

Trust in data privacy increases during pandemic

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COVID-19 has seen Australians become more trusting of organizations and governments when it comes to their personal data and privacy, according to new research.

The Australian National University (ANU) study examined more than 3,200 Australians' attitudes toward [data privacy](#) and security before and during the coronavirus pandemic, including the use of the COVIDSafe app.

Study co-author Professor Nicholas Biddle said the study also showed increases in trust "strongly related" to an increase in confidence in the Federal Government, state and territory governments and the public service.

"The level of Australians' trust, confidence and concerns about sharing their personal data is a critical question during this pandemic," Professor Biddle said.

"It directly relates to the extent to which governments are able to use personal data to monitor and control the spread of COVID-19. In turn, the extent to which governments' protect personal data will help shape the Australians' views about how their data is shared and used into the future. Our findings provide strong support for the notion that trust and confidence in different aspects of policy design and delivery interact with each other, creating vicious or virtuous circles."

The study measured Australians' trust in how their personal data was handled by governments and other organizations on a scale of one to 10—with 10 being the most trusting. The researchers found trust had increased across the board.

"The organization with the highest level of trust was the Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS), which jumped from 6.42 to 7.10 between 2018 and 2020," Professor Biddle said.

"The ABS was closely followed by universities (5.74 to 6.43), state and territories where people lived (5.36 to 6.36), and the Federal

Government (5.46 to 6.29). However, the greatest increase in trust was for companies that people use to make online purchases, like banks and telecommunications companies, with trust for these companies increasing by almost 30 percent."

According to Professor Biddle, even social media companies saw an increase in trust, rising from 2.88 before the pandemic to 3.43 during the COVID-19 outbreak.

The researchers also examined how many Australians had downloaded the COVIDSafe app, with 44.7 percent of males saying they had compared to 43 percent of females.

The age group with the most downloads was 55 to 64 year olds, while 18 to 24 year olds had downloaded it the least.

"The most common reason given for having downloaded the app was because it may help end social distancing restrictions more quickly," Professor Biddle said.

"Our research shows that the level of trust in the app strongly related to people's trust in the government; if they trust government they are more likely to download it. For those who had not tried to download the app, the two most common reasons given related to trust, with 20.8 percent of Australians saying they didn't trust government with their data and an additional 20.5 percent saying they didn't trust the safety of the app. A further 16.9 percent said that they didn't want the [government](#) 'tracking me.'"

The study also showed that while [trust](#) in data privacy had increased during the pandemic, the vast majority of Australians are still concerned about the security of their [personal data](#) and information in general.

"More than nine in 10 Australians, 92.3 percent, think it is increasingly likely they will become a victim of cybercrime, while 87.7 percent say they are concerned their online personal information is not kept secure by websites," study co-author Professor Matthew Gray said.

"And 85.8 percent of Australians avoid disclosing information online."

More information: Biddle et al., Data trust and data privacy in the COVID-19 period. (2020). [csrcm.cass.anu.edu.au/sites/def ...
_COVID-19_period.pdf](https://csrcm.cass.anu.edu.au/sites/default/files/2020-07/COVID-19_period.pdf)

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