

Connected and Unprotected:
The Marked Gap
Between Smartphone
Ownership and
Smartphone Security

Consumers use smartphones for more than communication. They use smartphones to run significant portions of their lives. Unfortunately, those smartphones are often unprotected from cybercrime.



Nearly half of U.S. smartphone owners say they do not use mobile security software.

Beyond texting, emailing, and scrolling through social media on their smartphones, consumers in the U.S. manage their finances, shop, and control connected things like their appliances, home security systems, deadbolt locks, and cars as well. However, nearly half of them (49 percent) do not use mobile security software¹, thus leaving them vulnerable to a marked rise in cyberattacks that specifically target smartphone users.

This is one of several findings revealed in McAfee's recent research, as published in Consumer Security Mindset: Mobile Edition, which illustrates the marked gap between smartphone ownership and smartphone security.

Pew Research cites that [85 percent of U.S. adults report owning a smartphone](#). Along with that ownership comes a wealth of data, which is often stored and shared via various apps and services, not to mention stored on the device itself. This data naturally has value, as it can be laden with personally identifiable information (PII), such as a person's name, address, social security number, or other identifying data like PIN numbers, credit card numbers, and so forth. That makes smartphones, and their users, a target for cybercrime.

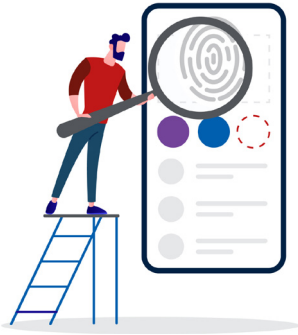
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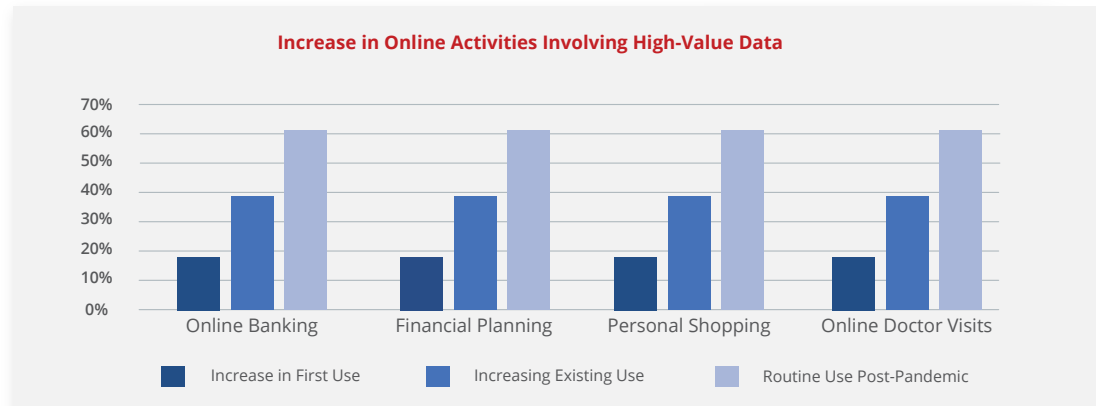
Increased Reliance on the Internet Generates Volumes of Valuable Personal Data

Consumers are creating more of this data as well. During the pandemic, consumers relied on their smartphones and other

connected devices for shopping, banking, and telemedicine visits. Our research conducted at the close of 2020² quantified this increased reliance and found double-digit increases in activities that can involve high-value data.



Even as people turn to their smartphones again and again to handle their personal and financial affairs, it would seem they do so with little confidence in their security.



While these figures reflect usage across computers, tablets, as well as smartphones, it is worth noting that [as of April 2021, nearly half of U.S. web traffic was mobile](#). Given that, along with the widespread use of mobile apps for banking, financial services, online shopping, and telemedicine, it only follows that a large portion of this increased usage came by way of smartphones.

As Consumers Flock to Their Smartphones, Hackers Follow

As a result of the uptick in mobile activity spurred by the pandemic, cybercriminals are launching sophisticated scams targeted specifically at mobile devices and software. The April 2021 edition of McAfee's Threats Report found that mobile malware grew 118% from Q3 to Q4 2020, with common attacks including malicious apps, email, and text phishing, along with network spoofing attacks.

While the sophistication and volume of those attacks increase, consumers recognize that cybercrime is a concern. However, the majority of them remain unsure how to address the associated risks. Moreover, a significant portion are unaware

of the valuable data they are creating on their phones to begin with:

- Some 82 percent of U.S. consumers say that device security is a concern of theirs.³
- More than half (58 percent) of U.S. consumers do not know if they are secure on their smartphones or feel that they are secure on them.⁴
- Only one-third of U.S. consumers (36 percent) said they have a clear understanding of the information stored on their smartphones.⁵

Given these figures, even as people turn to their smartphones again and again to handle their personal and financial affairs, it would seem they do so with little confidence in their security.

¹ McAfee/MSI International research conducted April 2021, 1,000 respondents, aged 18 to 75

² McAfee/MSI International research, conducted December 2020, 1,000 respondents, aged 18 to 75

³ McAfee/MSI International research, conducted December 2020, 1,000 respondents, aged 18 to 75

⁴ McAfee/MSI International research conducted April 2021, 1,000 respondents, aged 18 to 75

⁵ Ibid.

Four Straightforward Steps That Can Help Protect Mobile Devices

As consumers became more and more digitally connected via their mobile devices, it is critical that they stay educated and proactive about protecting their sensitive data. In that spirit, we suggest that they take the following steps:

- **Do not reuse passwords**, so that if one account is compromised the others are still protected. Further, consider using a password manager to create and store strong, unique passwords.
- **Protect your smartphone with mobile security** like [McAfee Mobile Security](#) to safeguard mobile devices and personal data from threats and malicious apps.
- **Use multi-factor authentication** whenever available to add an additional layer of security to protect personal data and information while banking, shopping, and other services.
- **Connect with a Virtual Private Network (VPN)** when using public Wi-Fi while travelling, at cafes, and other places away from home, as hackers can easily spy on unsecured network traffic.



Conclusion: Closing the Gap

As a safer internet rests with all who use it, it is imperative that the industry plays its part in helping consumers get educated on mobile security. For decades now, consumers have been encouraged to protect their computers from threats.

The same goes for their mobile devices. With their increased use in personal and financial affairs, protecting smartphones and mobile devices take on new import—particularly in a time when mobile attacks have increased by more than 100 percent.

About McAfee

McAfee is the device-to-cloud cybersecurity company. Inspired by the power of working together, McAfee creates business and consumer solutions that make our world a safer place. By building solutions that work with other companies' products, McAfee helps businesses orchestrate cyber environments that are truly integrated, where protection, detection and correction of threats happen simultaneously and collaboratively. By protecting consumers across all their devices, McAfee secures their digital lifestyle at home and away. By working with other security players McAfee is leading the effort to unite against cybercriminals for the benefit of all.

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