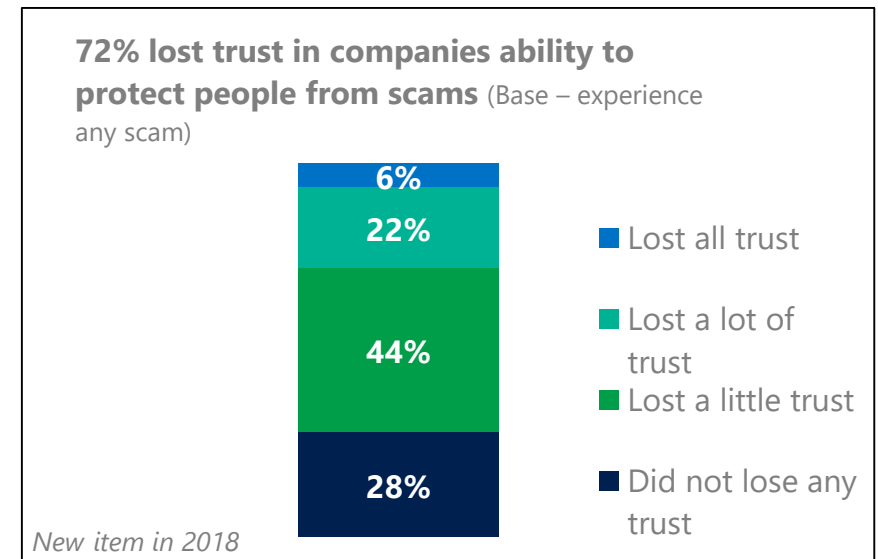
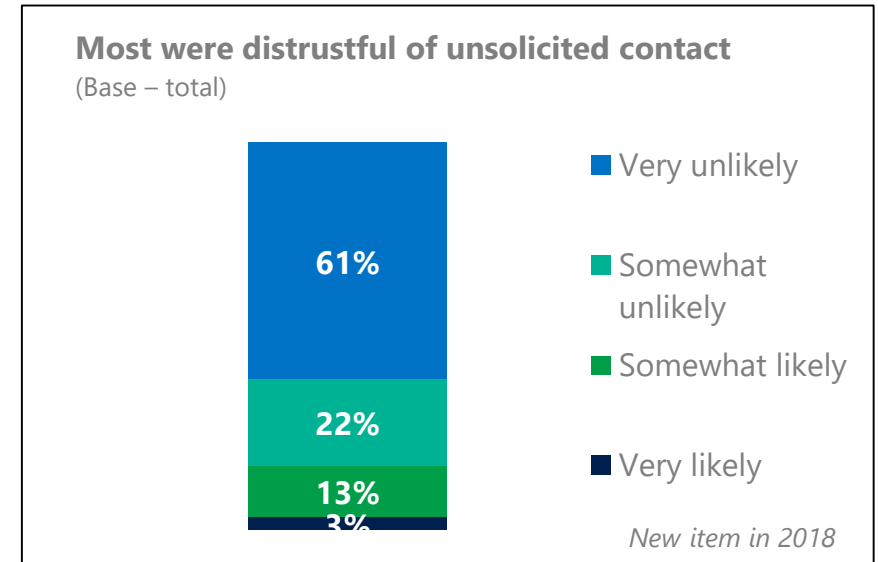
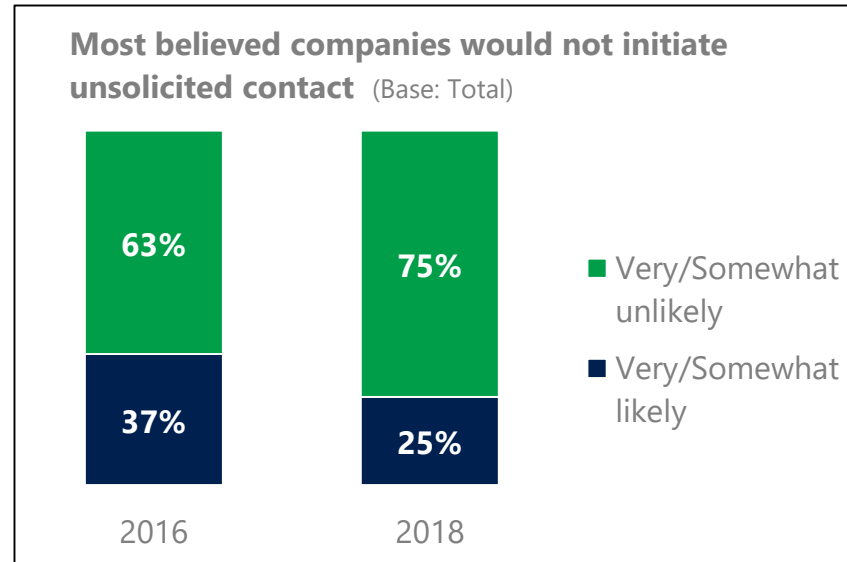
\*That is, consumers who encountered a scam and at least initially started doing what was asked/did not just ignore it. This is a mix of those who:

- Continued with the interaction and took the recommended actions
- Initially continued with the interaction, but then did not take further action

New items in 2018

# How are consumers fighting back against tech support scams?

- Consumers have developed a healthy skepticism about unsolicited contact from technology and software companies. Unsolicited contact has become a red flag for consumers that signals a potential scam.
- If faced with an unsolicited contact from a reputable tech company, 38% of consumers would try to block that company from making contact in the future and 33% would look up the issue online.
- 46% of consumers rely on search engines to research tech support scams and 31% use company websites.

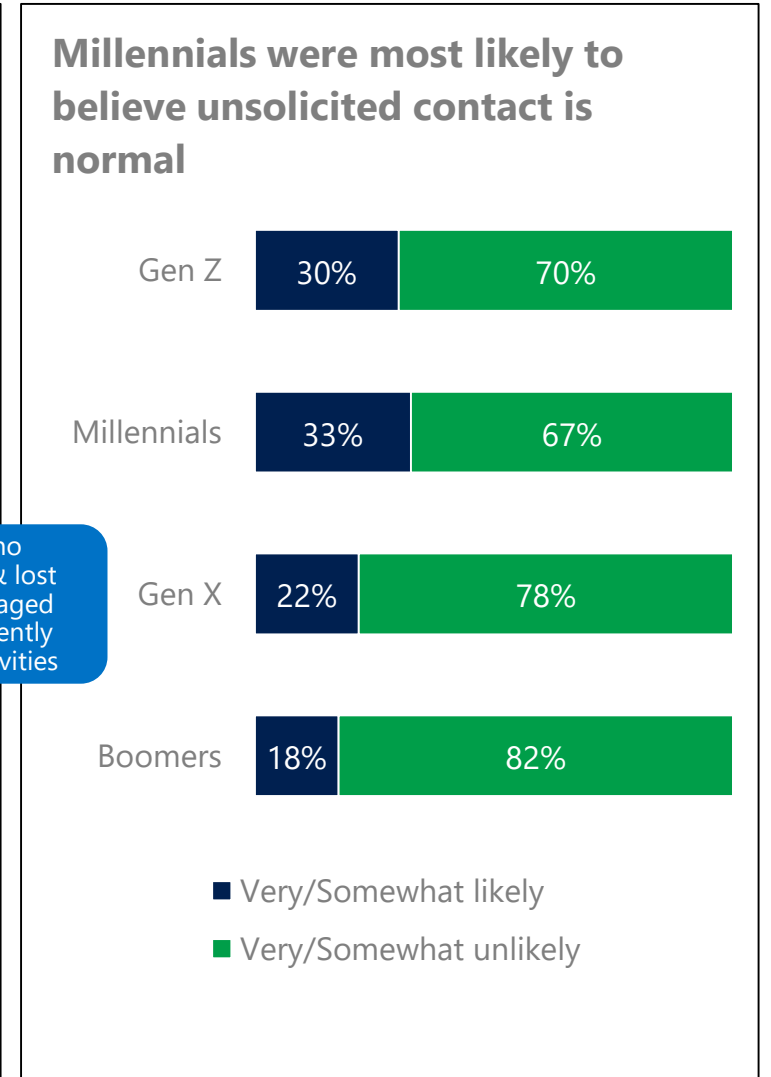
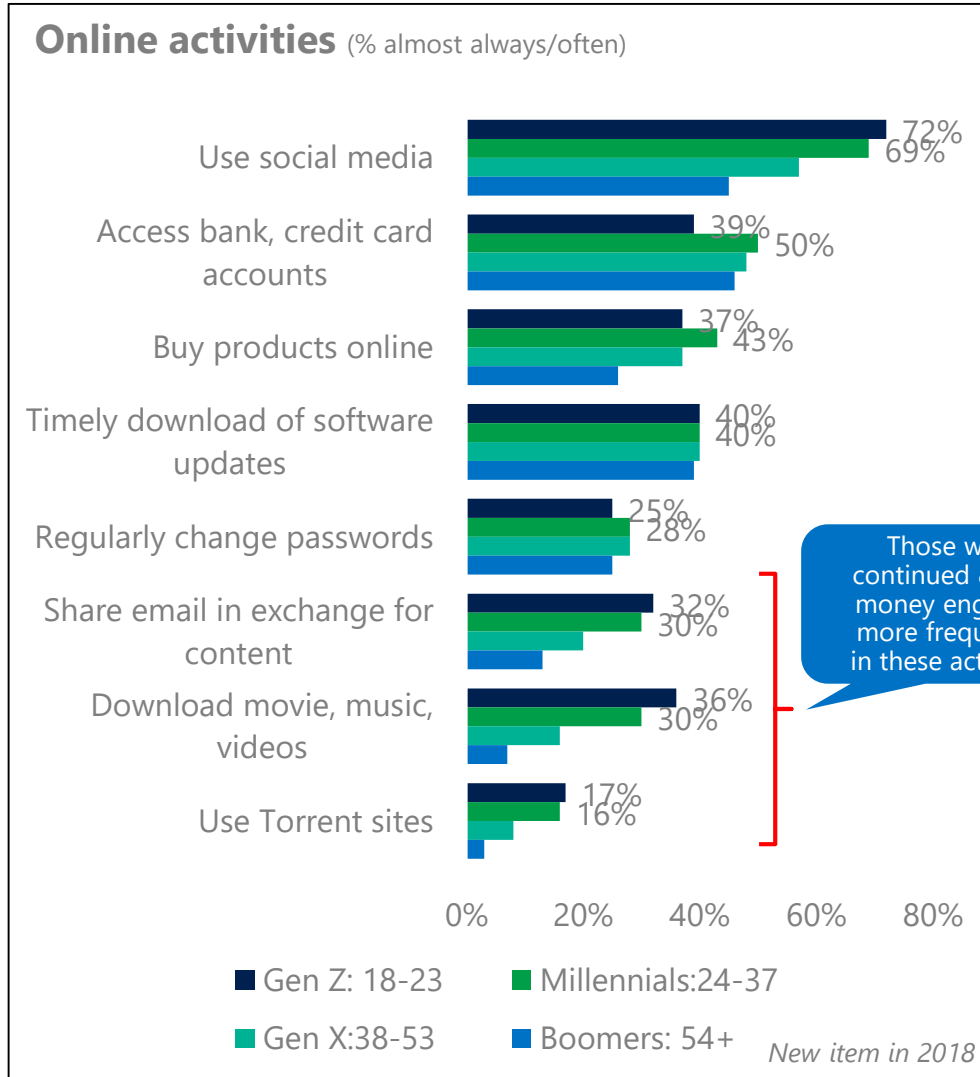


Q14. If you were to receive an unsolicited call or email like this from someone claiming to be from a reputable company offering you help, how likely would you be to trust them? Q15. How likely do you think it is that a reputable company would contact customers without first receiving some form of interaction from the customer? Q13b. How much do you trust software and technology companies not to sell you unnecessary support or repair services to fix new problems that are discovered on your computer? Q13c. Thinking back on each interaction, how much trust have you lost in reputable companies like Apple, Facebook, Google and Microsoft to protect you from the types of interactions you experienced?



# Why are Gen Z, Millennials & Males more vulnerable to tech support scams?

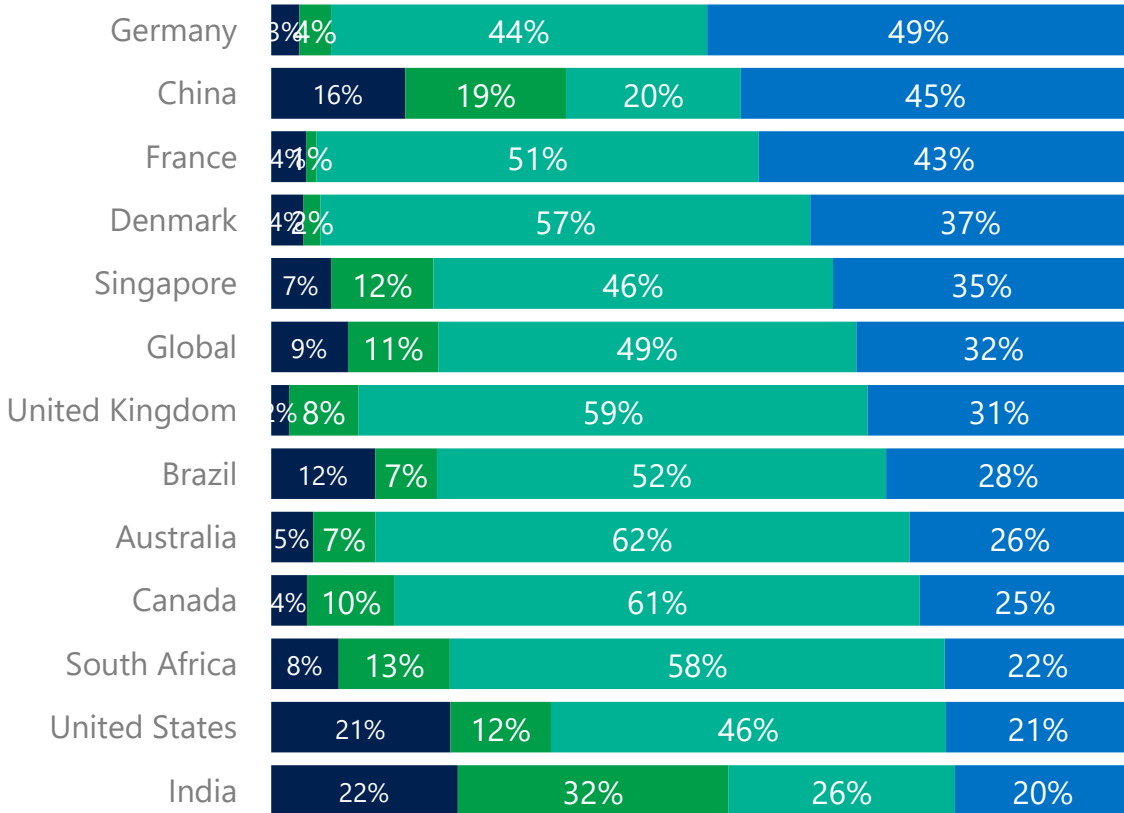
- Millennials and Gen Z engage in more risky online activities than older generations that included exchanging email for access to content, downloading movies, music, videos or using torrent sites.
- The youngest generations rated themselves highest on web and computer expertise suggesting that overconfidence in their online abilities could cause them to be less cautious and thereby more susceptible to scams.
- Millennials and Gen Z were found to be more trusting than older generations of reputable companies making unsolicited contact. Greater trust may result from a lack of experience or naivete as well as differing expectations among those more familiar with technology companies than older generations.



Q15. How likely do you think it is that a reputable company would contact customers without first receiving some form of interaction from the customer?  
 Q21a. Please check how often you do the following activities when you are online?

# Impact of tech support scams by country 2016 & 2018

**2016** (ranked by no interaction)



Continued -- lost money
  Continued - didn't lose  
 Ignored
  No interaction

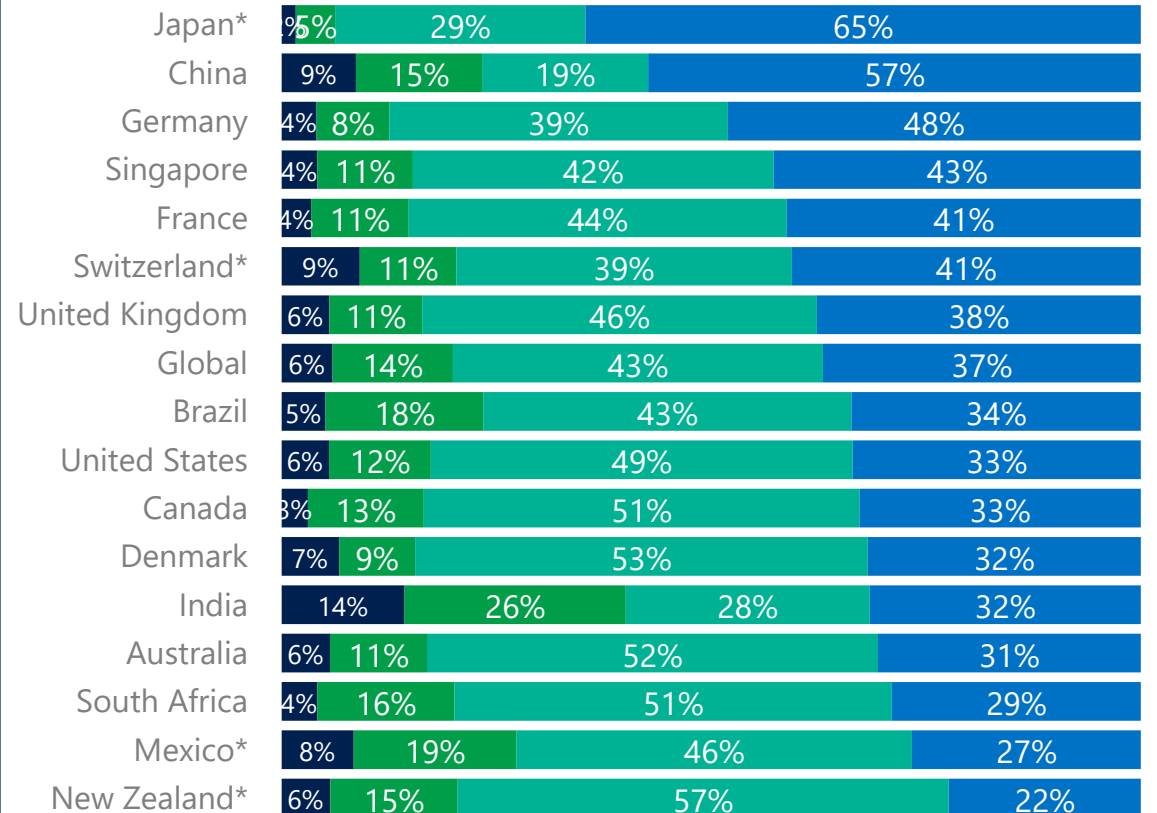
Fewer  
scams



More  
scams

\*New in 2018

**2018** (ranked by no interaction)

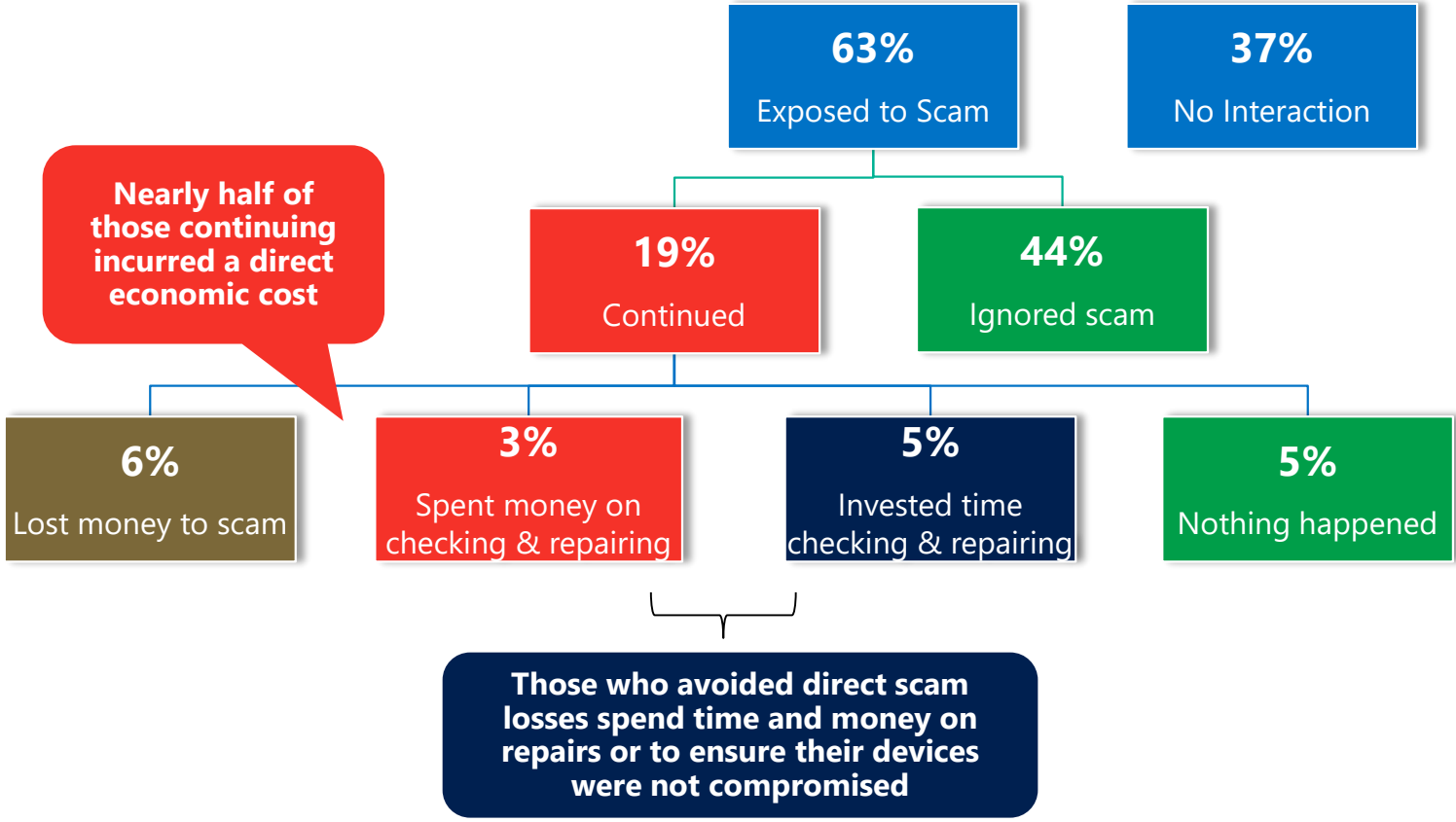


Continued -- lost money
  Continued - didn't lose  
 Ignored
  No interaction

Note: Country percentages may not add to 100% due to rounding  
 Q2. For each of the interactions you experienced, please indicate which actions you took, Q8. As a result of this interaction, have you lost any money?

# Anatomy of tech support scams

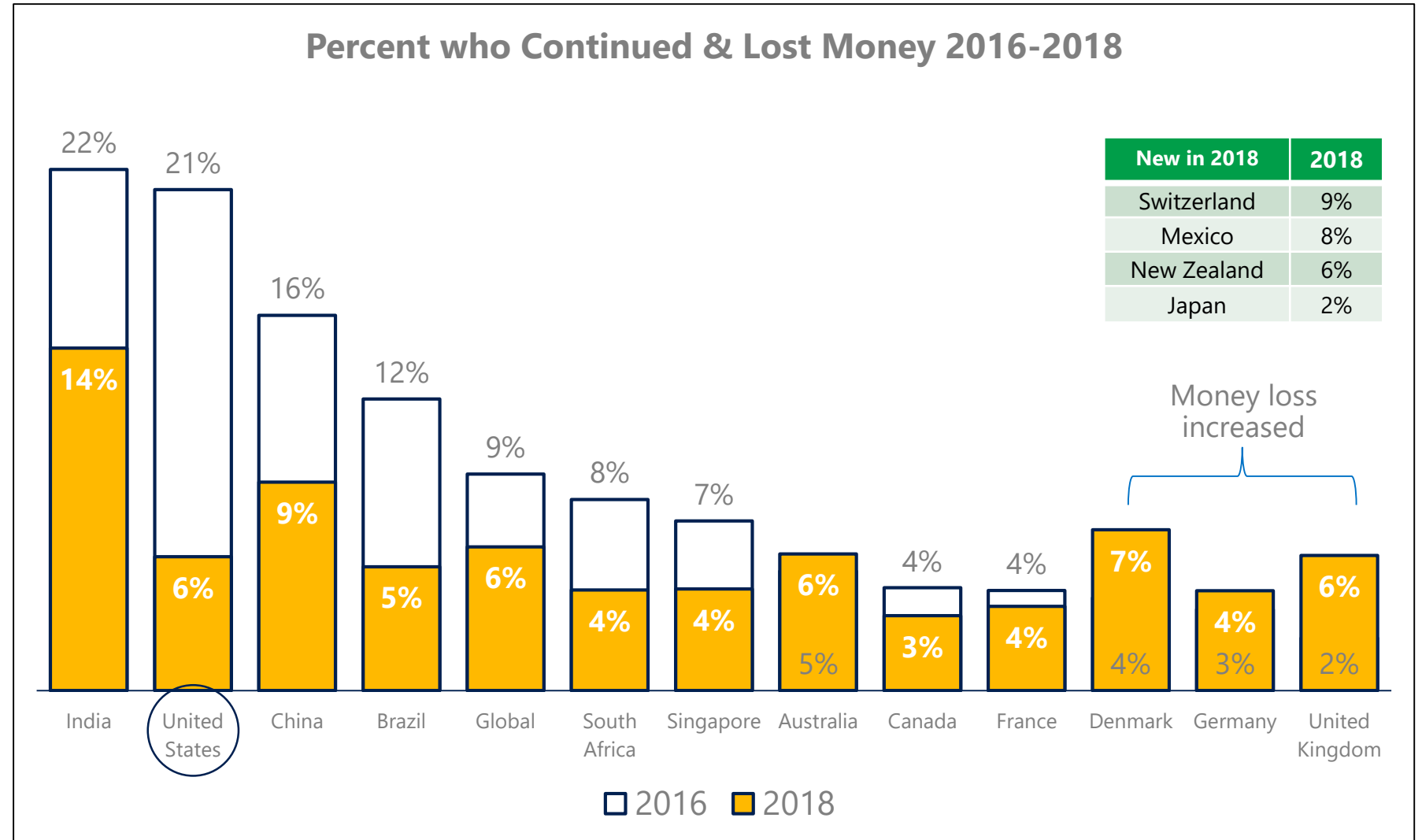
Scam exposure had costs beyond the initial loss of money



Q2. For each of the interactions you experienced, please indicate which actions you took  
Q8. As a result of this interaction, have you lost any money?  
Q12. To date, how much money, if any, has it cost you to fix or investigate further as to whether your computer had been compromised after this interaction?  
Q12A. To date, how much time has it taken to fix or investigate further as to whether your computer had been compromised after this interaction?

# Rates of tech support scam loss became more consistent worldwide

- ▶ The worldwide decline in scam loss was driven by declines in countries that had the highest rates of loss in 2016, led by India, U.S., China and Brazil.
- ▶ Conversely, countries which had the lowest scam incidence in 2016 (UK, Germany, Denmark) have regressed toward the worldwide average.
- ▶ The U.S. was the single greatest 'success story', going from over two in 10 suffering losses to only 6%.



New in 2018	2018
Switzerland	9%
Mexico	8%
New Zealand	6%
Japan	2%

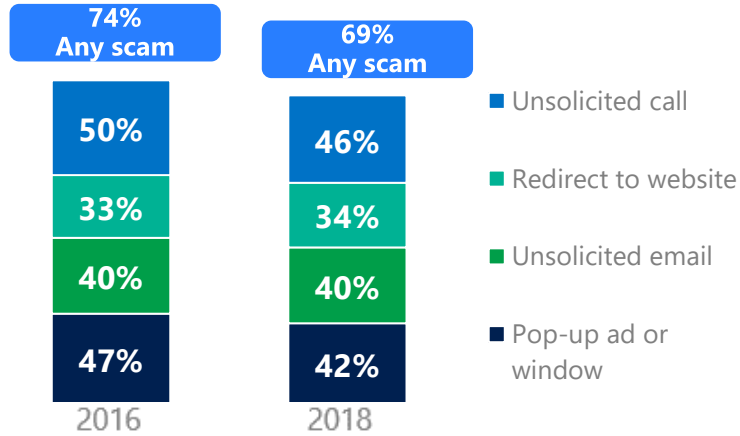
Money loss increased

# Country Snapshots

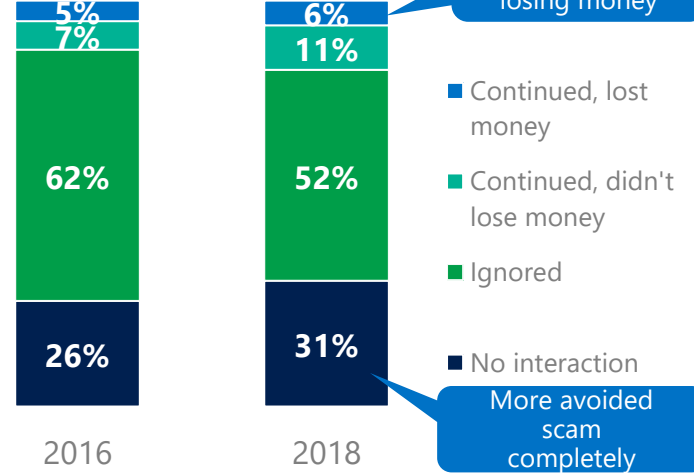
# Country Snapshot Australia



## Types of tech support scams

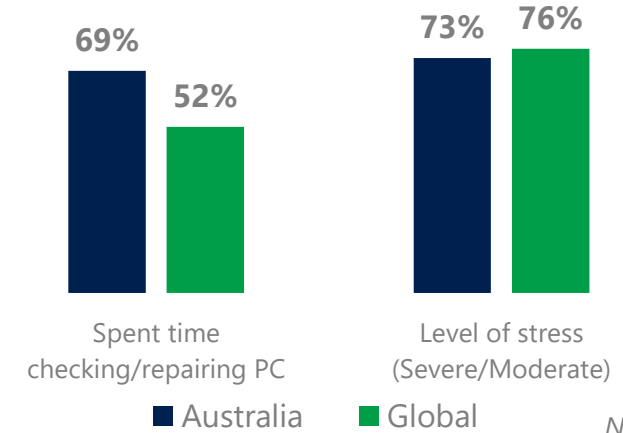


## Possible scam outcomes

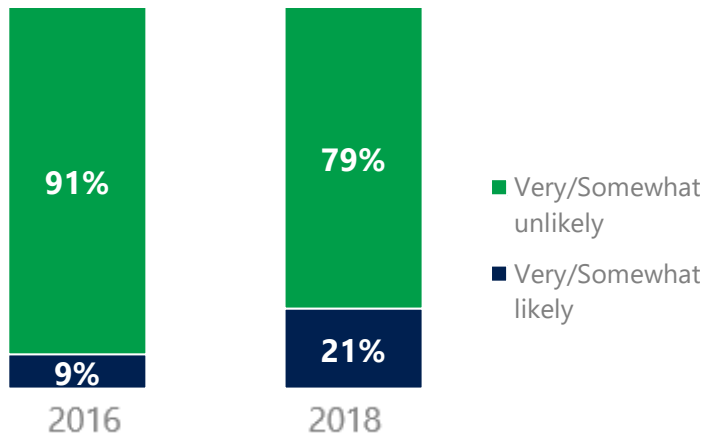


## Costs spread beyond monetary loss

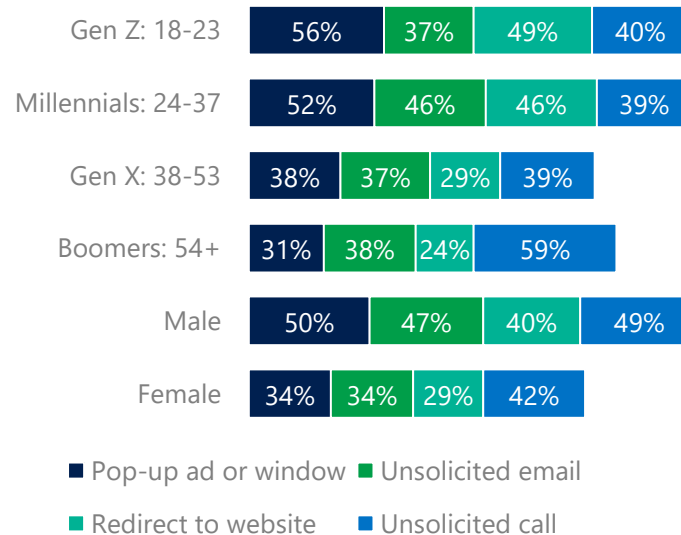
(Base: those who continued)



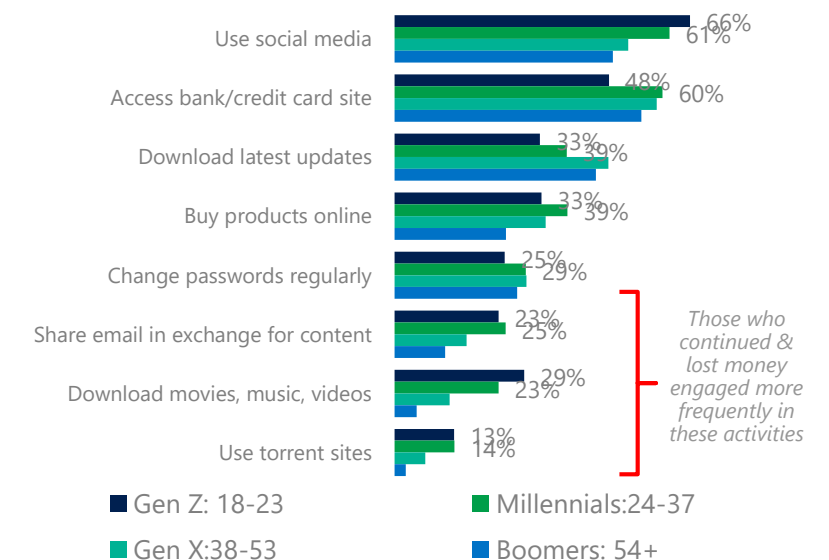
## Percent believing companies would not initiate unsolicited contact fell



## Tech support scam incidence by age & gender



## Online activities (% almost always/often)



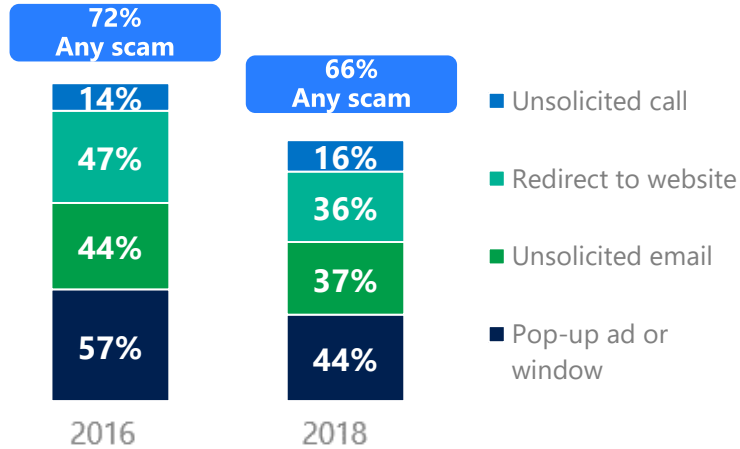
*New item in 2018*



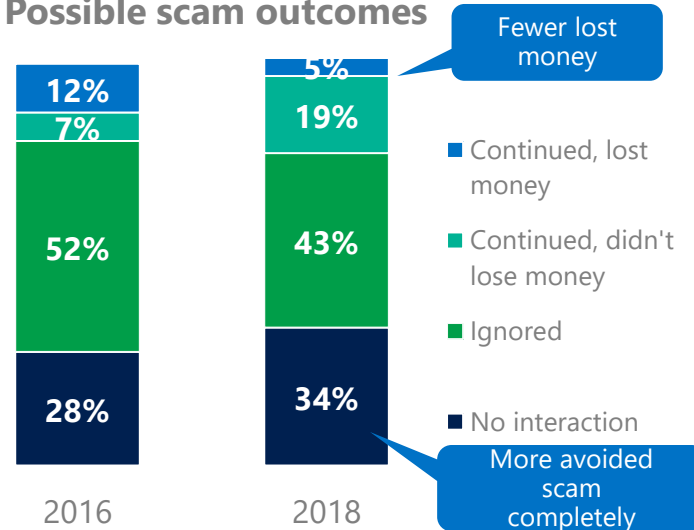
# Country Snapshot Brazil



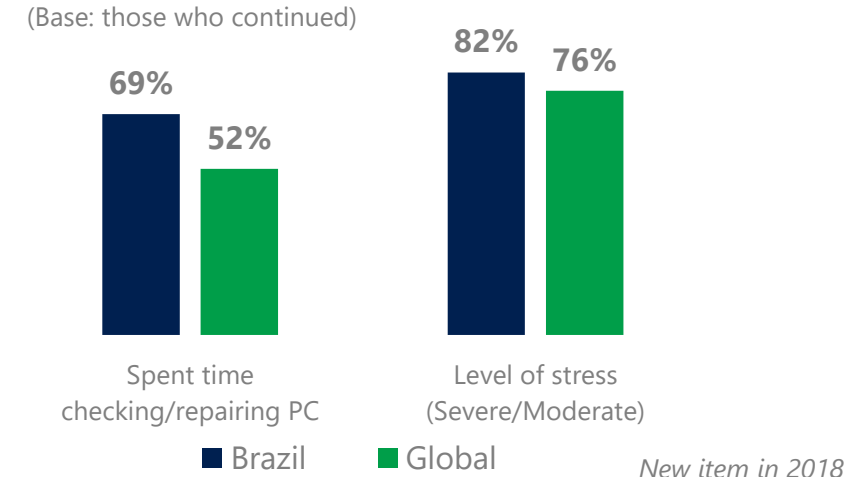
## Types of tech support scams



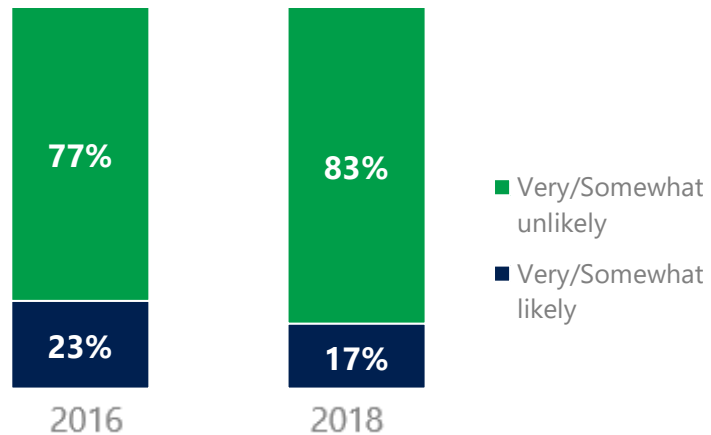
## Possible scam outcomes



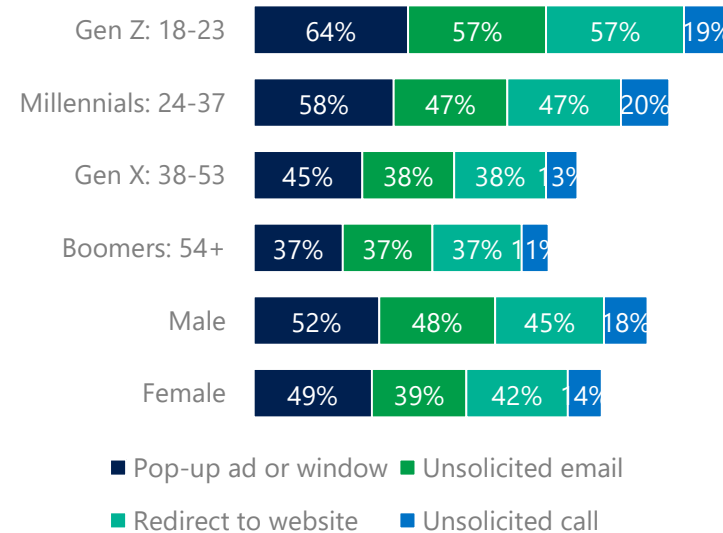
## Costs spread beyond monetary loss



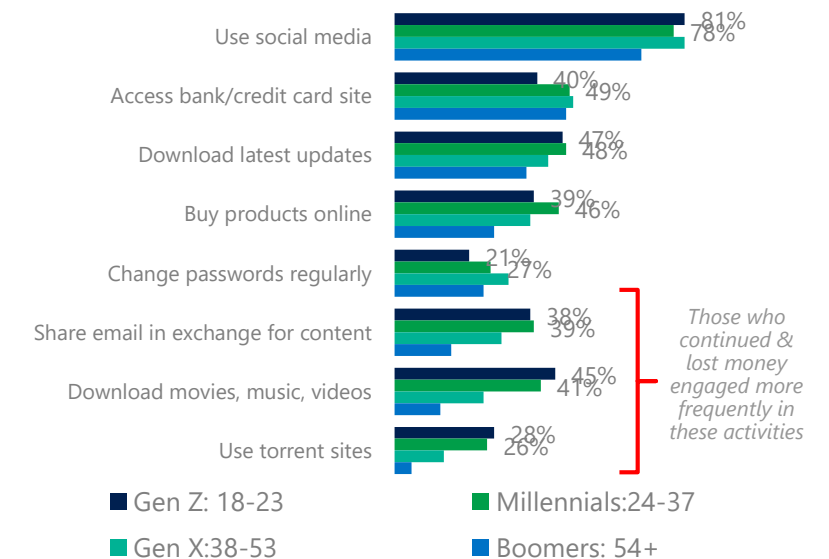
## Most believed companies would not initiate unsolicited contact



## Tech support scam incidence by age & gender



## Online activities (% almost always/often)

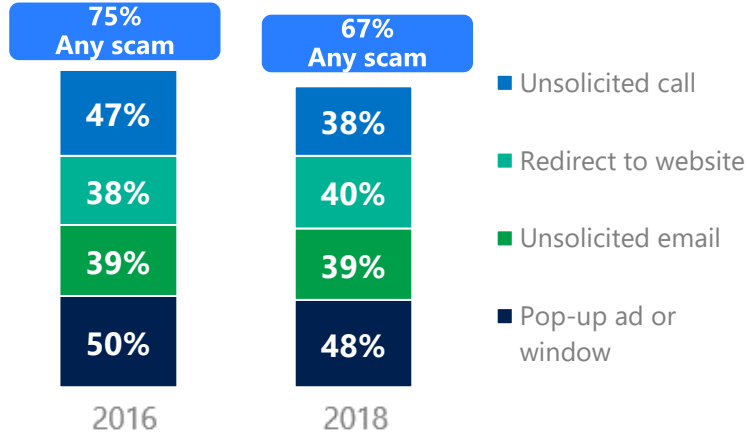


New item in 2018

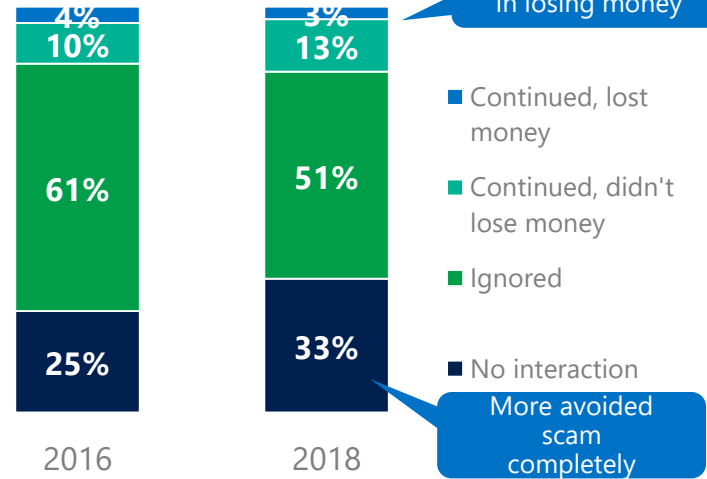
# Country Snapshot Canada



## Types of tech support scams

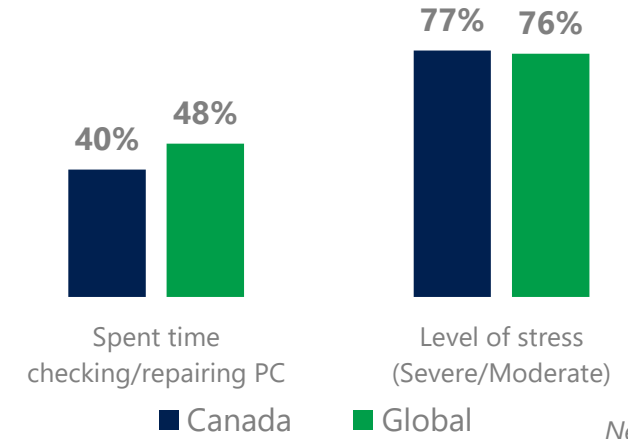


## Possible scam outcomes

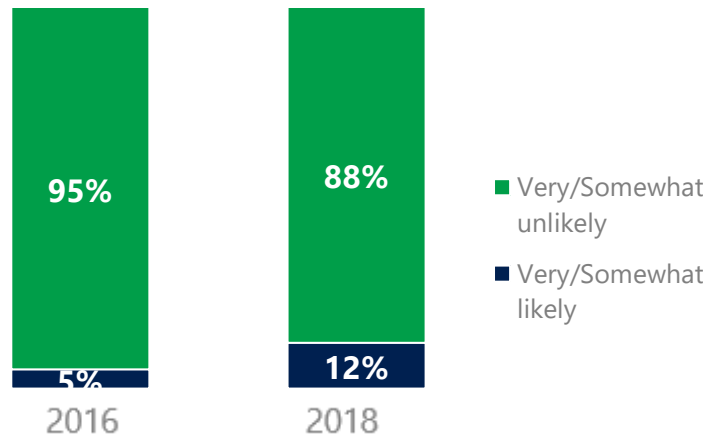


## Costs spread beyond monetary loss

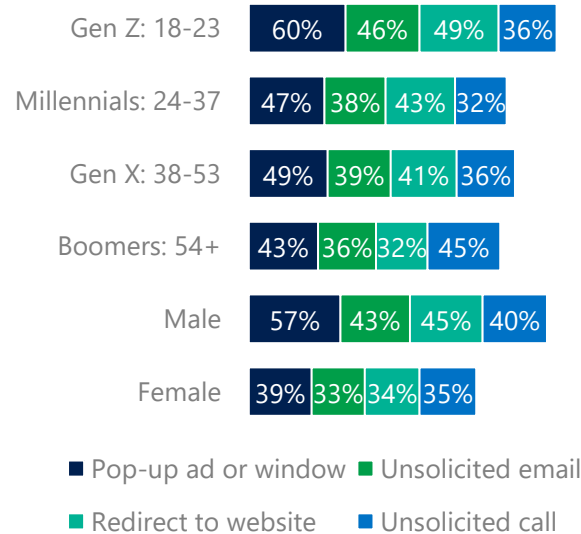
(Base: those who continued)



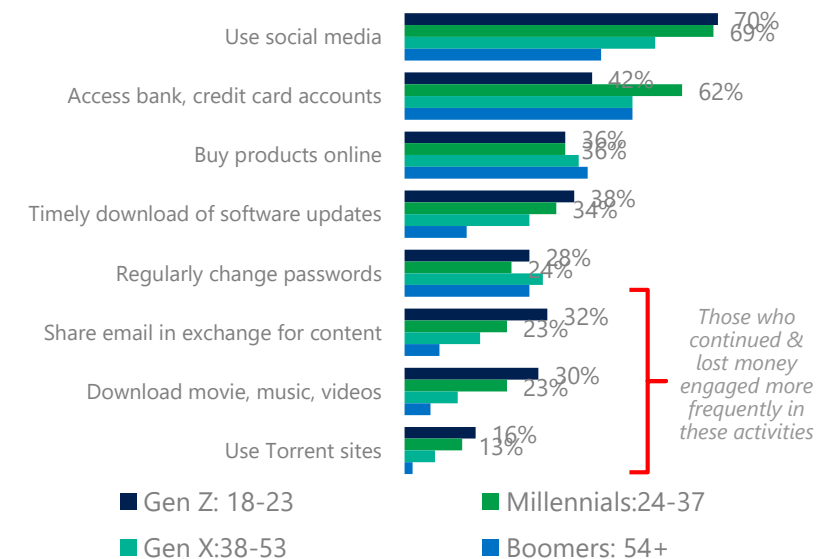
## 88% believed companies would not initiate unsolicited contact



## Tech support scam incidence by age & gender



## Online activities (% almost always/often)

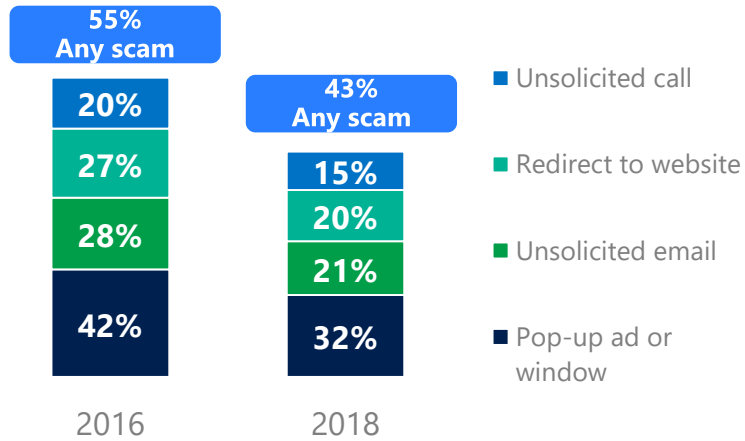


New item in 2018

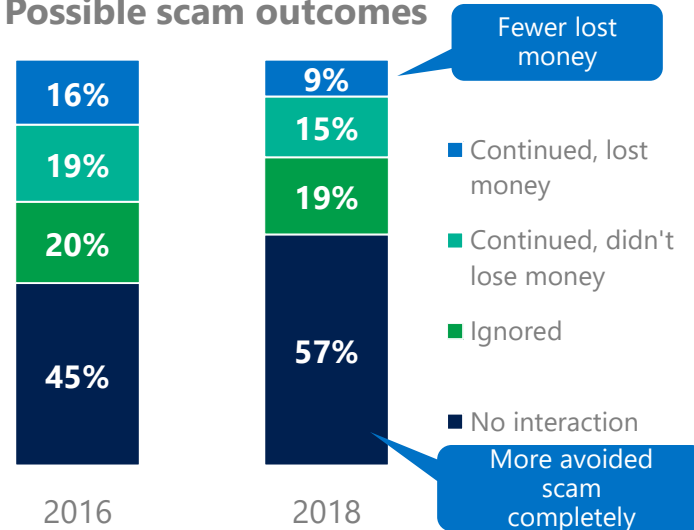
# Country Snapshot China



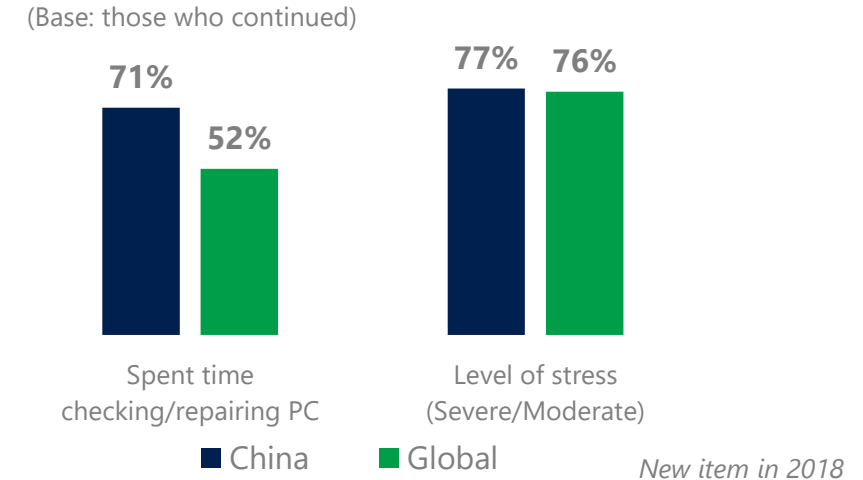
## Types of tech support scams



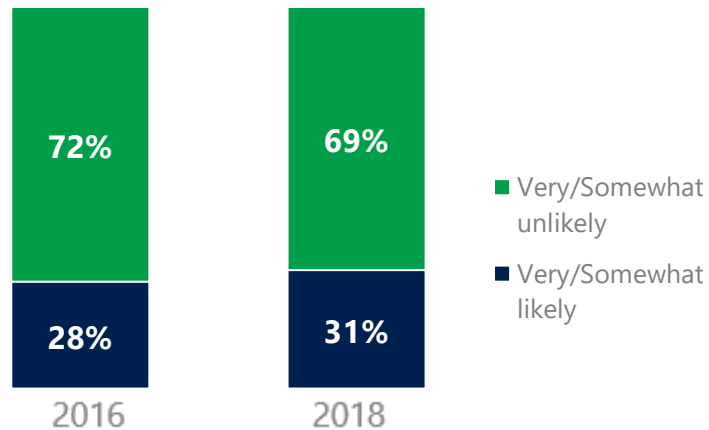
## Possible scam outcomes



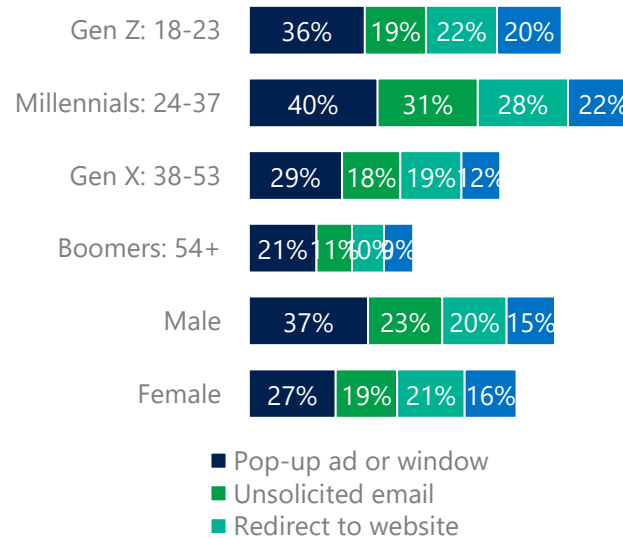
## Costs spread beyond monetary loss



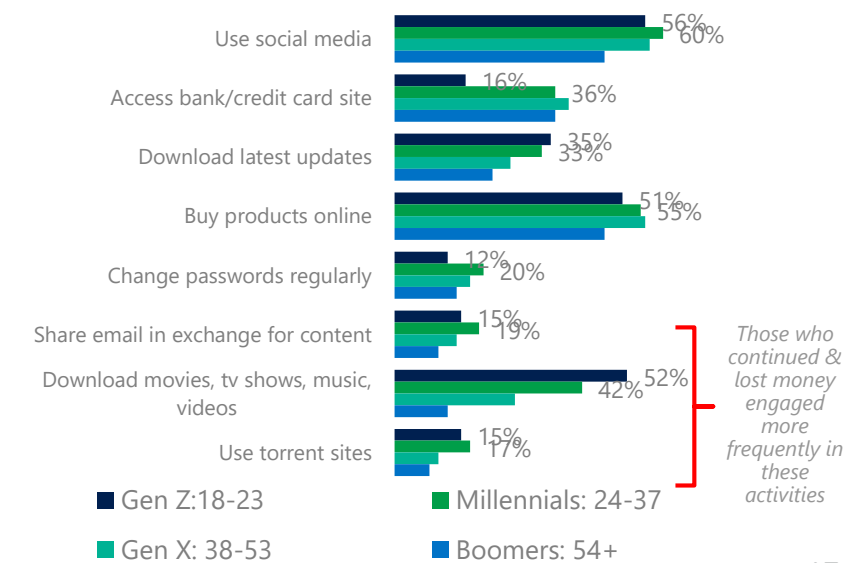
## Most believed companies would not initiate unsolicited contact



## Tech support scam incidence by age & gender



## Online activities (% almost always/often)

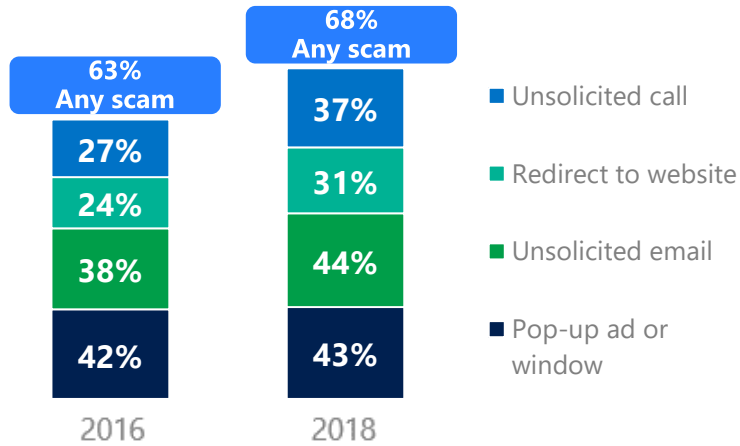


*New item in 2018*

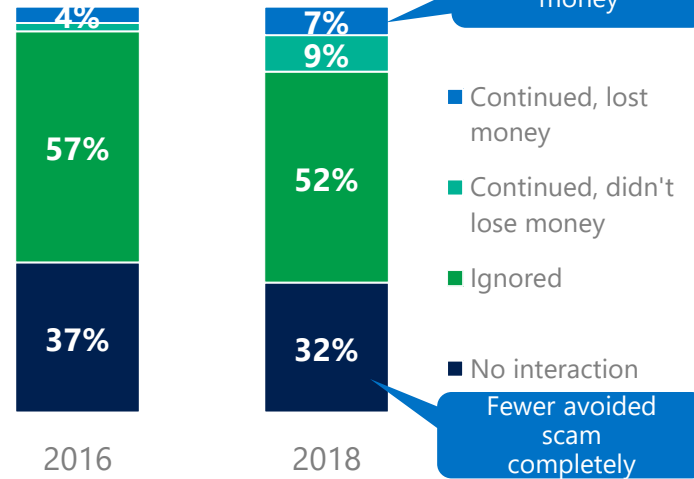
# Country Snapshot Denmark



## Types of tech support scams

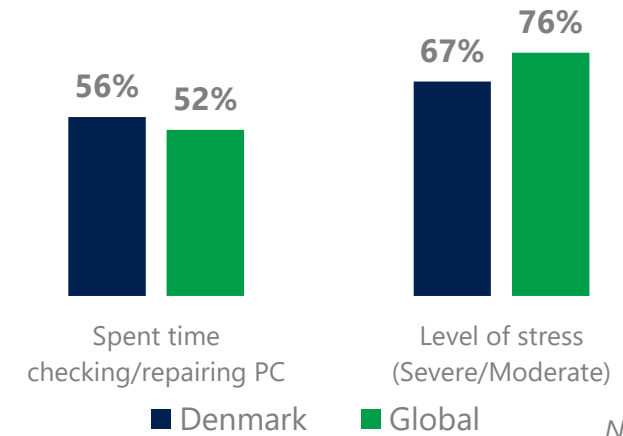


## Possible scam outcomes

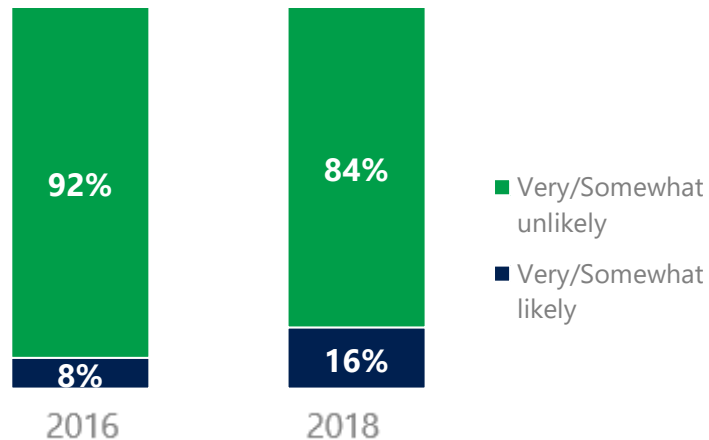


## Costs spread beyond monetary loss

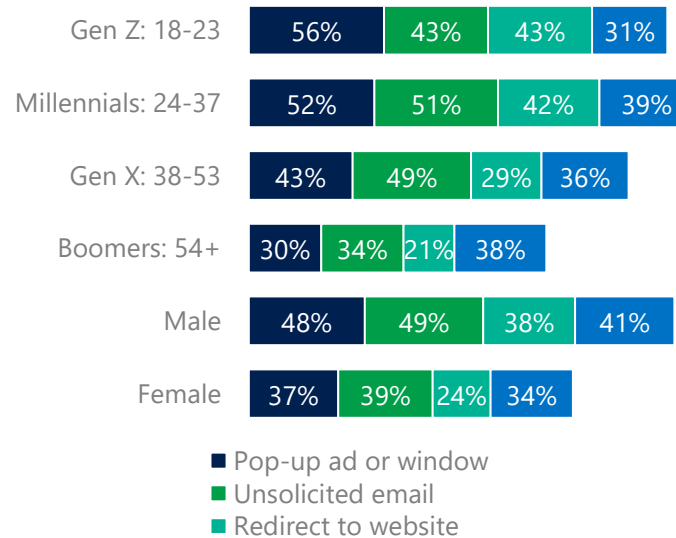
(Base: those who continued)



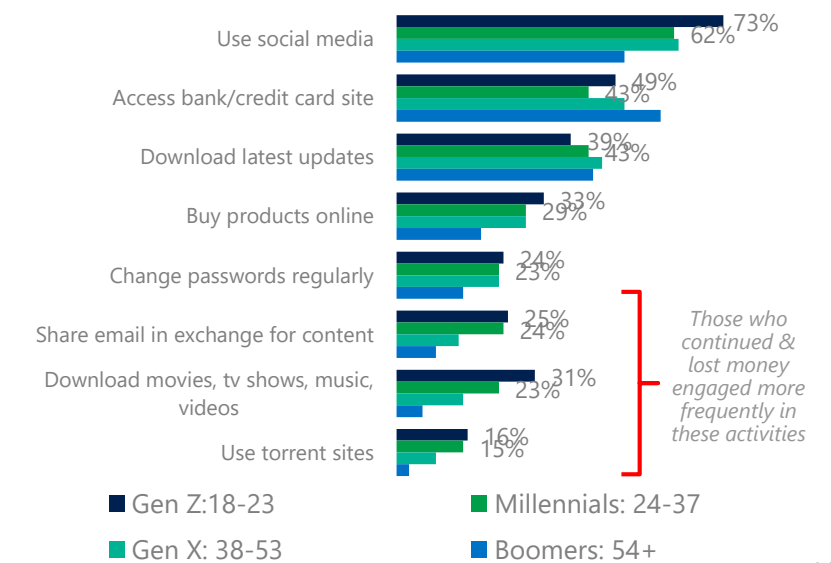
## Most believed companies would not initiate unsolicited contact



## Tech support scam incidence by age & gender

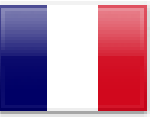


## Online activities (% almost always/often)

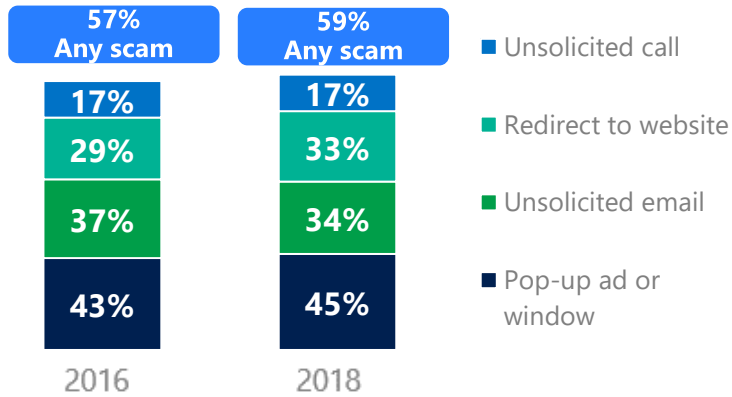


New item in 2018

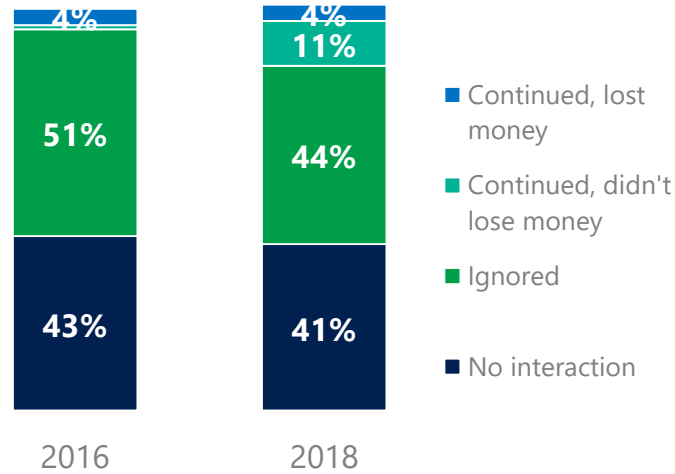
# Country Snapshot France



## Types of tech support scams

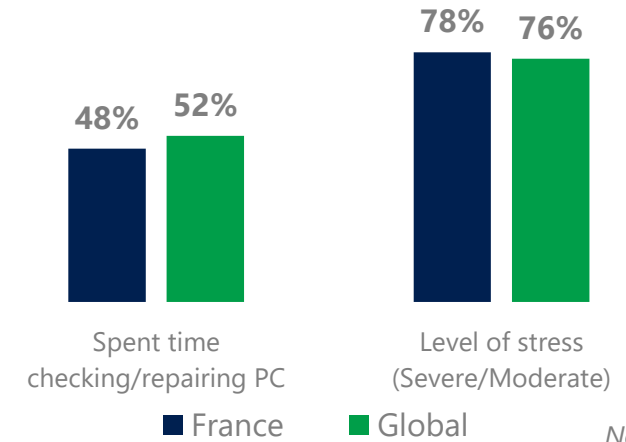


## Possible scam outcomes



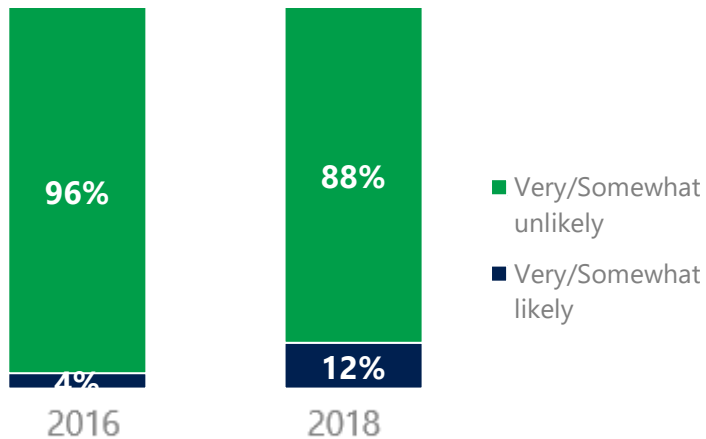
## Costs spread beyond monetary loss

(Base: those who continued)

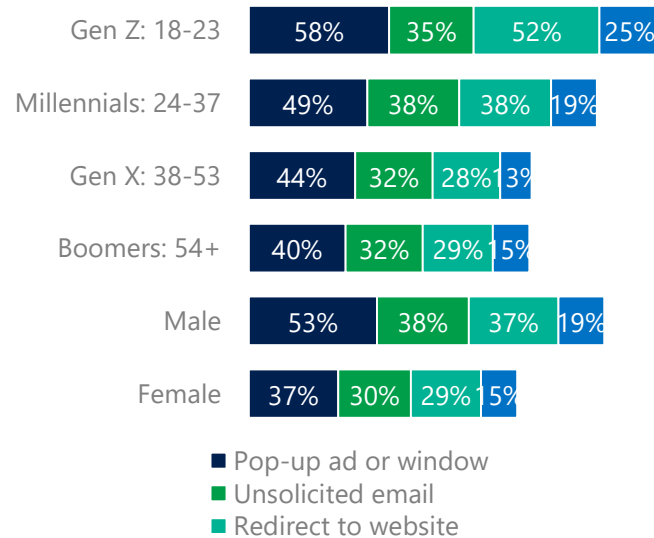


*New item in 2018*

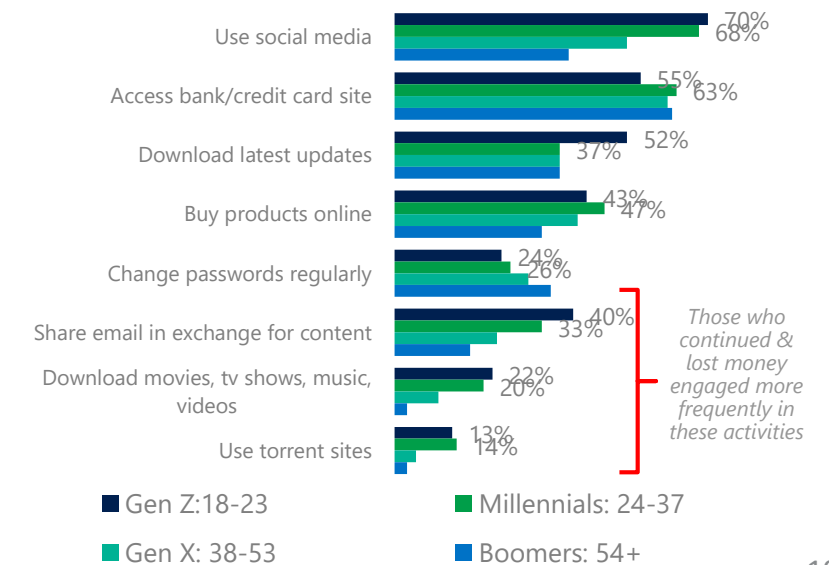
## Most believed companies would not initiate unsolicited contact



## Tech support scam incidence by age & gender



## Online activities (% almost always/often)



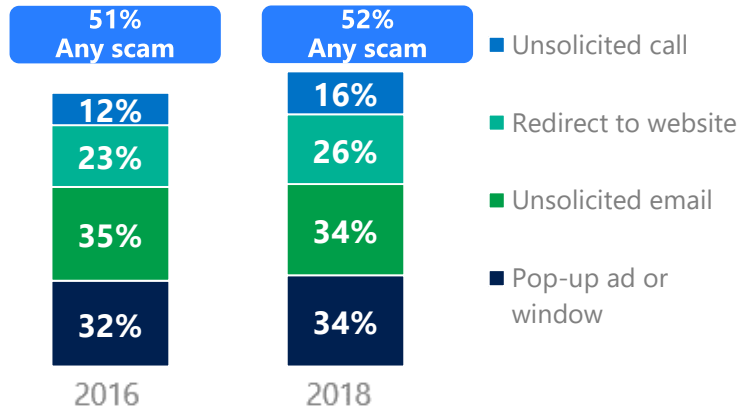
*Those who continued & lost money engaged more frequently in these activities*

*New item in 2018*

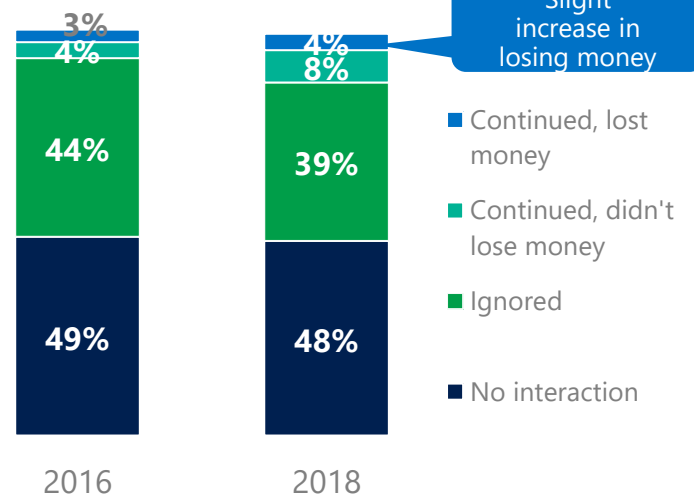
# Country Snapshot Germany



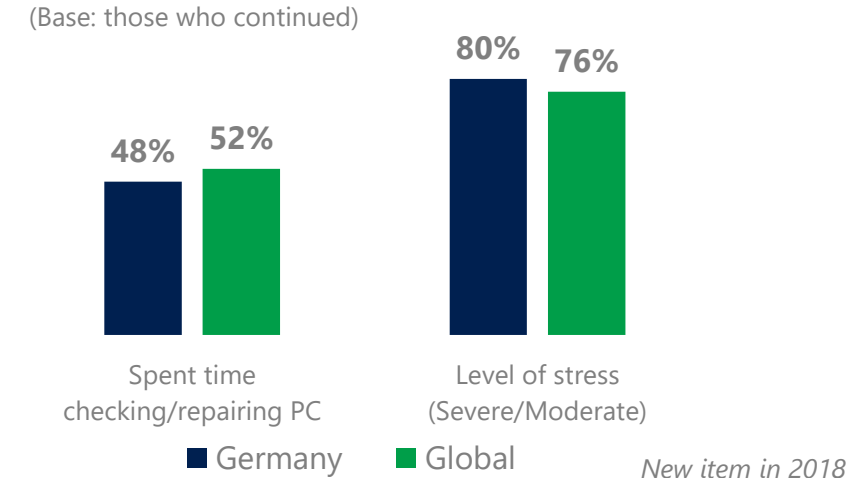
## Types of tech support scams



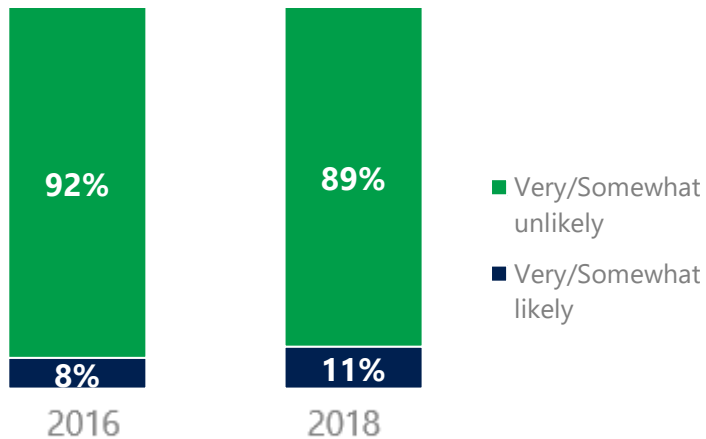
## Possible scam outcomes



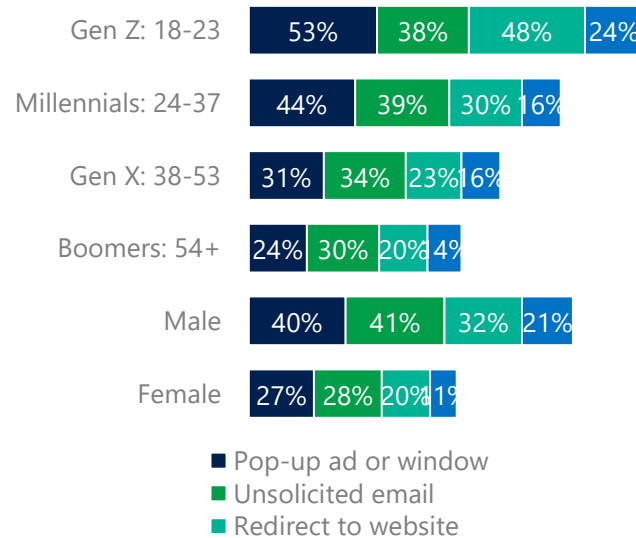
## Costs spread beyond monetary loss



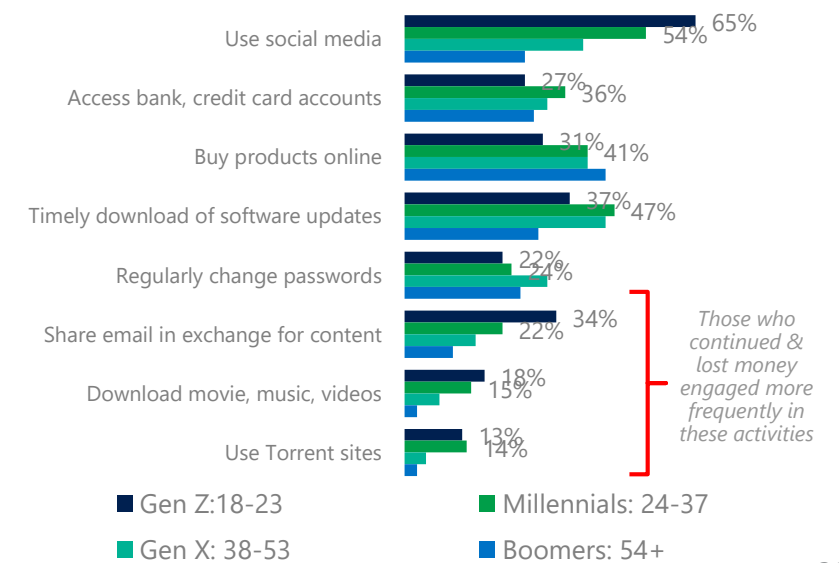
## Most believed companies would not initiate unsolicited contact



## Tech support scam incidence by age & gender



## Online activities (% almost always/often)



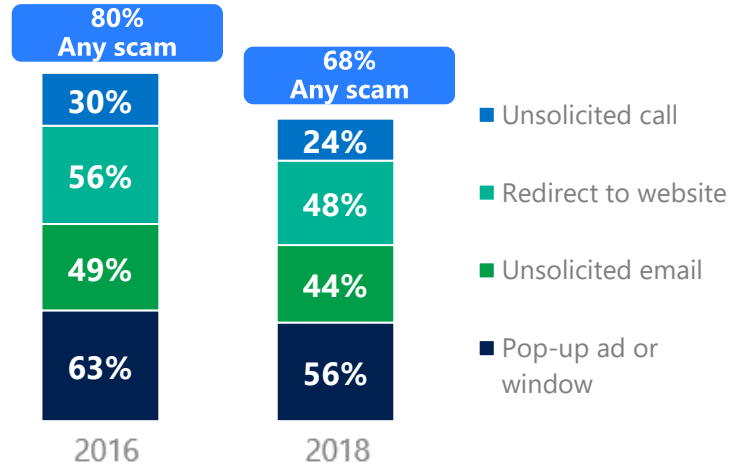
New item in 2018



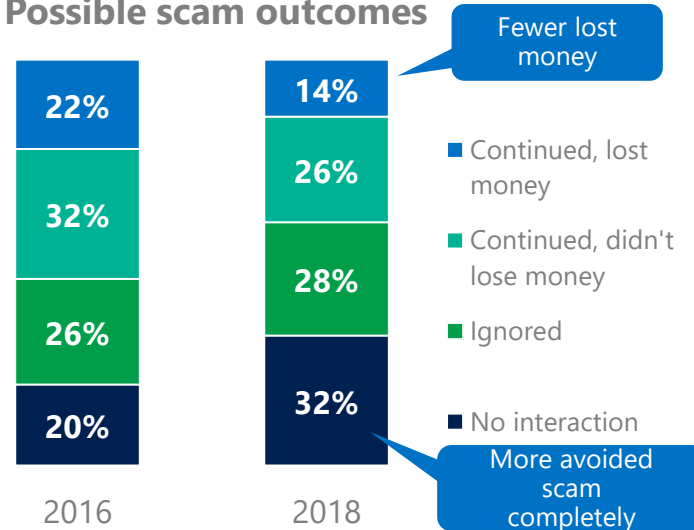
# Country Snapshot India



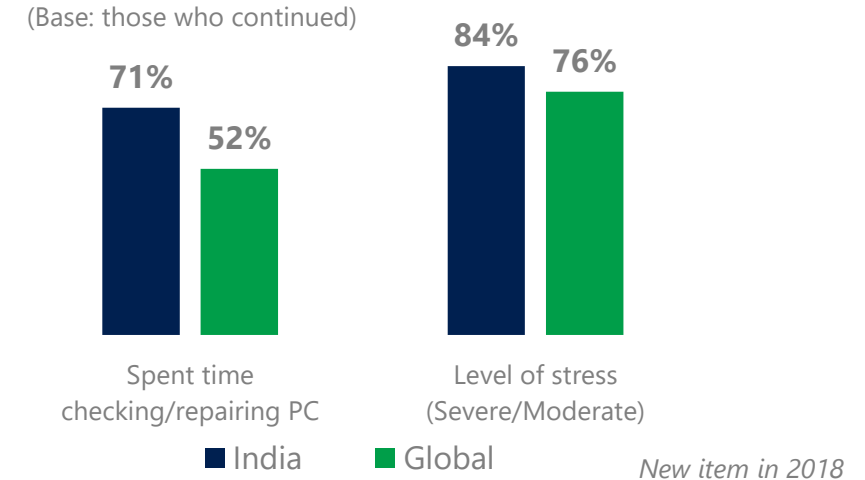
## Types of tech support scams



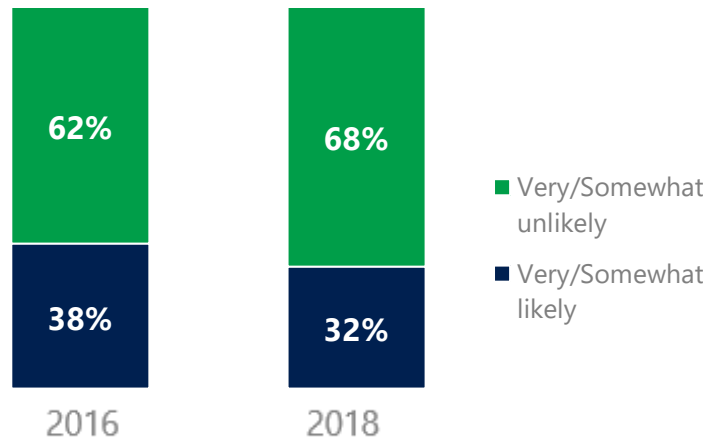
## Possible scam outcomes



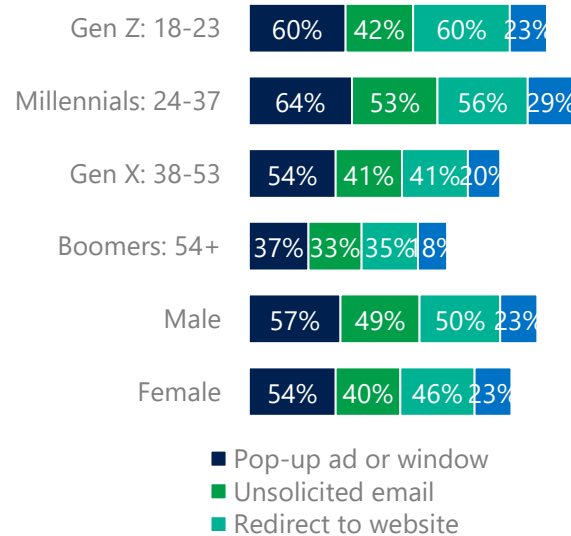
## Costs spread beyond monetary loss



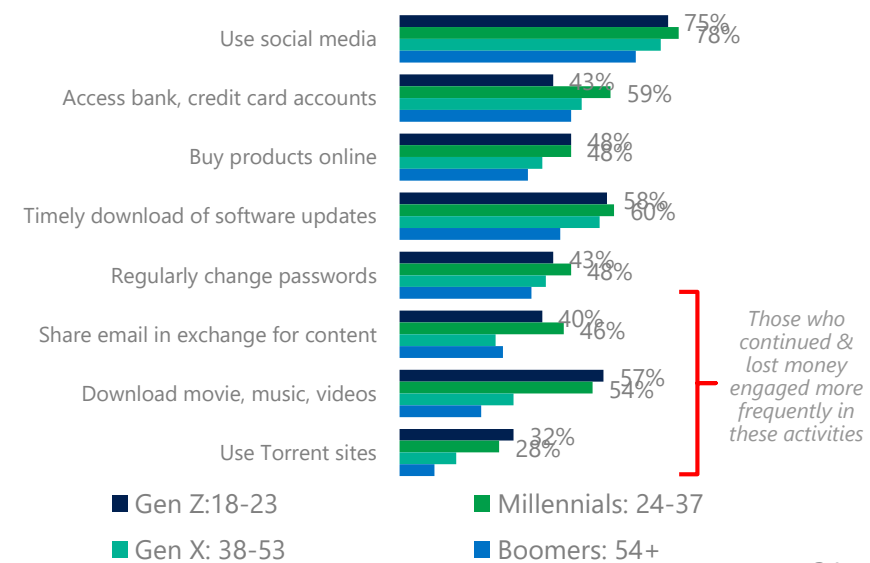
## Most believed companies would not initiate unsolicited contact



## Tech support scam incidence by age & gender



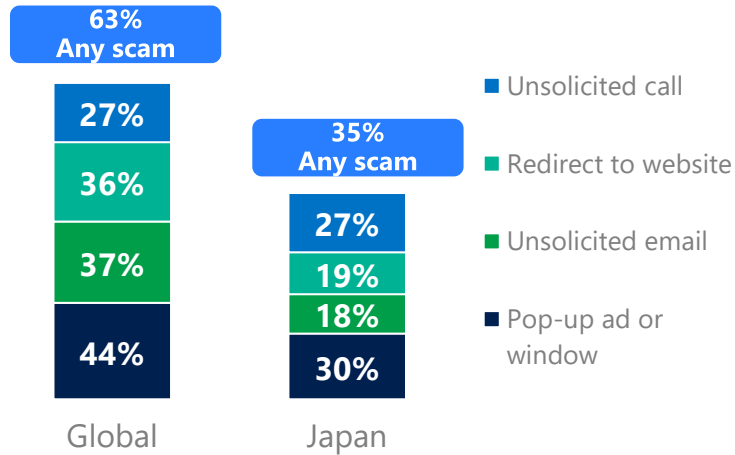
## Online activities (% almost always/often)



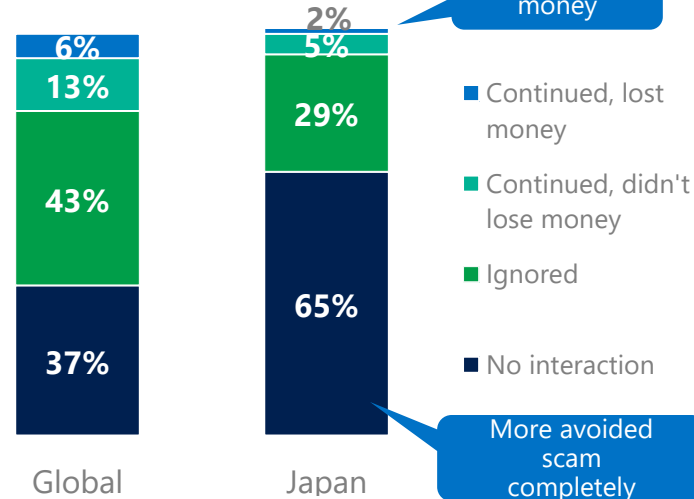
# Country Snapshot Japan



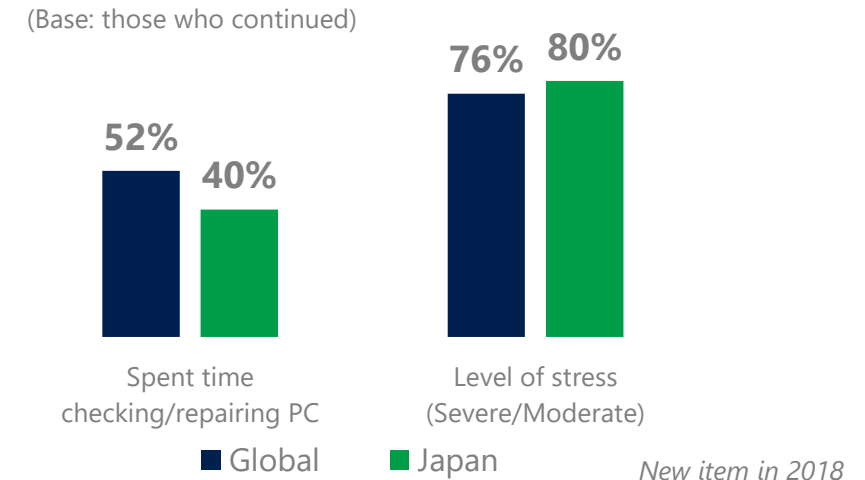
## Types of tech support scams



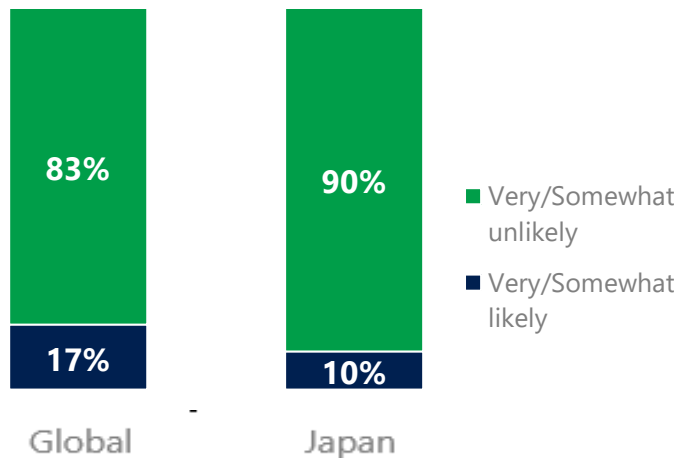
## Possible scam outcomes



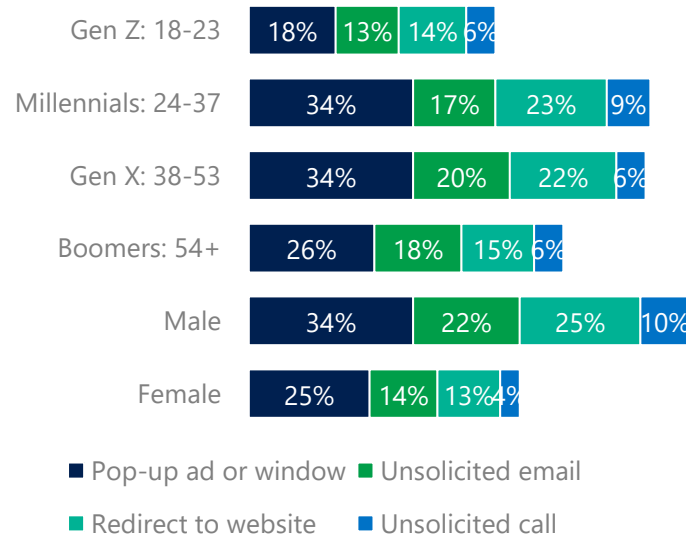
## Costs spread beyond monetary loss



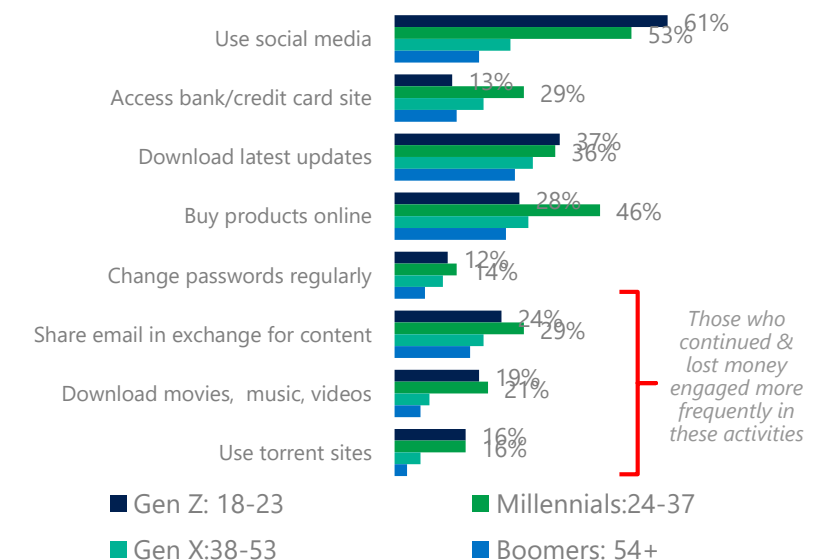
## Most believed companies would not initiate unsolicited contact



## Tech support scam incidence by age & gender



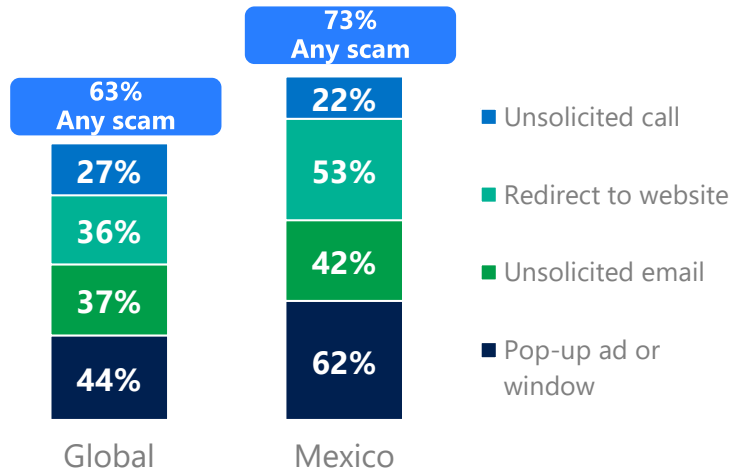
## Online activities (% almost always/often)



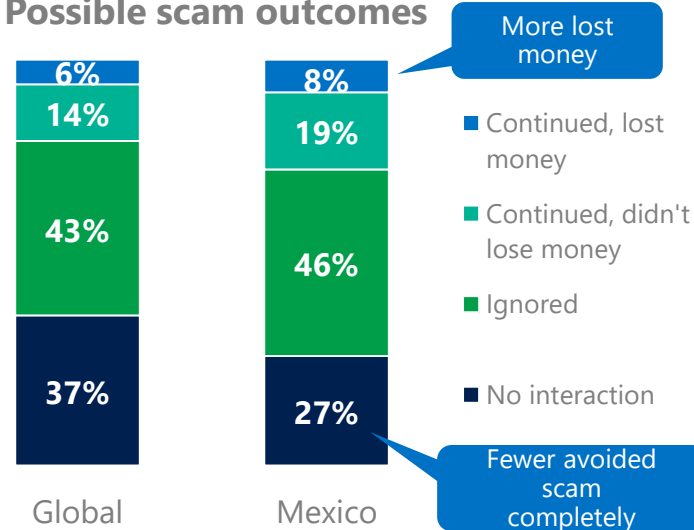
# Country Snapshot Mexico



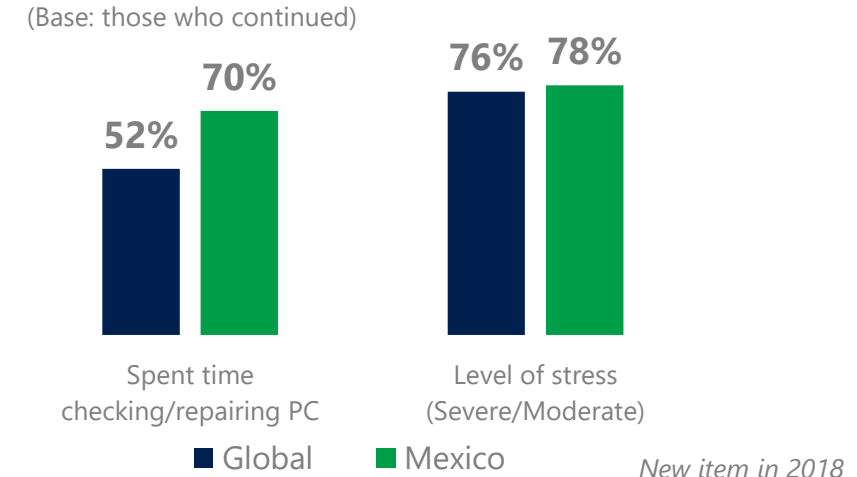
## Types of tech support scams



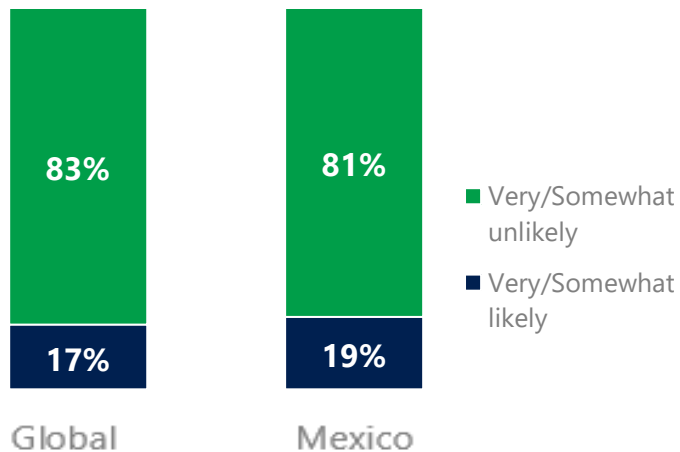
## Possible scam outcomes



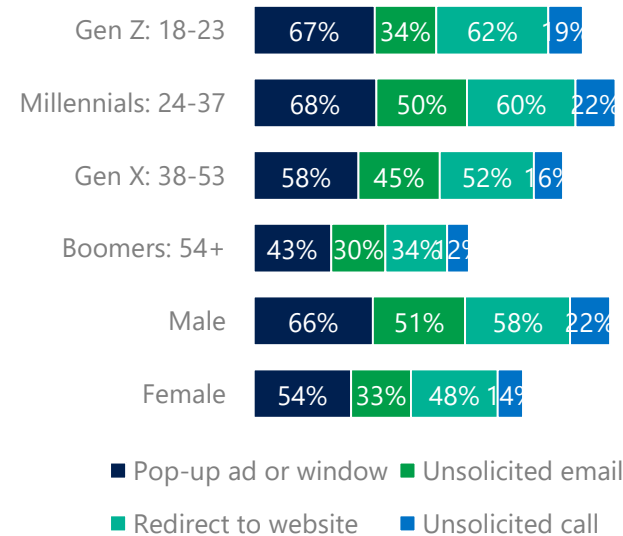
## Costs spread beyond monetary loss



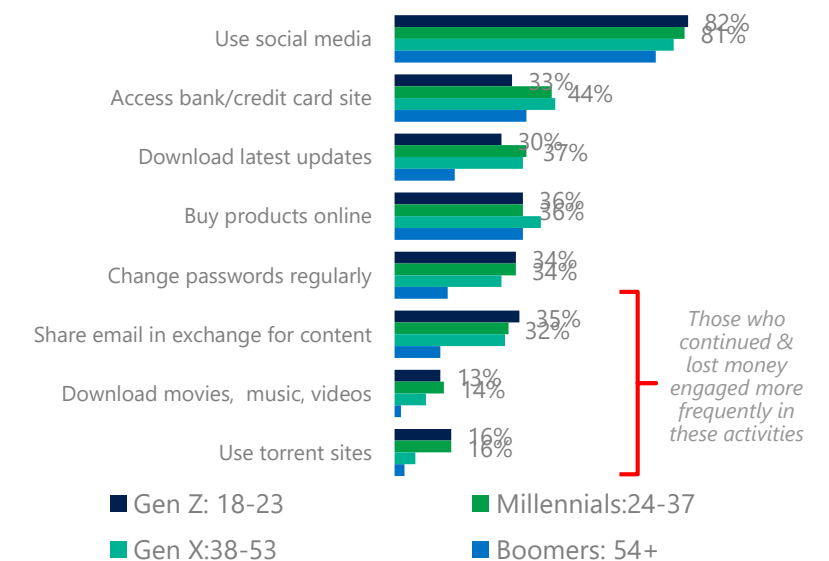
## Most believed companies would not initiate unsolicited contact



## Tech support scam incidence by age & gender



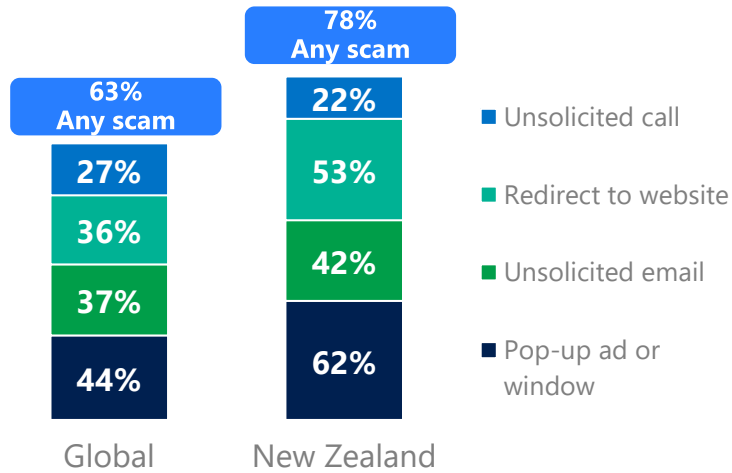
## Online activities (% almost always/often)



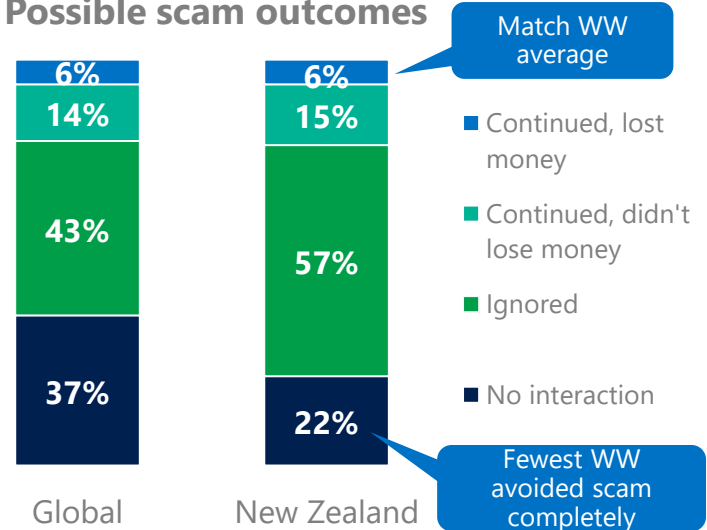
# Country Snapshot New Zealand



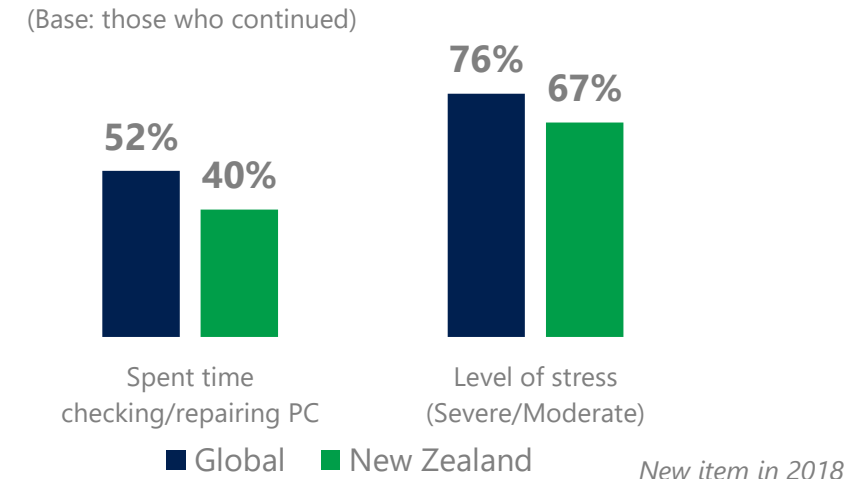
## Types of tech support scams



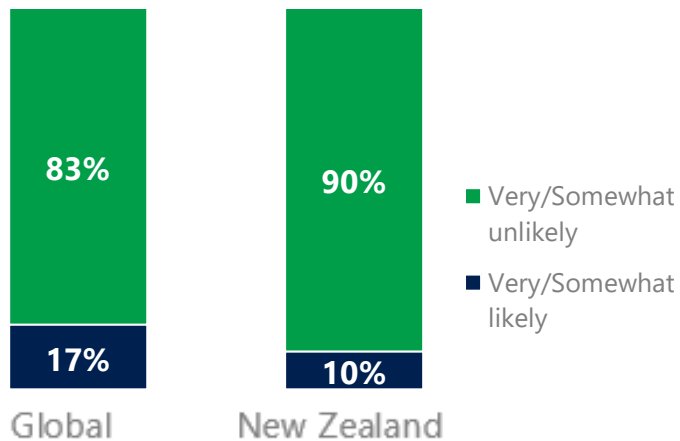
## Possible scam outcomes



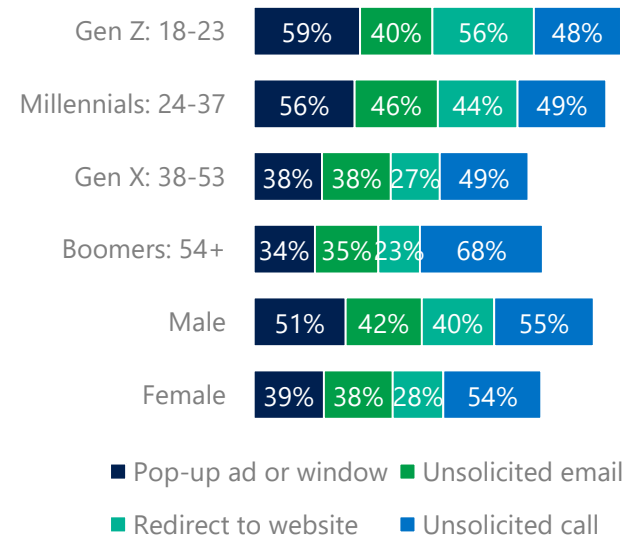
## Costs spread beyond monetary loss



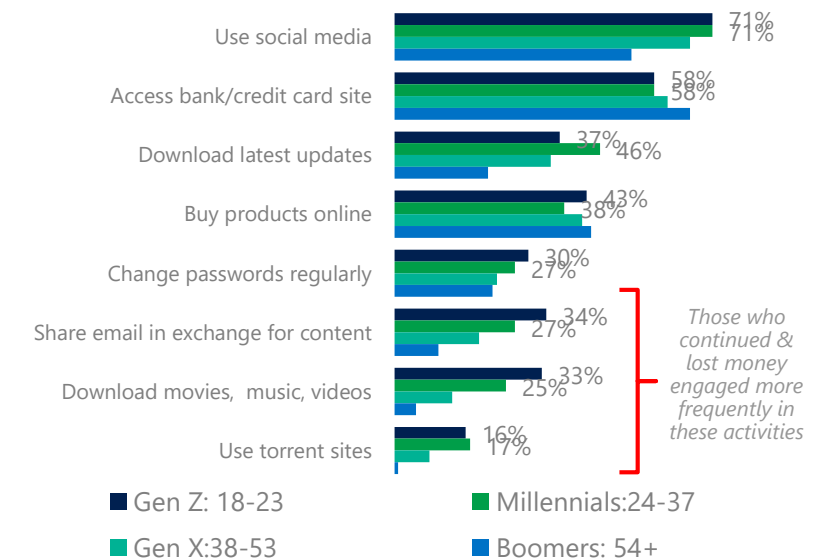
## Most believed companies would not initiate unsolicited contact



## Tech support scam incidence by age & gender



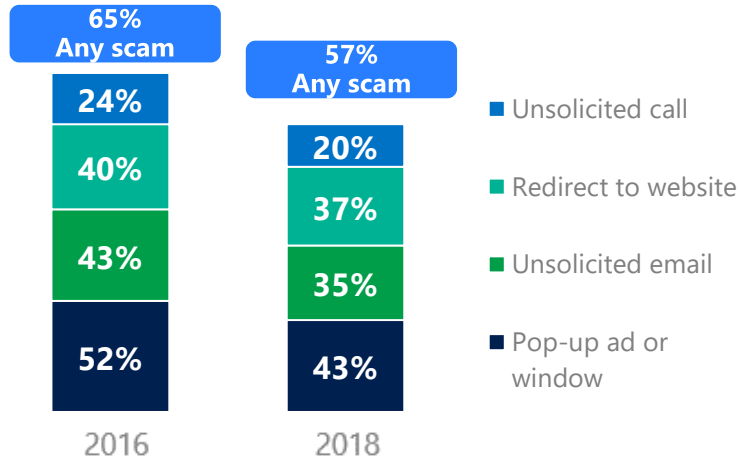
## Online activities (% almost always/often)



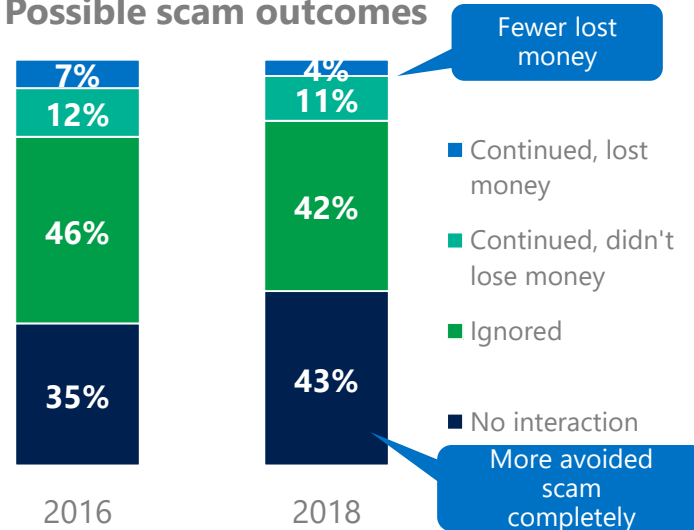
# Country Snapshot Singapore



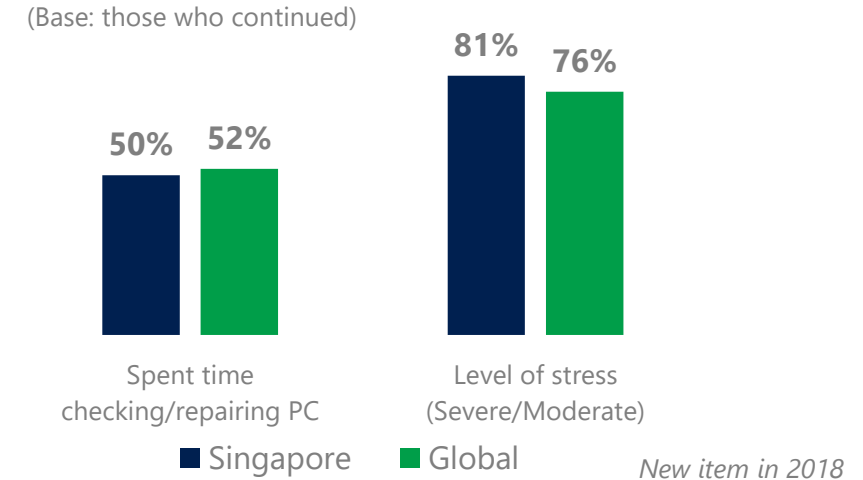
## Types of tech support scams



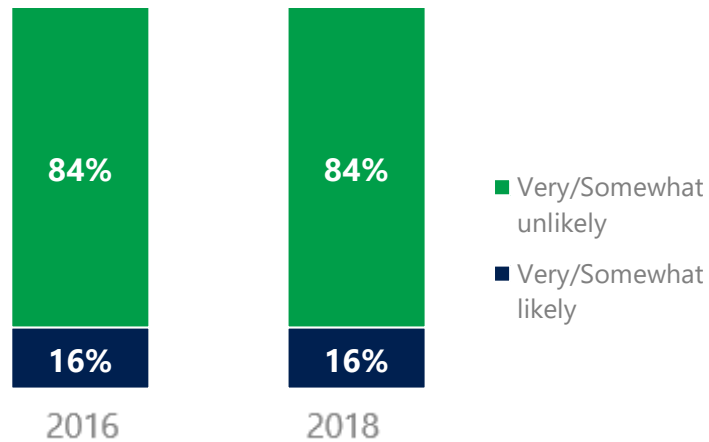
## Possible scam outcomes



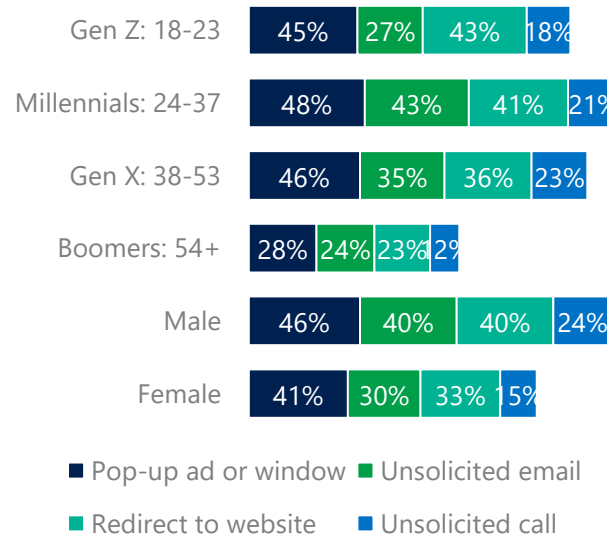
## Costs spread beyond monetary loss



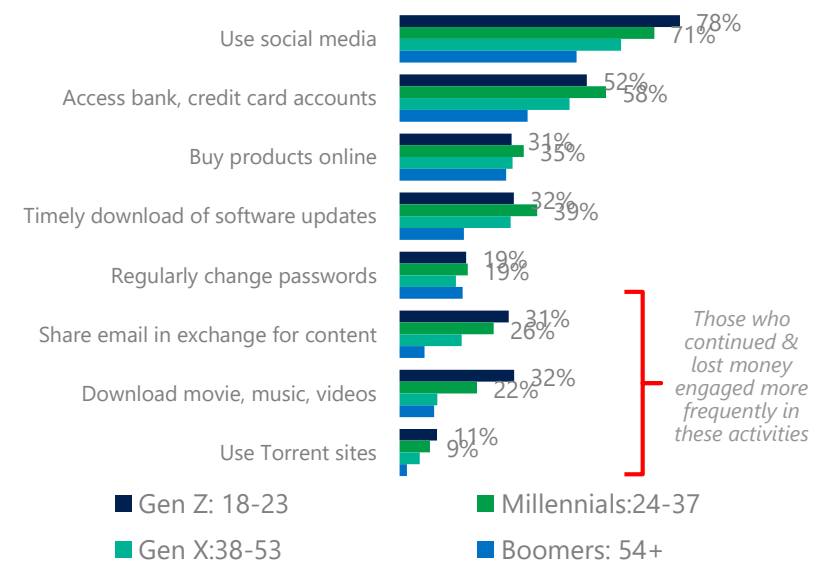
## Most believed companies would not initiate unsolicited contact



## Tech support scam incidence by age & gender



## Online activities (% almost always/often)

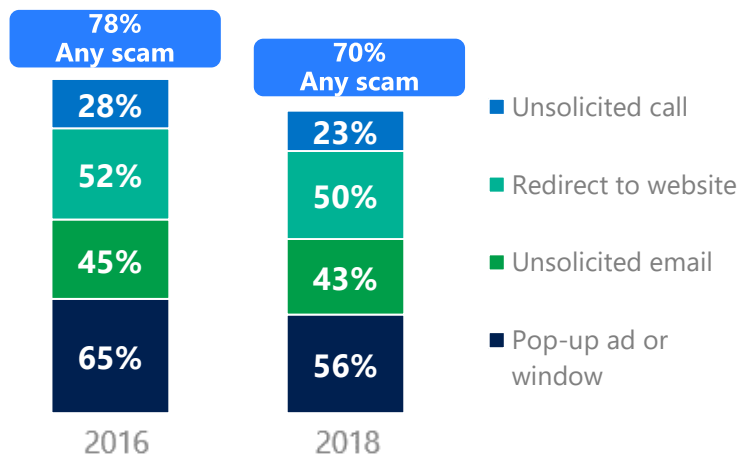


*New item in 2018*

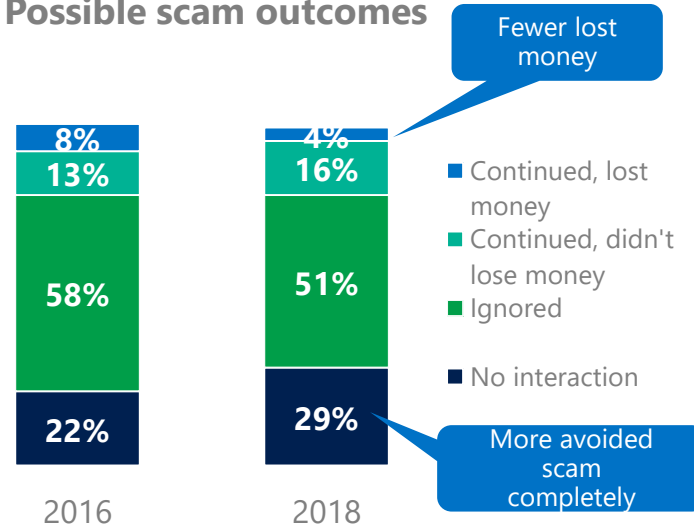
# Country Snapshot South Africa



## Types of tech support scams

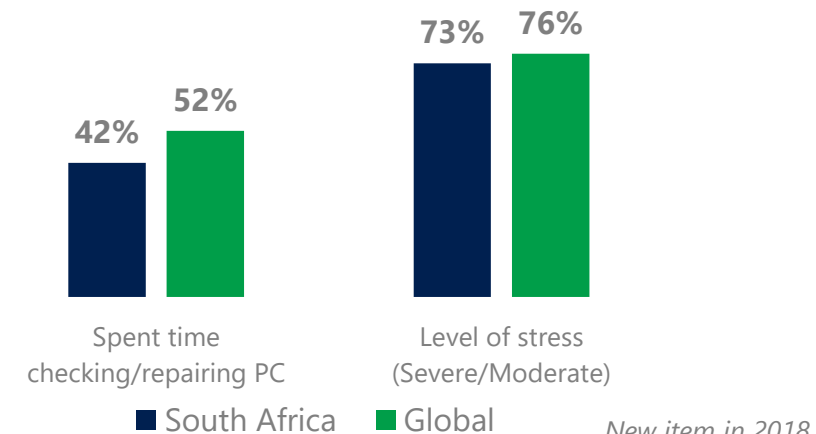


## Possible scam outcomes

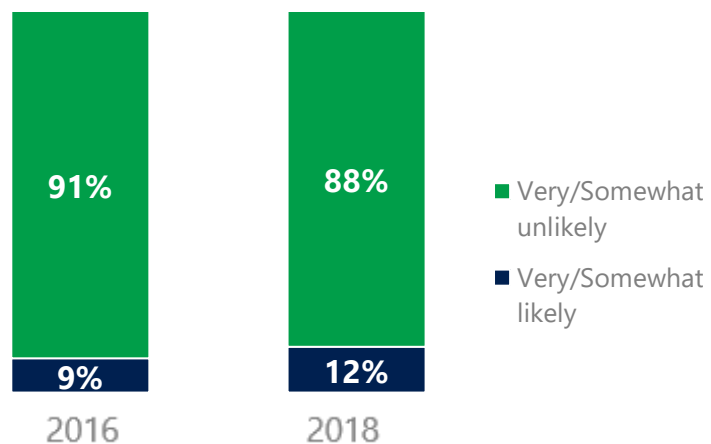


## Costs spread beyond monetary loss

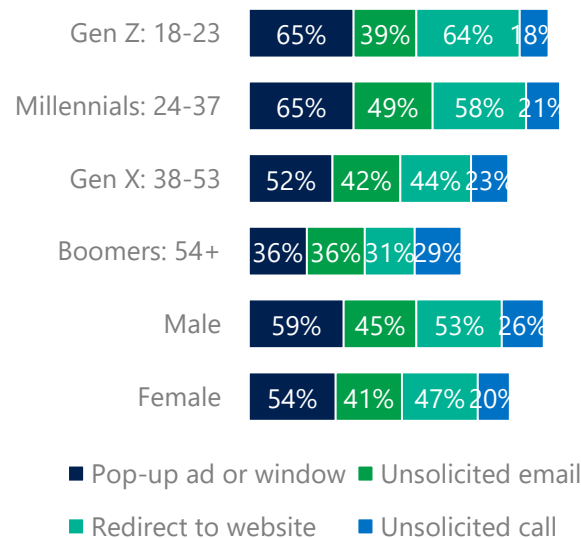
(Base: those who continued)



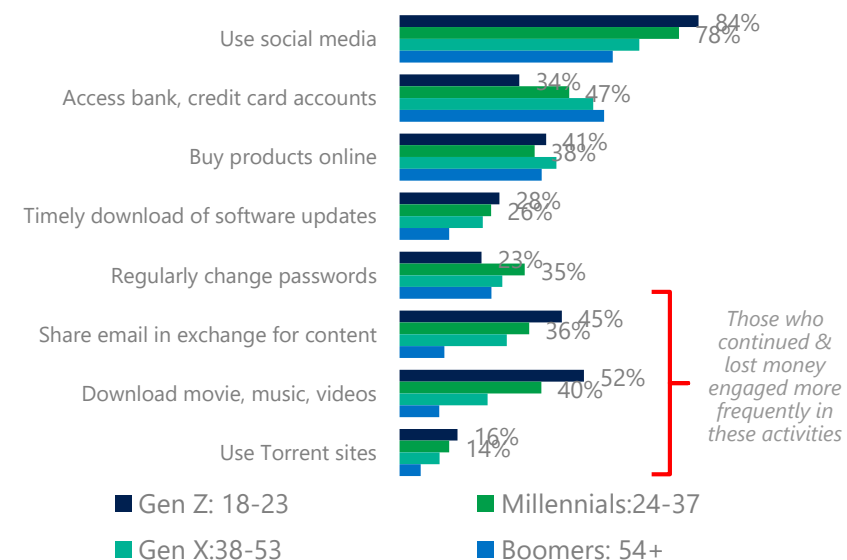
## Most believed companies would not initiate unsolicited contact



## Tech support scam incidence by age & gender



## Online activities (% almost always/often)



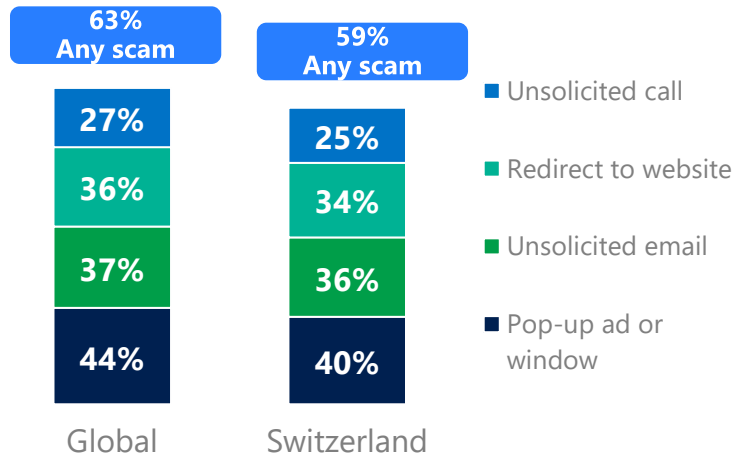
New item in 2018



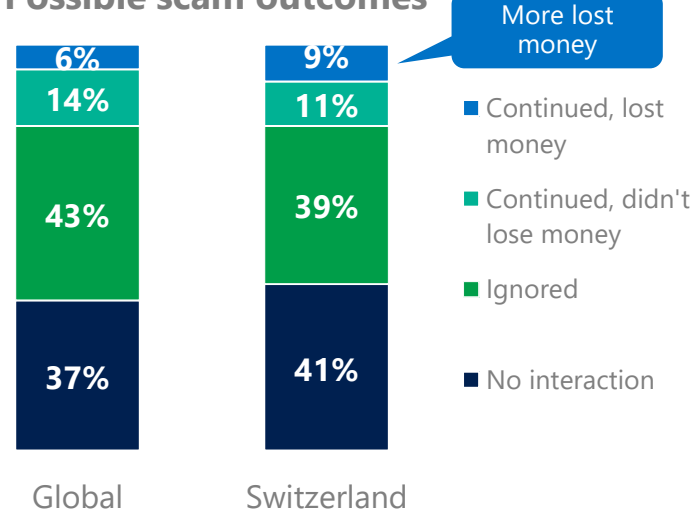
# Country Snapshot Switzerland



## Types of tech support scams

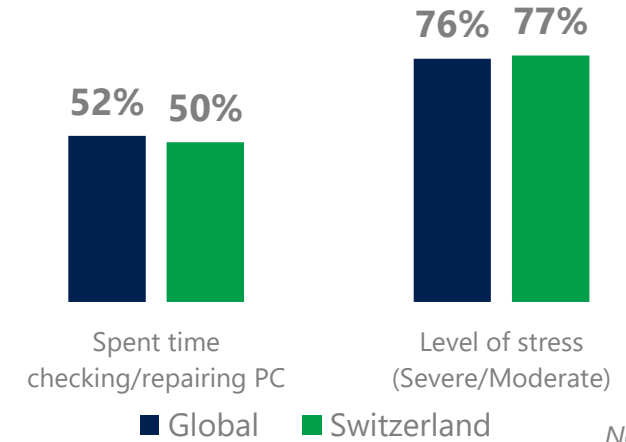


## Possible scam outcomes



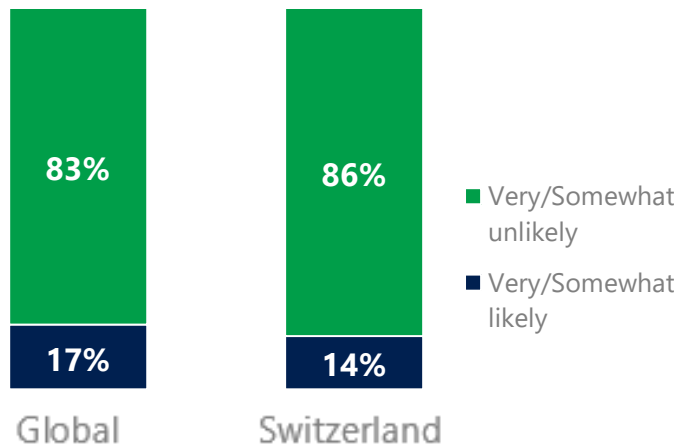
## Costs spread beyond monetary loss

(Base: those who continued)

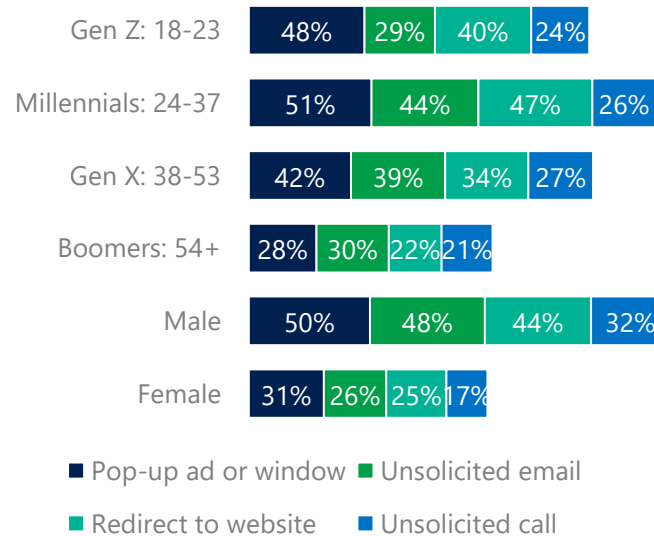


New item in 2018

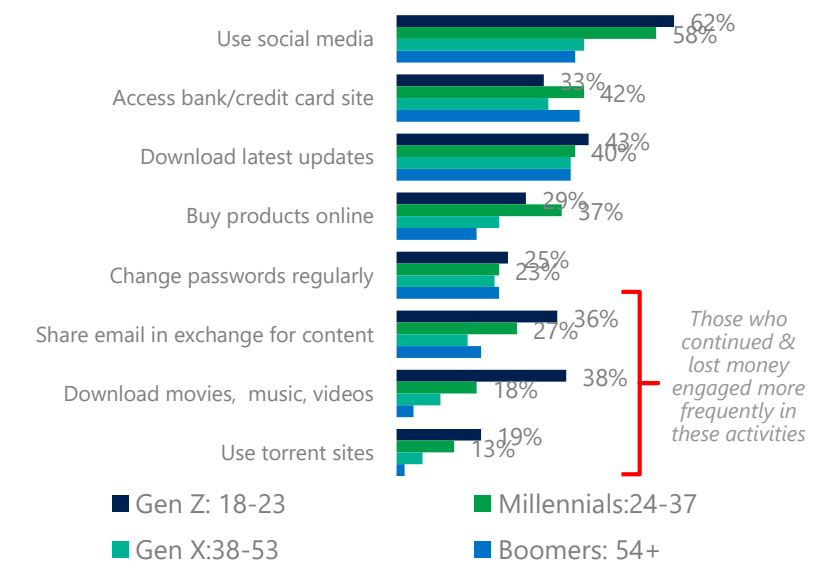
## Most believed companies would not initiate unsolicited contact



## Tech support scam incidence by age & gender



## Online activities (% almost always/often)

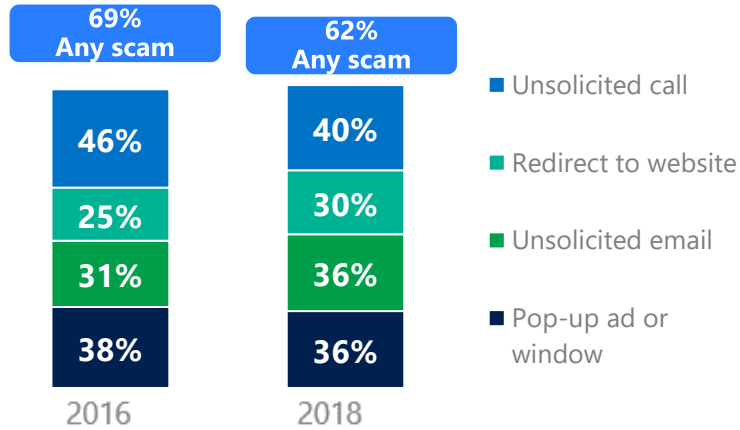


New item in 2018

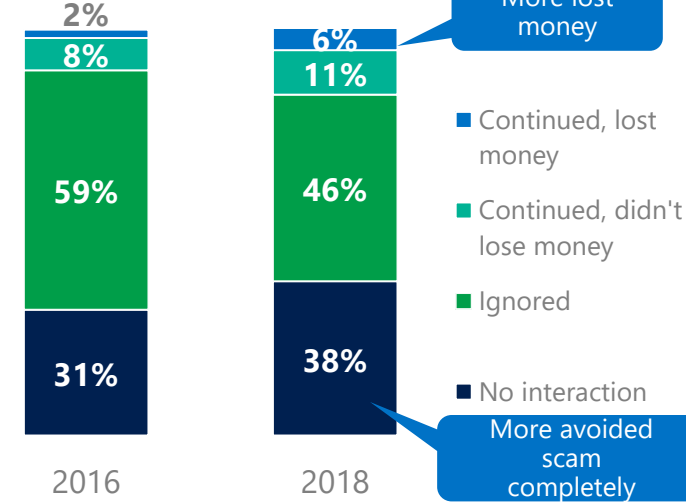
# Country Snapshot United Kingdom



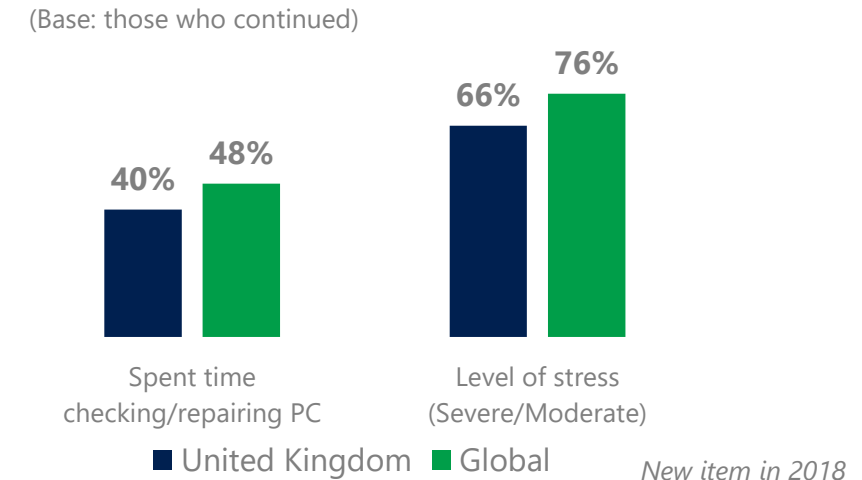
## Types of tech support scams



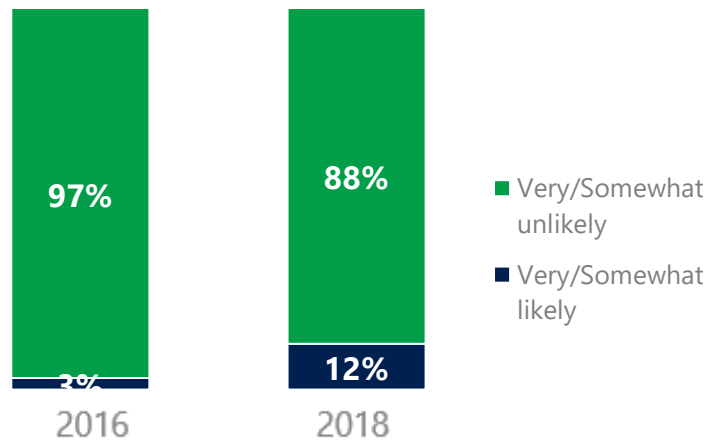
## Possible scam outcomes



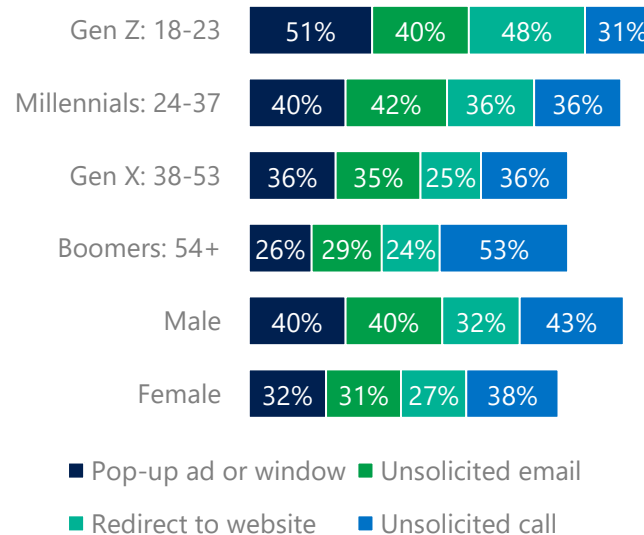
## Costs spread beyond monetary loss



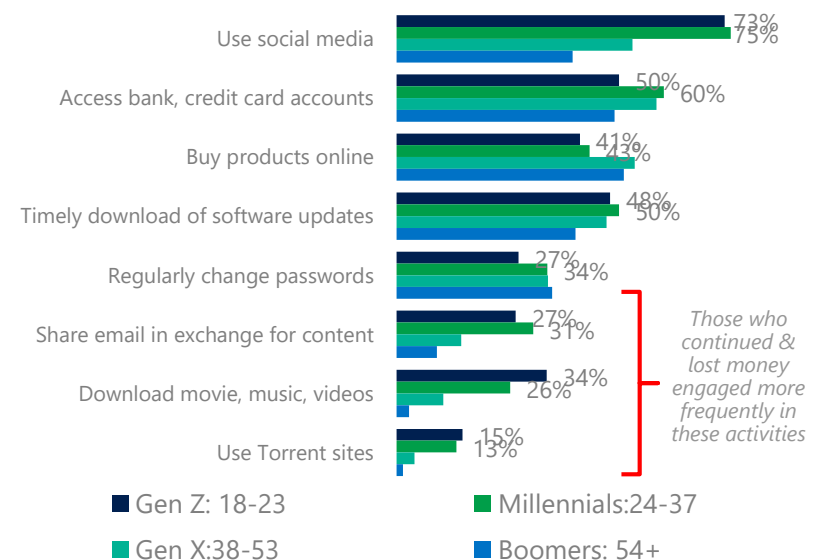
## Most believed companies would not initiate unsolicited contact



## Tech support scam incidence by age & gender

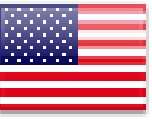


## Online activities (% almost always/often)

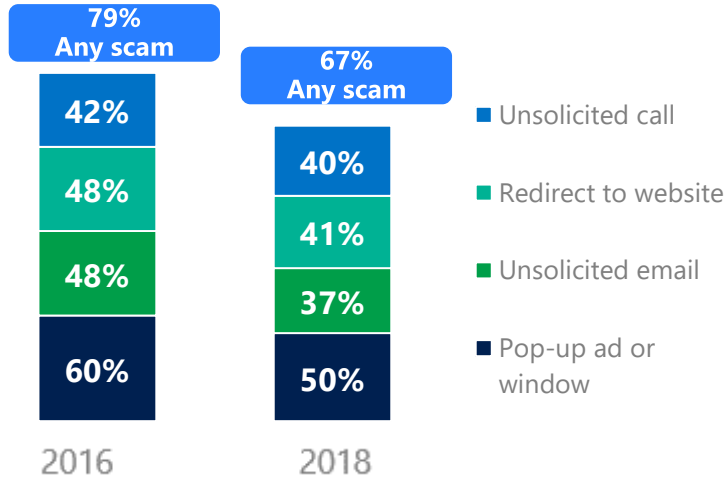


New item in 2018

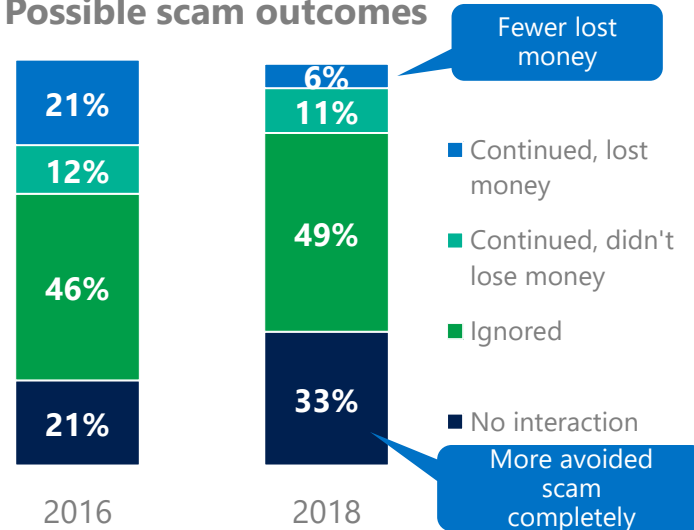
# Country Snapshot United States



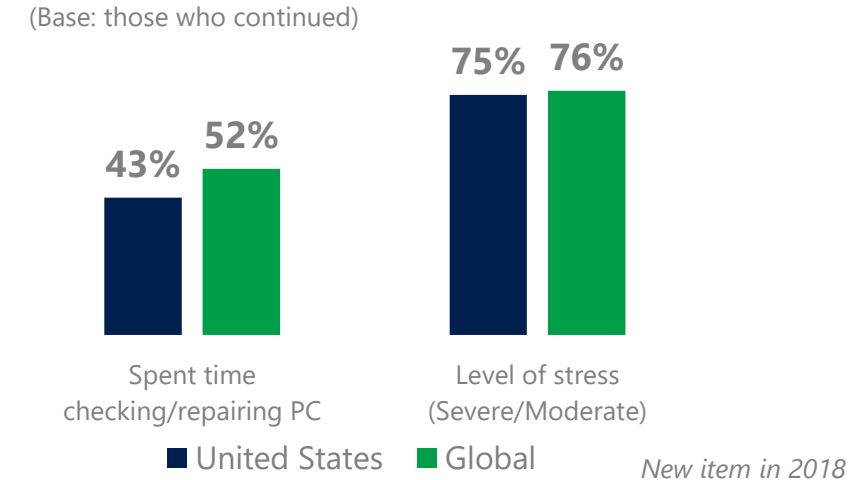
## Types of tech support scams



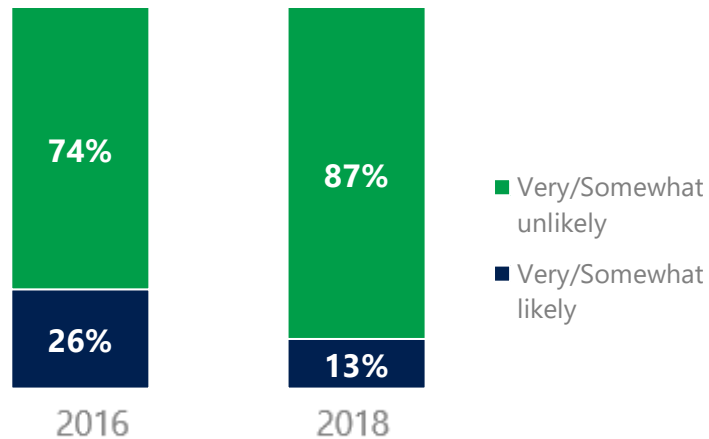
## Possible scam outcomes



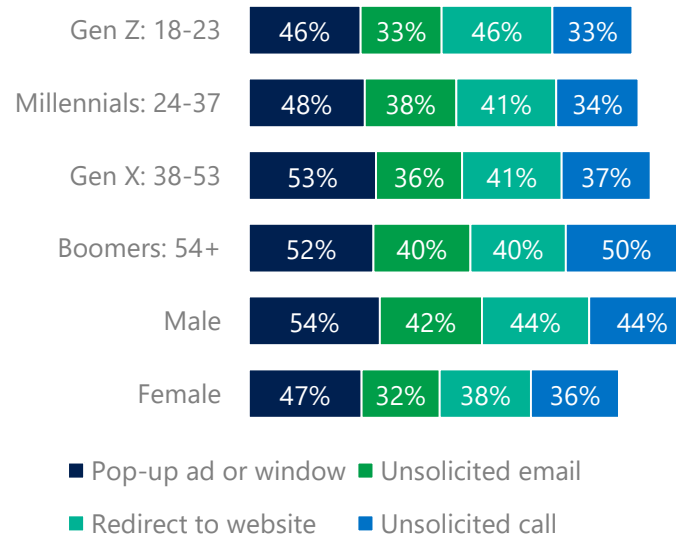
## Costs spread beyond monetary loss



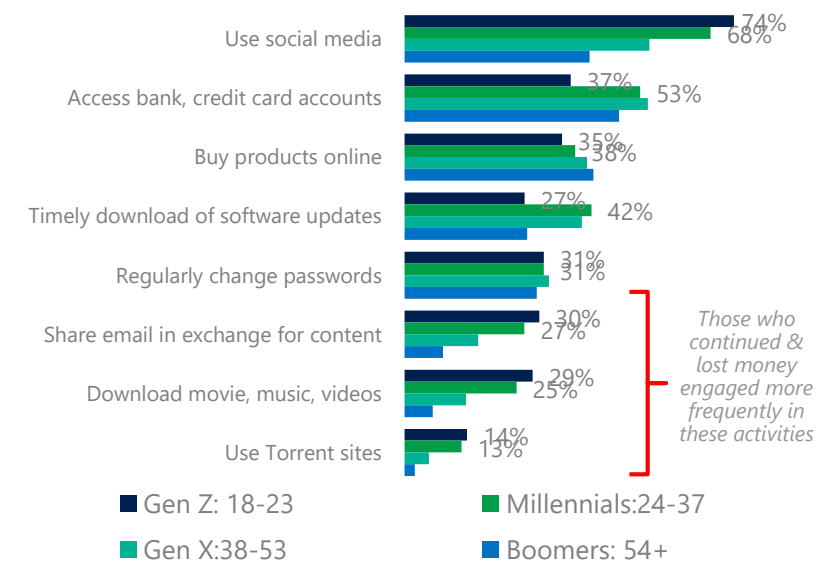
## Most believed companies would not initiate unsolicited contact



## Tech support scam incidence by age & gender



## Online activities (% almost always/often)

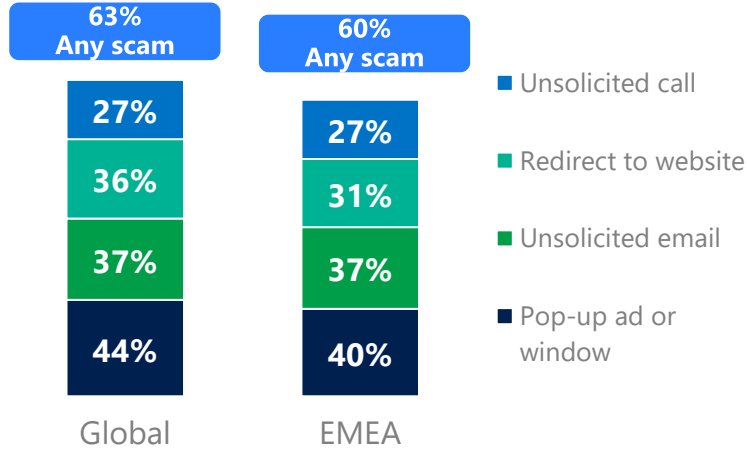


New item in 2018

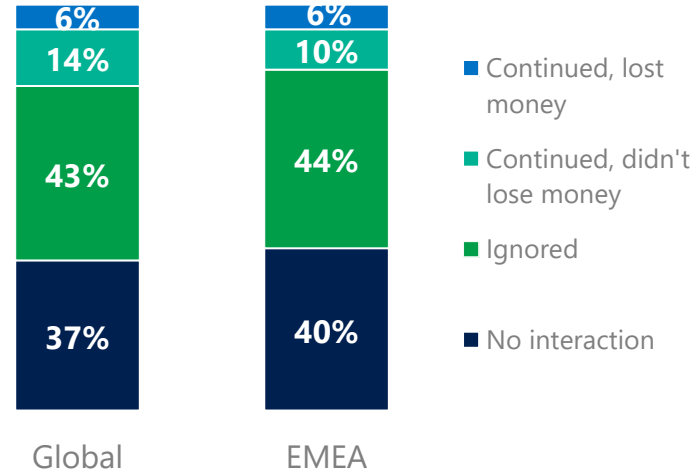
# EMEA & APAC Snapshots

# Regional Snapshot: EMEA (France, Germany, Denmark, Switzerland, United Kingdom)

## Types of tech support scams

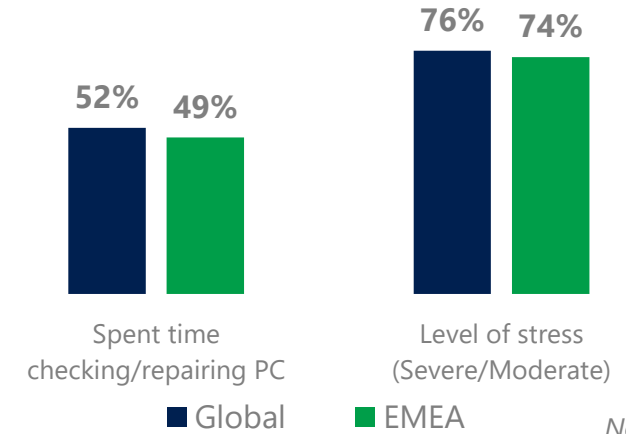


## Possible scam outcomes



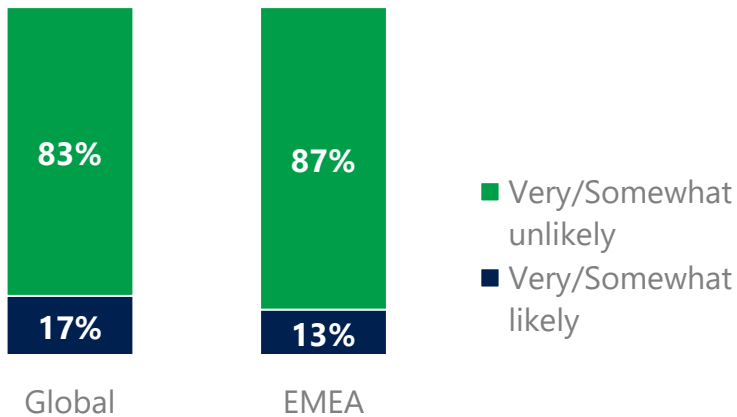
## Costs spread beyond monetary loss

(Base: those who continued)

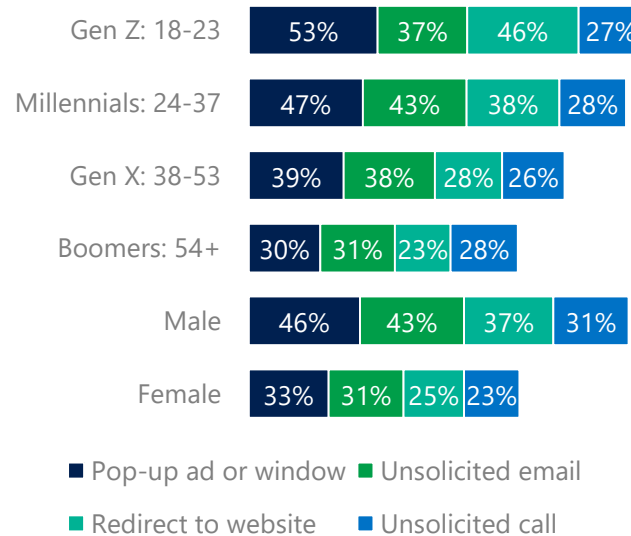


New item in 2018

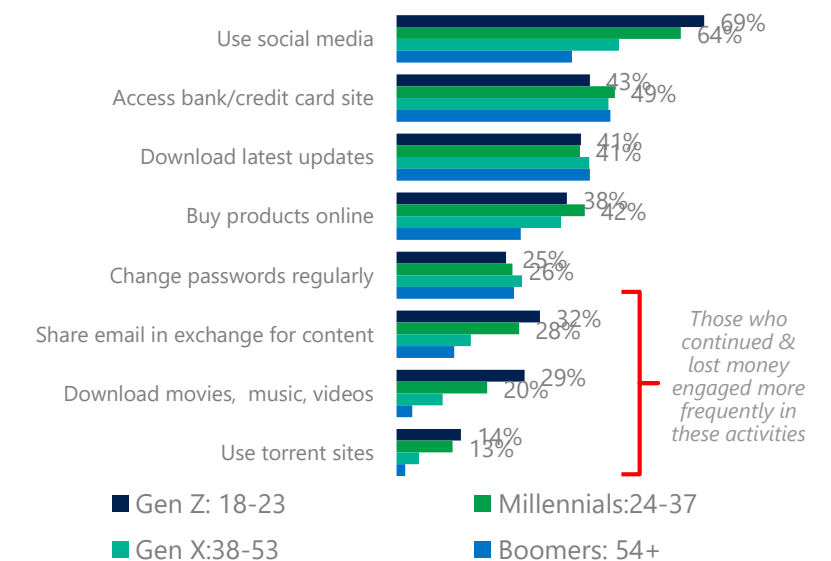
## Most believed companies would not initiate unsolicited contact



## Tech support scam incidence by age & gender



## Online activities (% almost always/often)

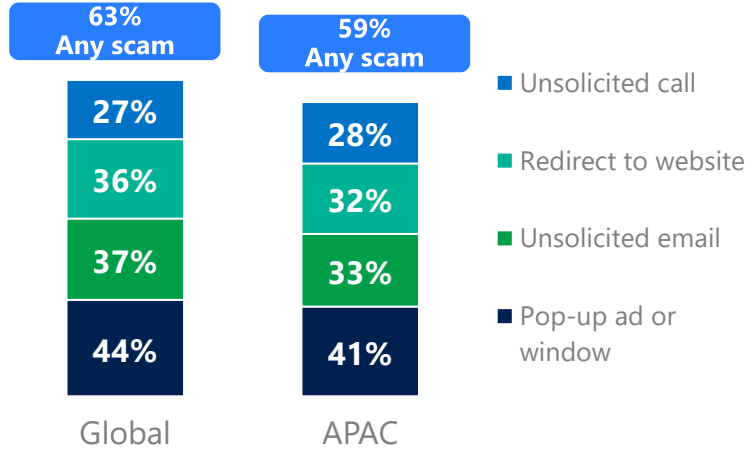


Those who continued & lost money engaged more frequently in these activities

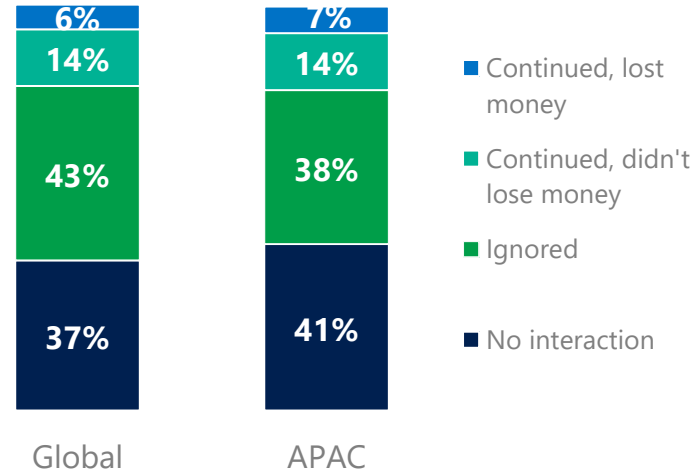
New item in 2018

# Regional Snapshot: APAC (Australia, China, India, Japan, New Zealand, Singapore)

## Types of tech support scams

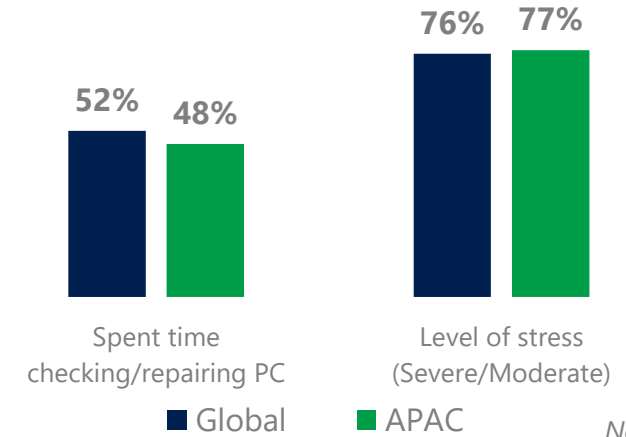


## Possible scam outcomes



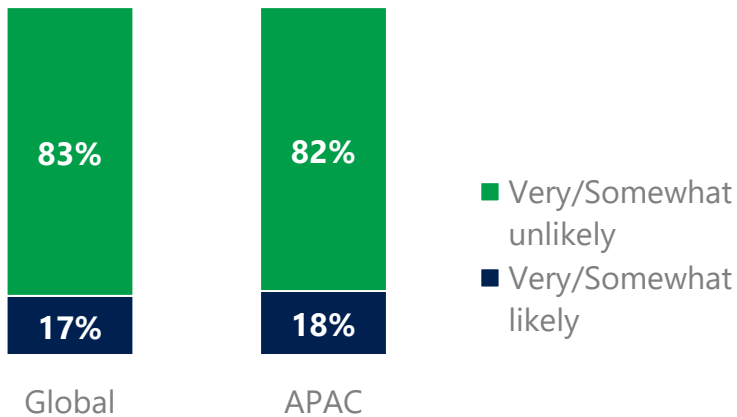
## Costs spread beyond monetary loss

(Base: those who continued)

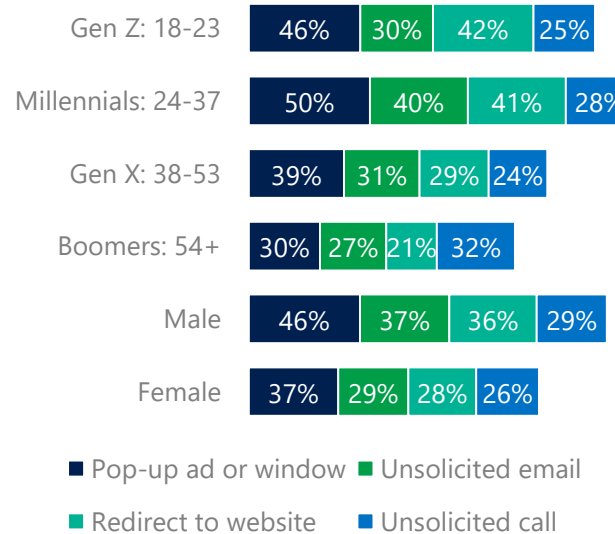


New item in 2018

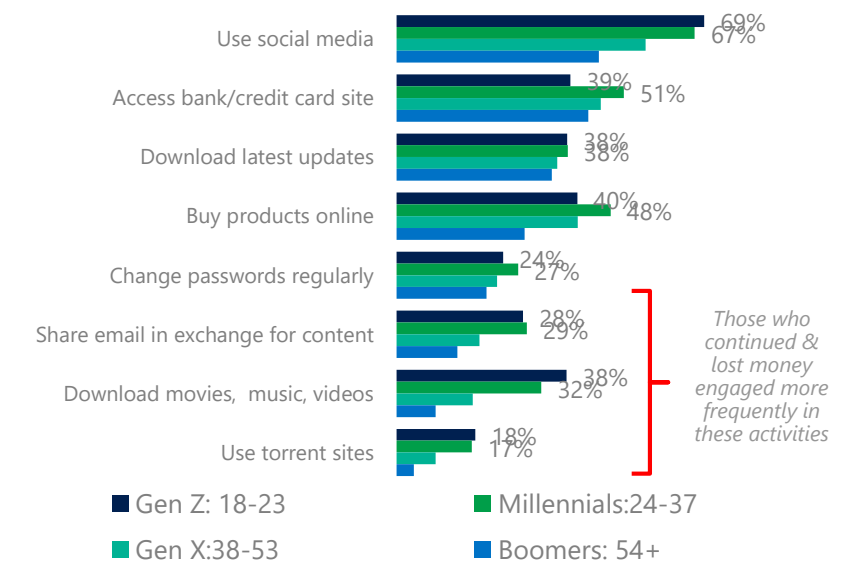
## Most believed companies would not initiate unsolicited contact



## Tech support scam incidence by age & gender



## Online activities (% almost always/often)



Those who continued & lost money engaged more frequently in these activities

New item in 2018

