

Online Privacy Remains a Key Concern Among the 50-plus



A 2022 Tech Study reports tech attitudes and behaviors among the 50-plus

There is no denying, people of all ages have fully embraced technology, to the point that many are dependent on it for connection, entertainment, and for ways in which it makes their lives easier. So, it is no surprise that 97% of Americans ages 50-plus currently own at least one of the primary technology devices (desktop, laptop, smartphone, tablet, home assistant, or a wearable).

That said, not everyone is as comfortable with how technology is penetrating their lives and putting their personal data at risk. A lack of confidence that what is done online is, and will remain, private has an impact on tech purchases and use among the 50-plus.

Though some strides are being made by putting privacy controls more clearly in the hands of the user, more work needs to be done before most of the hesitation that exist today is removed.

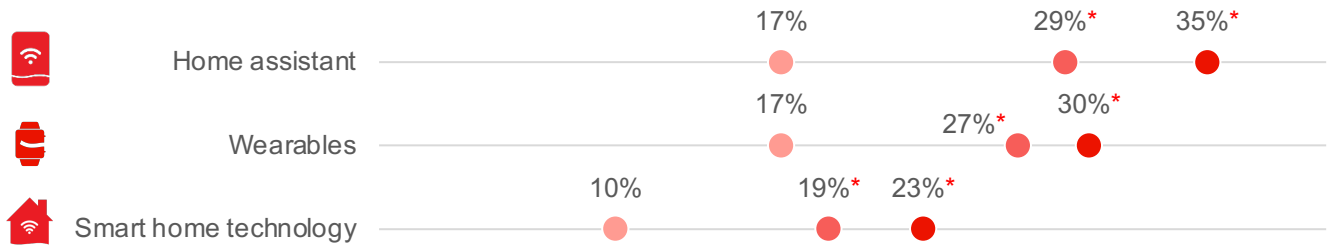
Tech ownership continues to grow, albeit privacy concerns remain

There has been significant growth in technology ownership the past few years, undoubtable accelerated by the pandemic. The biggest increases were seen in home assistants, wearables, and smart home technology/security.

48% of 50-plus tech owners express concern for their online privacy

Year over year growth in tech ownership

■ 2019 (2,607) ■ 2020 (2,256) ■ 2021 (2,063)

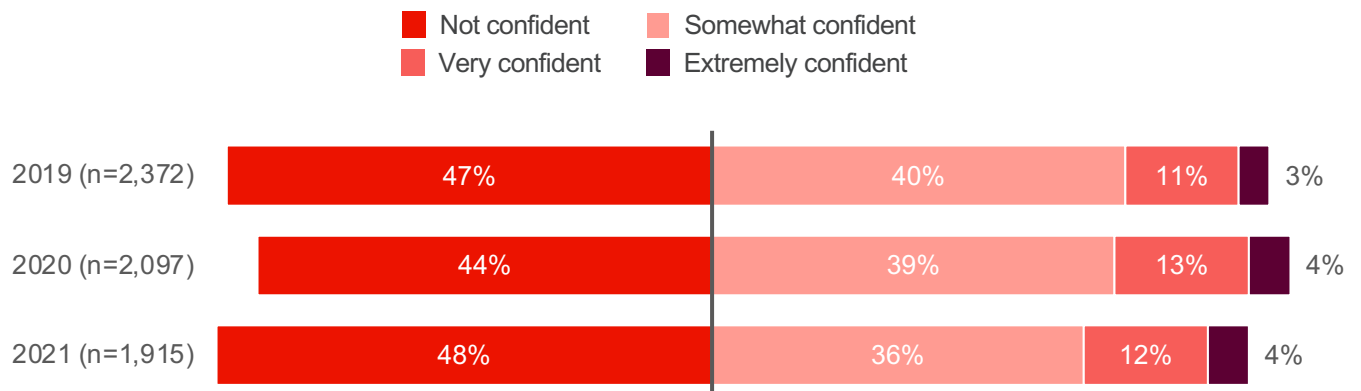


* Indicates a significant difference by year at a 95% confidence level

However, while companies and manufacturers continue to create newer and more sophisticated versions of their technology and software, not much has been done to address the growing concern for one's online privacy. And while on the surface that may not appear to be having a negative impact on their bottom lines, the data suggests otherwise.

To put this into perspective, it is important to understand the degree of concern among those 50-plus. Few indicate being very or extremely confident that what they do online remains private, with more than 4 out of 10 consumers expressing a significant lack of confidence. This pattern exists year over year.

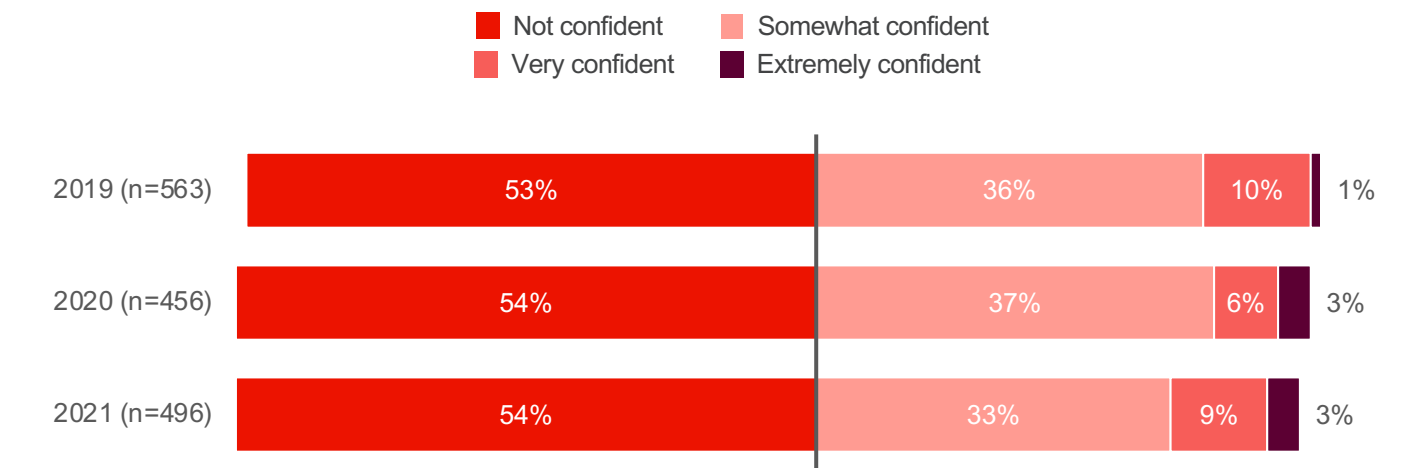
Confidence in online privacy — 2019, 2020, and 2021



Concern for one's online privacy cuts evenly across gender, age, ethnicity, and region.

There are even lower levels of confidence that the information given to or received from a home assistant remains private. For the past several years, over half of those who own a home assistant express a lack of confidence in the level of privacy these devices offer.

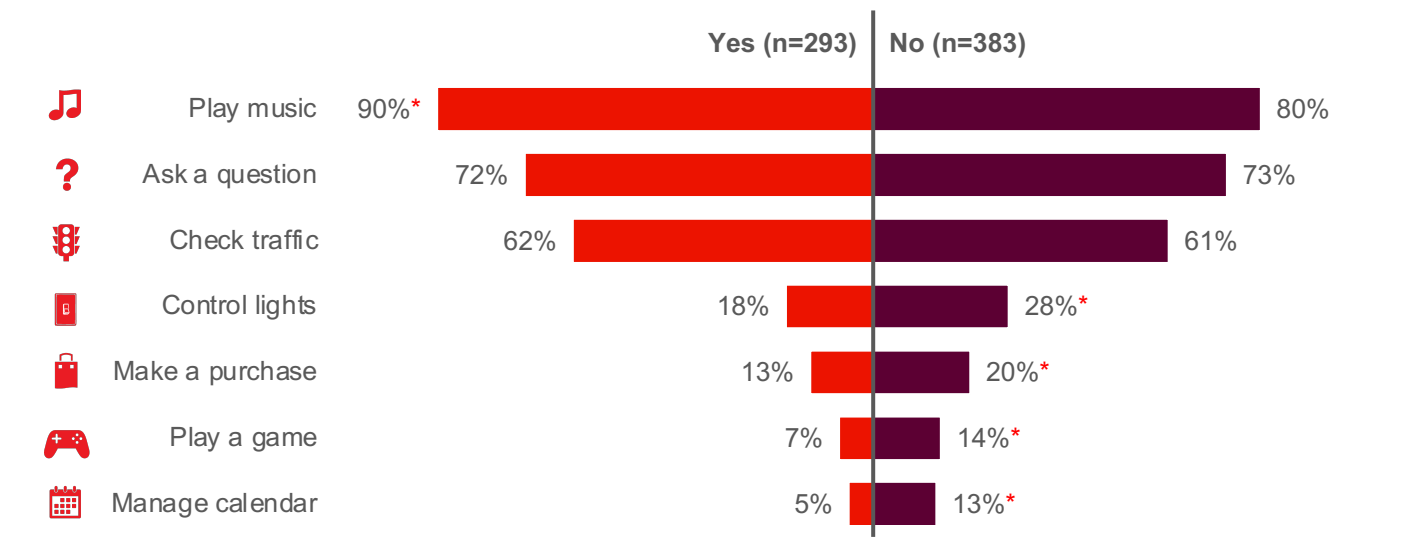
Confidence in home assistant privacy — Among home assistant owners 2019, 2020, and 2021



Lack of confidence in one’s online privacy appears to create hesitation for some, in the way of ownership and full adoption of technology capabilities.

Staying with home assistants as our example, the rate of ownership is 39% among those who do not have concerns about their online privacy, compared to 32% among those who do express concern (not very / not at all confident). But it goes beyond ownership, confidence in privacy impacts the use of home assistants as well; 90% of those without privacy concerns use their device weekly compared to 78% of those with privacy concerns. In addition, how the device is used also differs. Those with privacy concerns stick to the more passive uses, while those without privacy concerns are more likely to use their home assistant to its full potential.

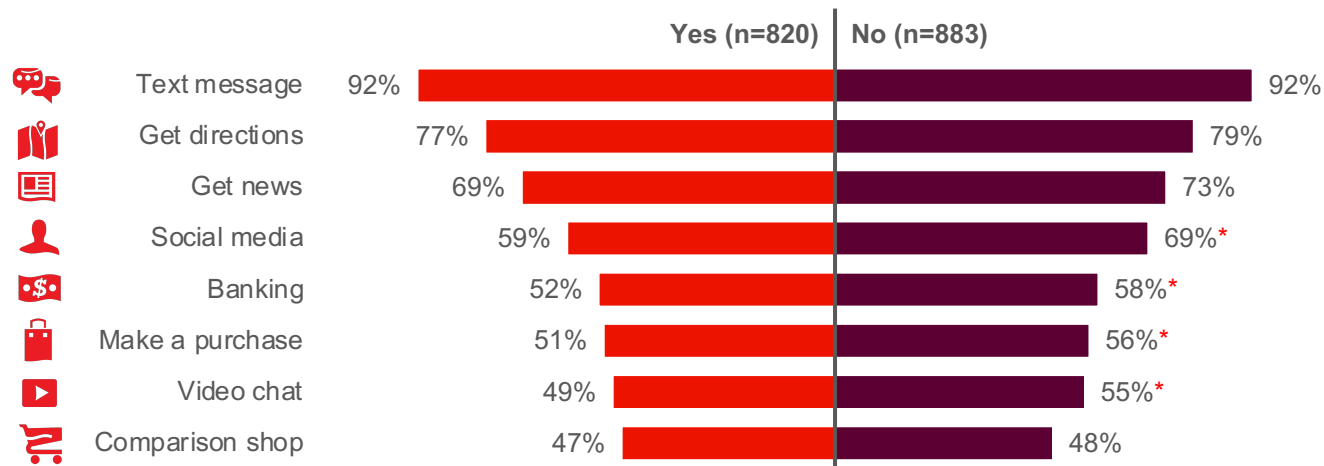
Difference in home assistant use — by level of concern for online privacy



* Indicates a significant difference by year at a 95% confidence level

The same pattern exists with smartphones. While most will use a smartphone to text, get directions, to get news, or to comparison shop, those who are less confident that what they do online remain private are less likely to use the smartphone for social media, banking, to make a purchase, or video chat, to name a few.

Difference in smartphone use — by level of concern for online privacy



* Indicates a significant difference by year at a 95% confidence level

These differences may just be the tip of the iceberg. When asking about tech purchases in the past year, 33% of those who expressed concern about their online privacy did not make a purchase, compared to 24% of those without concerns who say the same. These hesitations appear to run deep, as 31% of those with concerns about their online privacy claim to be late adopters of technology in general, compared to 22% of those without concerns who claim the same.

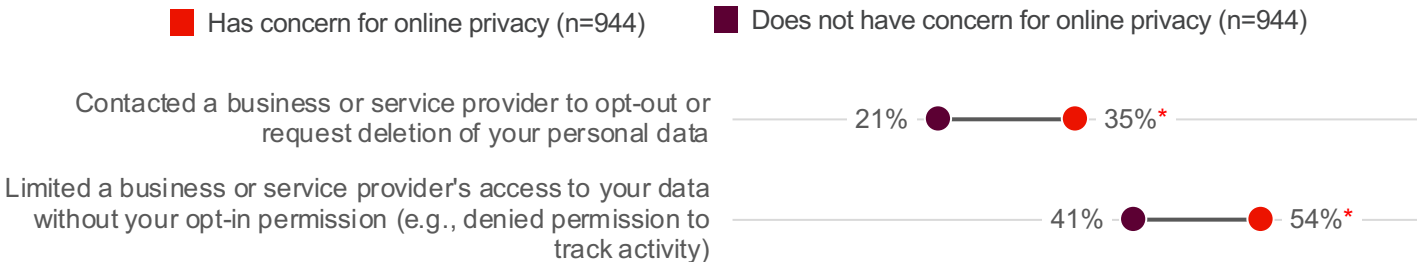
How to limit access to personal data remains a mystery to some

There have been some changes to address or acknowledge privacy concerns. For example, Apple¹ allows smartphone users to be in control of how apps use personal data to track users. Specifically, Apple allows users to adjust what information is shared, where you share it, and when it is backed up. But is this enough? It doesn't appear so. Consumers would benefit from not only being given choices about how and when their personal information is used, but they also need help in better understanding the fine print associated with many of these agreements.

When asked to what extent have participants taken control over the sharing of their personal data, less than half have taken steps to protect themselves. Overall, 26% of the 50-plus have contacted a business to request deletion of their personal information while 45% have opted-out of allowing a company to have access to their personal data.

On a positive note, those with the greatest concerns about their online privacy are significantly more likely to have stepped up their awareness and control of how their personal data is being used, but the problem is far from being solved.

Percent who have done the following privacy behaviors — by level of concern for online privacy



¹ <https://www.apple.com/privacy/control/>

* Indicates a significant difference by year at a 95% confidence level

Implications

On the surface, with continued tech device growth, online privacy concerns do not seem to be holding consumers back, but that is not necessarily the case. A significant portion of the 50-plus have concerns about their privacy. If concerns continue to go unaddressed, it will likely stifle their trust and use of the devices they currently own. With limited device use, the value of such devices will decrease and so will repeat sales.

Some companies are trying to put the power of data release back in the consumer's control, but it is not enough. There are lengthy agreements that consumers are expected to read and understand that they simply do not. If they did and if these agreements were in the consumers' favor, then it is likely far more would take advantage of the data sharing opt-out and suppression options being offered.

But to be honest, most consumers are not fully aware of how much of their lives are stored in databases in the cloud, under the preface of "personalizing" experiences, and are therefore at risk for exposure they do not intend. So while educating the consumer on how to better protect themselves is certainly welcomed, what is really needed is consumer advocacy for fair and transparent use of personal data, as the consumer cannot protect what they don't know is at risk.



For more information on the survey and methodology please contact:
Brittne Kakulla, bkakulla@aarp.org.

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