

# Excitement, superstition and great insecurity – how global consumers engage with the digital world

Consumers globally navigate the digital world with both enthusiasm and unease, balancing tech-savviness with concerns about privacy, AI impacts, and data security.



As a recent study<sup>[1]</sup> shows, modern consumers everywhere are becoming more knowledgeable about the benefits and drawbacks of an increasingly complex and sophisticated digital world. Yet even amongst the generally tech savvy, younger audience<sup>[2]</sup>, superstitious beliefs can be found alongside excitement and concern when it comes to using smart devices, surfing on the internet and managing their personal information. A widespread sense of insecurity highlights the need for more education on safe practices in the digital environment, expert explanations

on new technologies, and knowledge about reliable security solutions protecting users' devices, privacy and digital identity.

## Key insights

- **52%** do not feel very safe or safe on the Internet as a whole.
- **44%** take funny tests or play mini-games on social media and post my results.
- **43%** feel uncertain about what is safe and what is not when it comes to using digital devices.
- **38%** believe it is impossible to tell whether they are talking to a real person or an AI/a chatbot when they are online.
- **57%** would use Artificial Intelligence to help me manage my everyday life.
- **48%** believe that human relationships will change because of AI – people will have online, virtual partners instead of relationships with real humans.
- **57%** believe that it is possible to find every image/video/voice recording that has ever been published online by a specific person.
- **52%** are sure that personal data will remain visible online even when the person is not alive anymore.
- **45%** think it is not ethical to keep video, voice or image records online without the permission of their family after someone has passed away.

- **61%** believe that the identities of the deceased are particularly vulnerable to identity theft.

## Summary

What is immediately surprising is the level of insecurity amongst consumers who use many different digital services and devices every day, despite feeling fundamentally unsafe. Part of this is the growth in online interactions with digital entities undistinguishable from real people. Almost one in five (19%) even say that they are using the internet much less now because they do not know which sites they can trust.

Concerns over being tracked or monitored through their digital devices sit alongside worries over potential health risks and remembered reports of smartphones exploding or catching fire when charging. Safeguarding personal data and access to important accounts and financial applications is on their minds, but at the same time, consumers will happily click on mini-games and funny personality tests on their social media, not thinking at all about the security implications. Entertainment outweighs safety worries.

Artificial Intelligence (AI) has become an ever-present part of everyday consumer life, with many believing it will create exciting new opportunities (43%). When it comes to making the most important life decisions, around a third would ask an AI for help and more than half would use it for running their everyday lives with more efficiency. Almost half believe that human relationships will change because of the impact of AI – virtual characters replacing real-life partners.

Making images, videos and personal information available online creates its own long-term challenges. The ethics of eternal digital footprints are unclear, and many consumers are uncomfortable with their lack of control. More than half are certain that anything posted by a specific person can be found, and that this will remain the case even if they are deceased.

However, many find this unacceptable and would make the permission of that person's family mandatory. Alongside, the misuse of such data is recognized as a

potential issue by almost two thirds of consumers globally, even if they do not know what to do about it.

# Chapter 1. Digital superstitions

## Even the tech savvy younger generations hold many false beliefs when it comes to digital technology

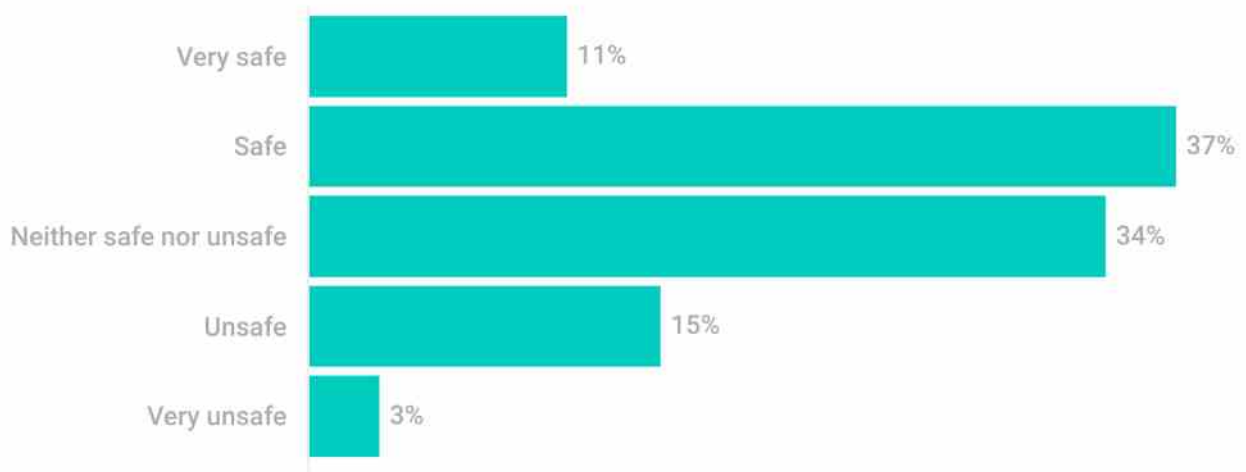


A superstition is a deeply held conviction not backed up by scientific evidence. Even those most familiar with digital technology and smart devices still hold on to superstitions around chain letters, health impacts of smartphones and how to keep their personal information secure. There are also some well-founded concerns

about being online and data safety, but having fun and interacting with others can lead consumers to forget what they should be paying attention to for staying safe online – even if they already know better.

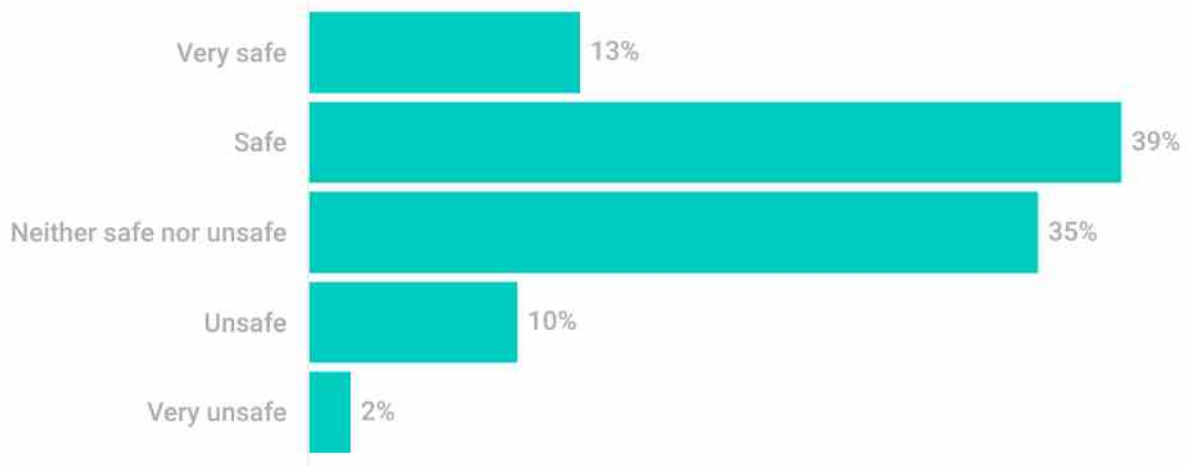
## A surprising 43% of consumers are unsure about the safe use of digital devices, more than half do not feel safe on the Internet

How safe do you feel on the Internet as a whole?



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### How safe do you feel when it comes to using digital/smart devices?



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52% overall do not feel safe when using the internet, with growing insecurity over chatbots taking the place of 'real people' (47% find it very difficult to tell the difference). As many as 43% foresee the creation of completely convincing digital replicas of specific people who can act in their name without anyone realizing, and 45% are often overcome by the feeling that companies know a lot more

about them than they should, with no understanding of where that information might have come from.

Almost one in five consumers (19%) say that they are using the internet much less now because they are not sure which sites to trust, 49% cover the webcam on their digital devices to avoid being observed without their knowledge.

## **Being tracked, listened to and hacked are widespread concerns, impacting the way consumers use their smart devices**

Two thirds (67%) are concerned that their movements can be tracked through their smartphones without their knowledge. Almost half (49%) believe that digital assistants like Alexa or Siri listen to everything said within earshot 24 hours a day, passing on the information collected.

40% are convinced that the payment cards they have stored in their digital wallets can be copied wirelessly and used by others without their knowledge (43% believe that all of the required information is actually stored on their phone). Just over a quarter (26%) make use of special protective phone covers to prevent this from happening.

Almost a third (31%) avoid conducting any direct business transactions via their smartphones as they cannot be sure if the seller is real or not, and 19% are convinced that deepfakes are impossible to spot.



## **Smartphones are a part of daily life, but still regarded with some suspicion by more than half of global consumers, especially when it comes to their health and personal safety**

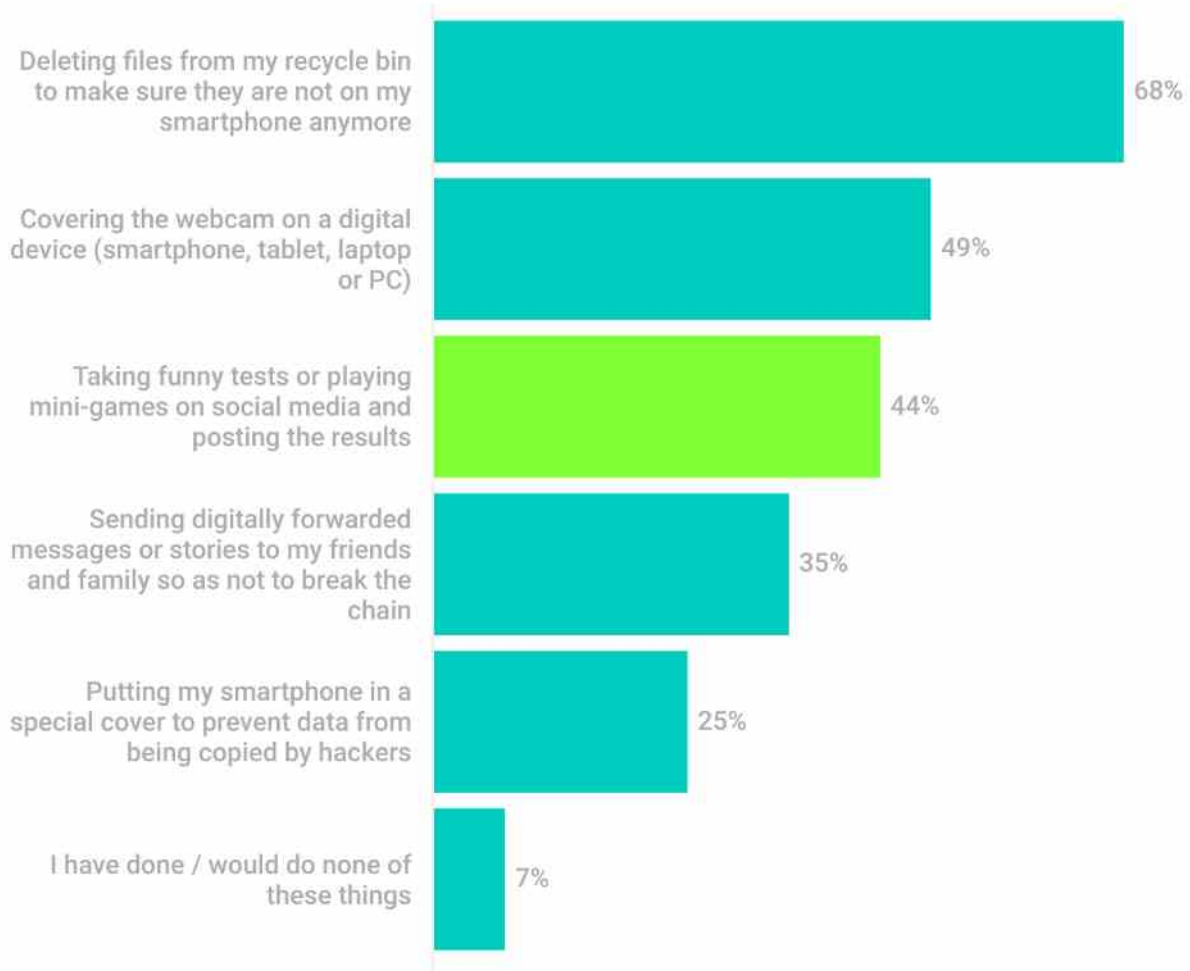
There are widespread concerns over the health impacts the use of smartphones might have: 53% do not keep their smartphones on their nightstand when they sleep, 49% believe that they emit radiation that can be harmful. As many as 26% report that they get headaches when they make calls of more than a few minutes, the same number say that carrying a smartphone close to their body all day makes them feel unwell.

Attempts to minimize potential risks of using smartphones include 68% regularly emptying the recycling bin to remove the contents from the smartphone (which it does not), not charging their phones overnight as they might explode (38%) or catch fire (36%), and 25% using special covers to prevent hackers from accessing their data.

More than a quarter (28%) turn off their phones or put them into airplane mode when having a private conversation in the vicinity of the device, 26% do this whenever they are in a public place and carrying their phone with them.

## **Many consumers do not think much about the impact and potential risks of their online behavior, from using public Wi-Fi to posting personal data on social media**

**Which of the following things have you done or would you do?**



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As many as 44% will play mini-games and take tests for fun, posting their results on social media, and 35% make sure they do not break the chains of forwarded messages or stories to their friends and family.

39% of consumers globally believe that it is perfectly safe to log onto openly available Wi-Fi networks, typically in cafés or public places, and 44% regularly play mini-games or take social 'tests' online for fun, posting the results on social media for their friends to see. Perhaps this is based on the belief that they would always have to give explicit permission for their data to be stored and used (53% say so), forgetting that the terms & conditions for the vast majority of websites are automatically sanctioned by making use of them.

One in five say that digital items can work as good luck charms (19%), and as many (21%) are specifically nervous about chain letters and the impact it might



have if they do not send them to the required number of recipients.

## **Consumers globally exhibit a woeful lack of understanding of what is safe and what is not**

Some users attempt to use the internet in a safer way, but still do not understand how to do this effectively: 40% believe that switching on the 'incognito mode' when browsing makes their activity invisible to everyone, a quarter (24%) rely on the encryption of all contents in messenger services like WhatsApp to make live links safe to use, and 22% are sure that iOS-based products are immune to all attempts to hack them.

Blockchain technology is believed by 21% to be usable for cryptocurrency only, but also entirely safe (20%).

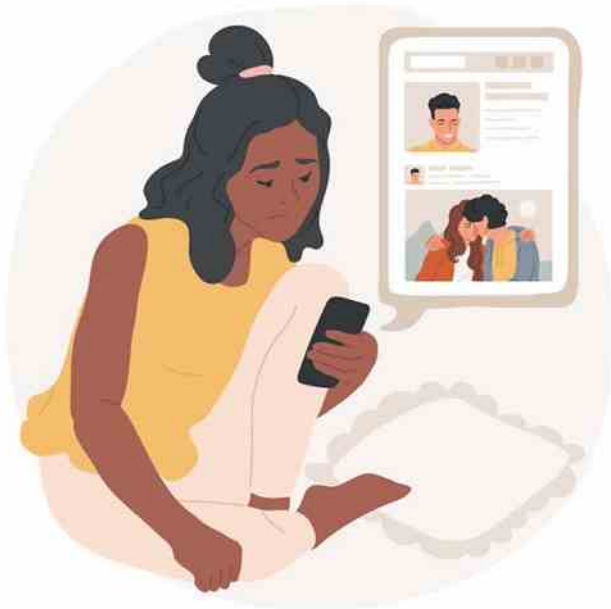
All of this shows that there is a great need for more understanding, knowledge and support to enable consumers to use the internet safely and protect their personal information.

## **Chapter 2. Digital perceptions – AI & new technologies**

### **The speed of technological change causes widespread concern as increasingly intelligent software solutions make it more and more difficult to know what is safe in the digital realm**

Evolving digital technologies are not understood well enough by those who use them every day. There is a general sense of concern as almost a quarter (24%) blame modern communication technology for an increase in heart problems and more than one in five (22%) regard 6G technology as potentially unsafe, with no evidence to the contrary.

And although the majority accepts new technology in general as safe and under control, this does not extend to expectations regarding personal information: as



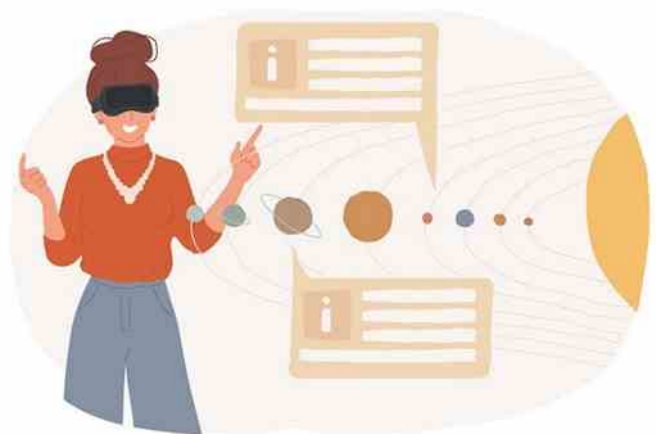
many as 36% are convinced that it will not be possible to keep personal data safe in the future and almost a third (30%) even say that there is no point in caring about personal data security in the future as it would be pointless to do so. In line with a growing sense of resignation, 21% said 'No' and 10% 'Don't know' when asked if they would pay attention to the information provided on websites about the data collected about them.

## **Artificial Intelligence (AI) creates both great excitement and insecurity amongst consumers globally**

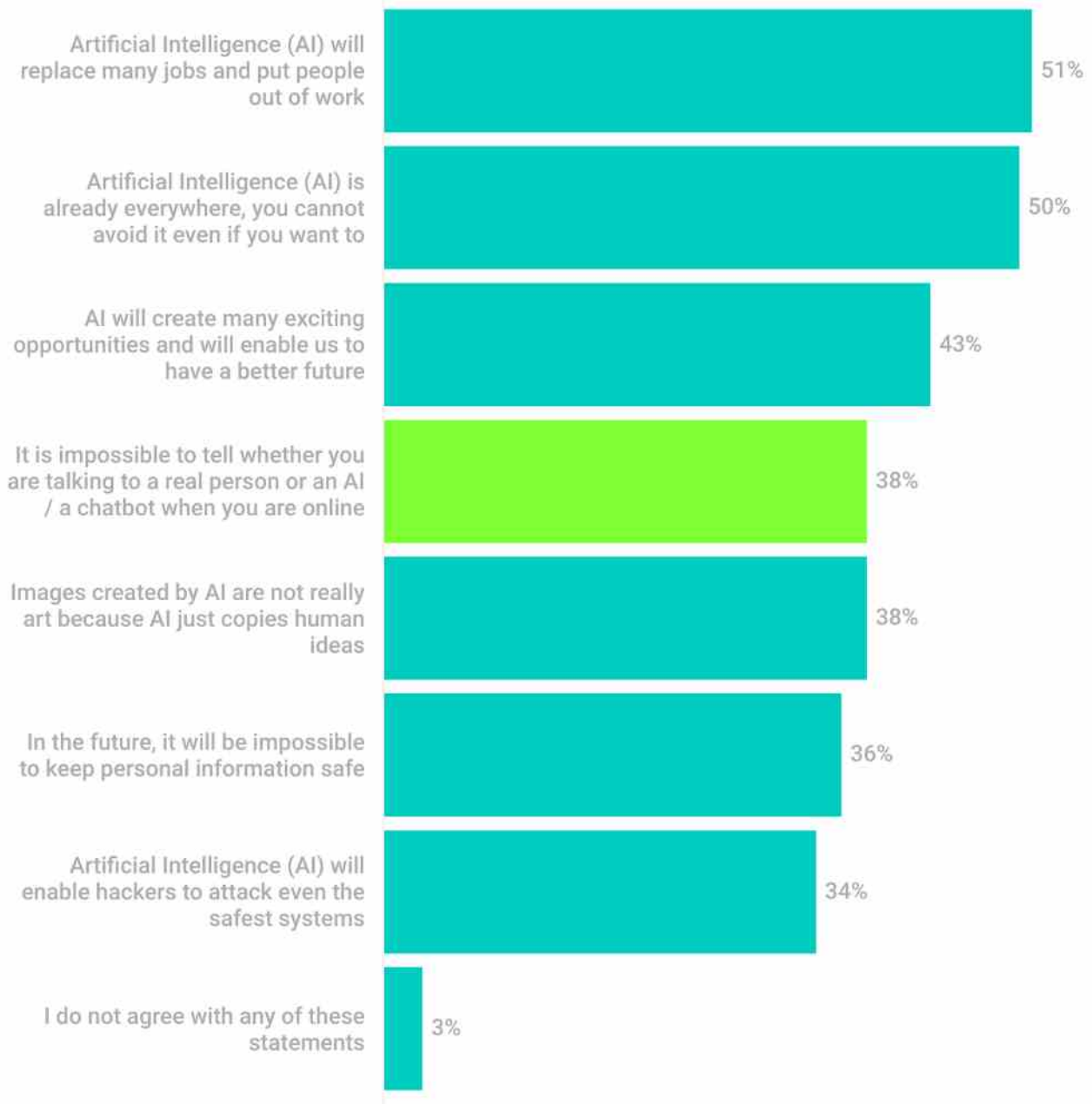
Half of all consumers (50%) believe that AI has become an unavoidable part of our lives already, with 43% having a positive outlook on the many exciting opportunities for improving everyone's future. When it comes to creativity, almost two thirds (62%) judge AI as a credible producer of works of art.

Another area where AI is expected to deliver improvement is education: 47% foresee children being taught through virtual reality and experiences in the Metaverse. 34% can even imagine an AI as their manager at work being a fairer boss than their current human equivalent.

By contrast, 51% are sure that AI will put many people out of work as it replaces many jobs, and 38% that it will make it impossible to distinguish 'real' from artificial conversation partners online, be they customer service chatbots or potential partners on a dating app.



## Thinking about new technologies, which of the following statements would you agree with?

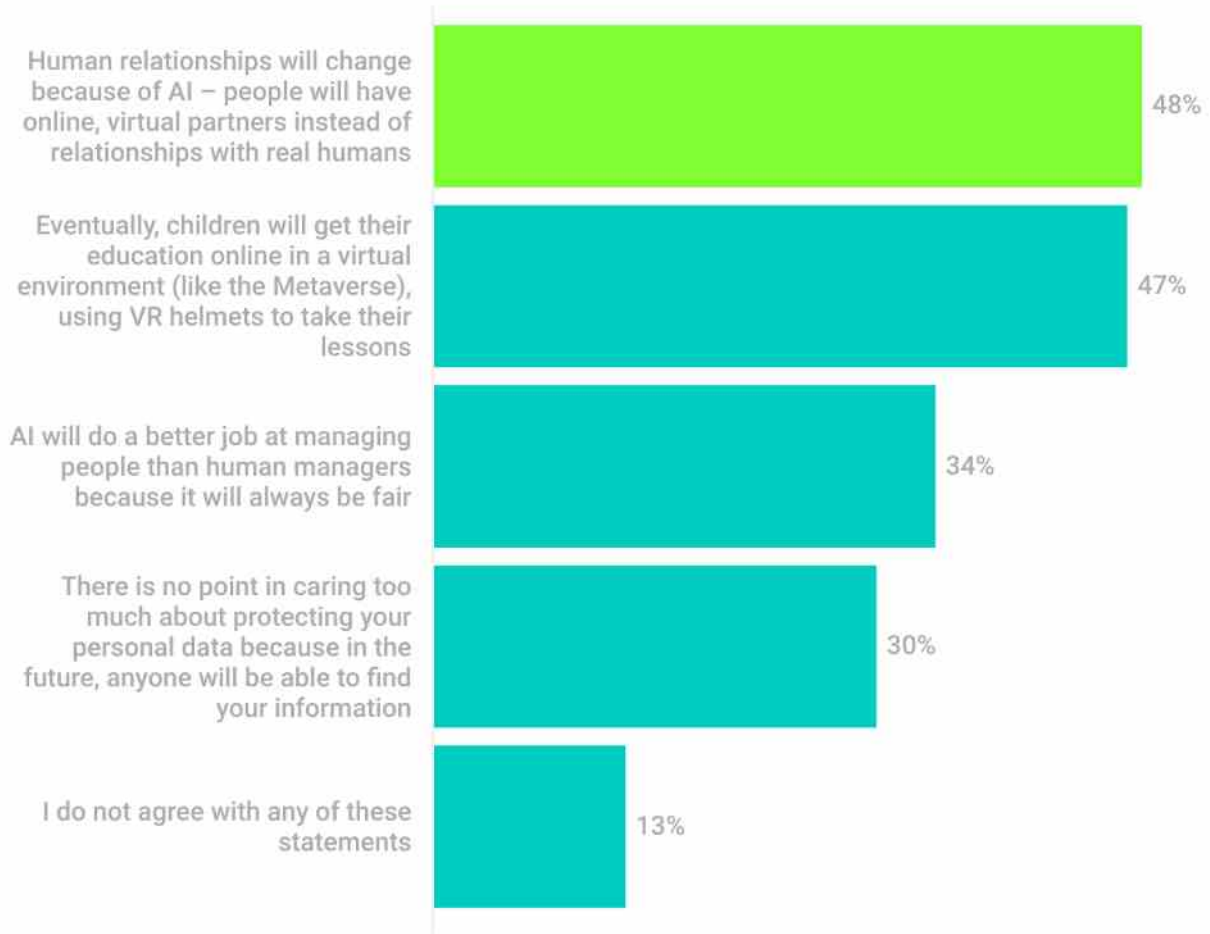


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## AI is a long way yet from replacing IRL relationships, but can help to make better decisions

As many as 48% believe that human relationships will change because of the impact of AI – virtual characters replacing real-life partners.

## In the future, what differences might AI make to the way we live?



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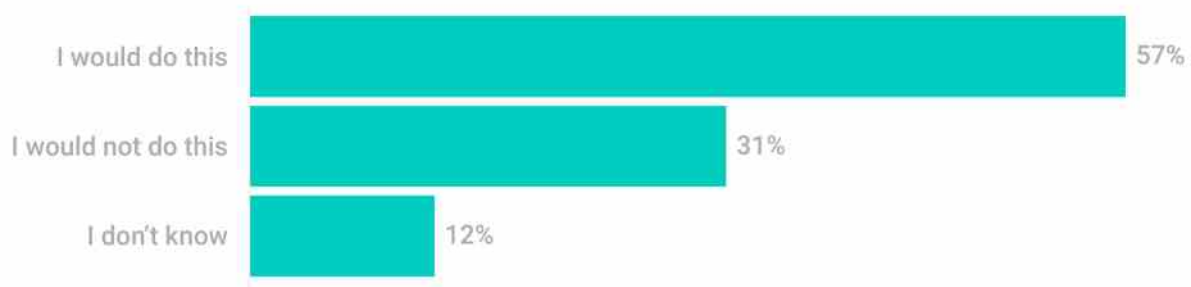


The same number (48%) of global consumers would use an AI chatbot to have conversations with people online, but only 31% would use AI to help them find the right partner on a dating app, 28% to help them raise their children.

When it comes to making the most important life decisions, only 34% would ask an AI for help, but as many

as 57% would use it for running their everyday lives with more efficiency.

## Would you use Artificial Intelligence to help you manage your everyday life?



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### **AI takes personal information security out of the hands of consumers across the world**

On balance, it seems that AI has become accepted as an inevitable part of modern life, often in a positive light, but its role in pushing up the risk to personal information is widely underestimated. Only 34% believe that it could enable hackers to attack even the safest systems, but 30% are sure that anyone will be able to find out whatever they want about you in the future and you cannot do anything to stop them.

### **Connected vehicles allow your movements to be tracked without you knowing and can be hacked remotely**

In line with general uncertainty over the collection and use of personal data, 41% are suspicious of the amount of information collected by modern cars and believe that it can certainly be used to track your movement – without you even knowing that this was being done.

Only 16% have no concerns over the safety of connected or autonomous vehicles. As many as 46% insist that the safety of a self-driving car depends crucially on the constant presence of a human driver – this is perhaps unsurprising, considering regular media coverage of trials going wrong in

spectacular ways. Reflecting this, only a third (35%) would use a taxi operated entirely via autopilot compared to 49% saying 'definitely not'.

Autonomous cars are also believed to be hackable remotely (38%), making them decidedly unsafe, and more than a third (35%) are sure that any connected vehicle could be brought to a sudden stop through a cyber-attack. Electric vehicles are regarded as a specific target for hackers by 26%.

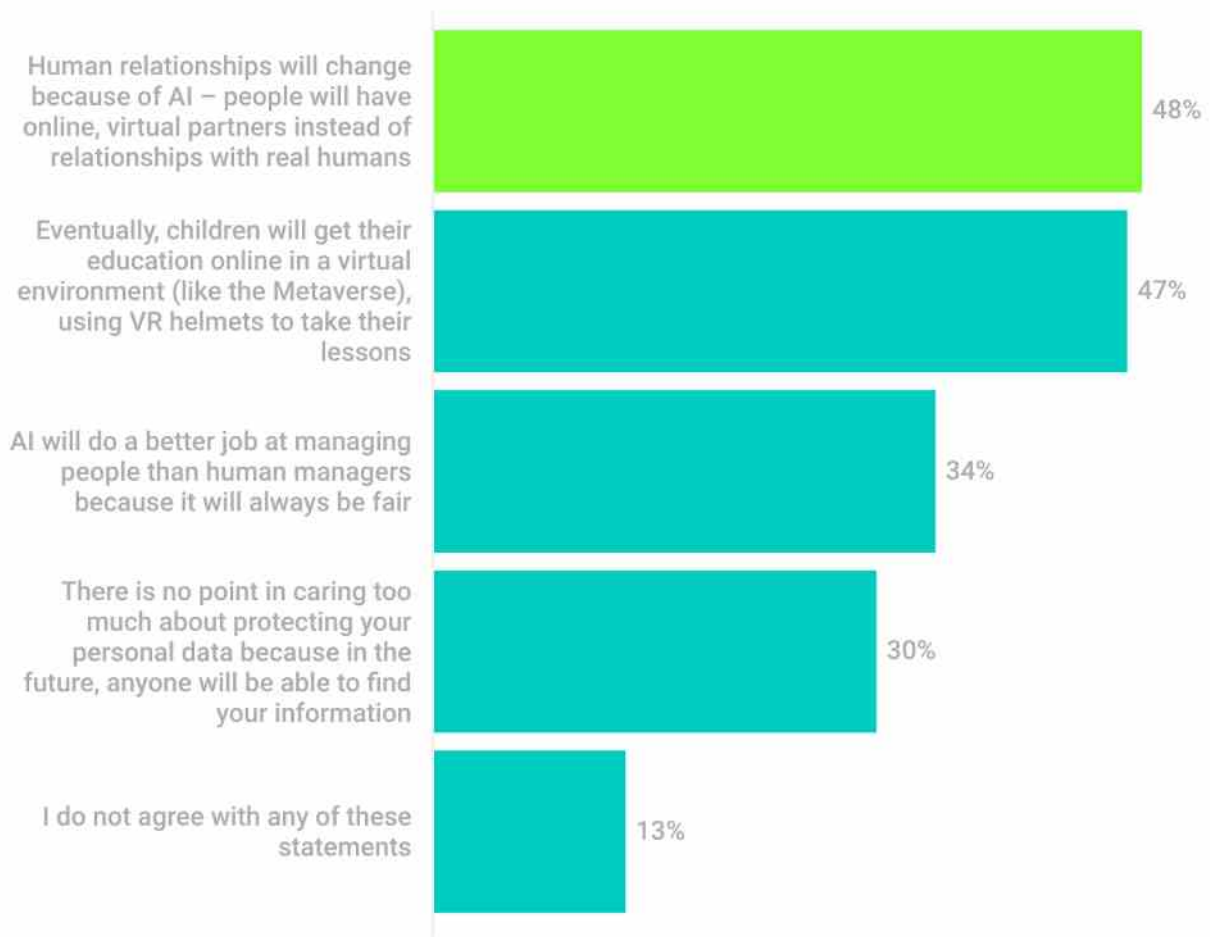
In a fast-changing and confusing world full of new technologies, consumers struggle to keep up and also to prioritize what information is most important to protect. No-one wants to lose out on the benefits innovation can deliver, but many do not know what action they can take to minimize the negative fall-out from using smart devices, AI or even 'just' the internet.

## **Chapter 3. Digital immortality**

### **Growing awareness of the longevity of digital information makes many consumers more cautious of what they post online**

43% of global consumers are certain that there is no time limit to find every image, video or voice recording relating to a specific person ever published online. Almost a third (32%) say that they do not post any images of themselves or their family online, as it is so hard to control who will see or even use them.

**In the future, what differences might AI make to the way we live?**



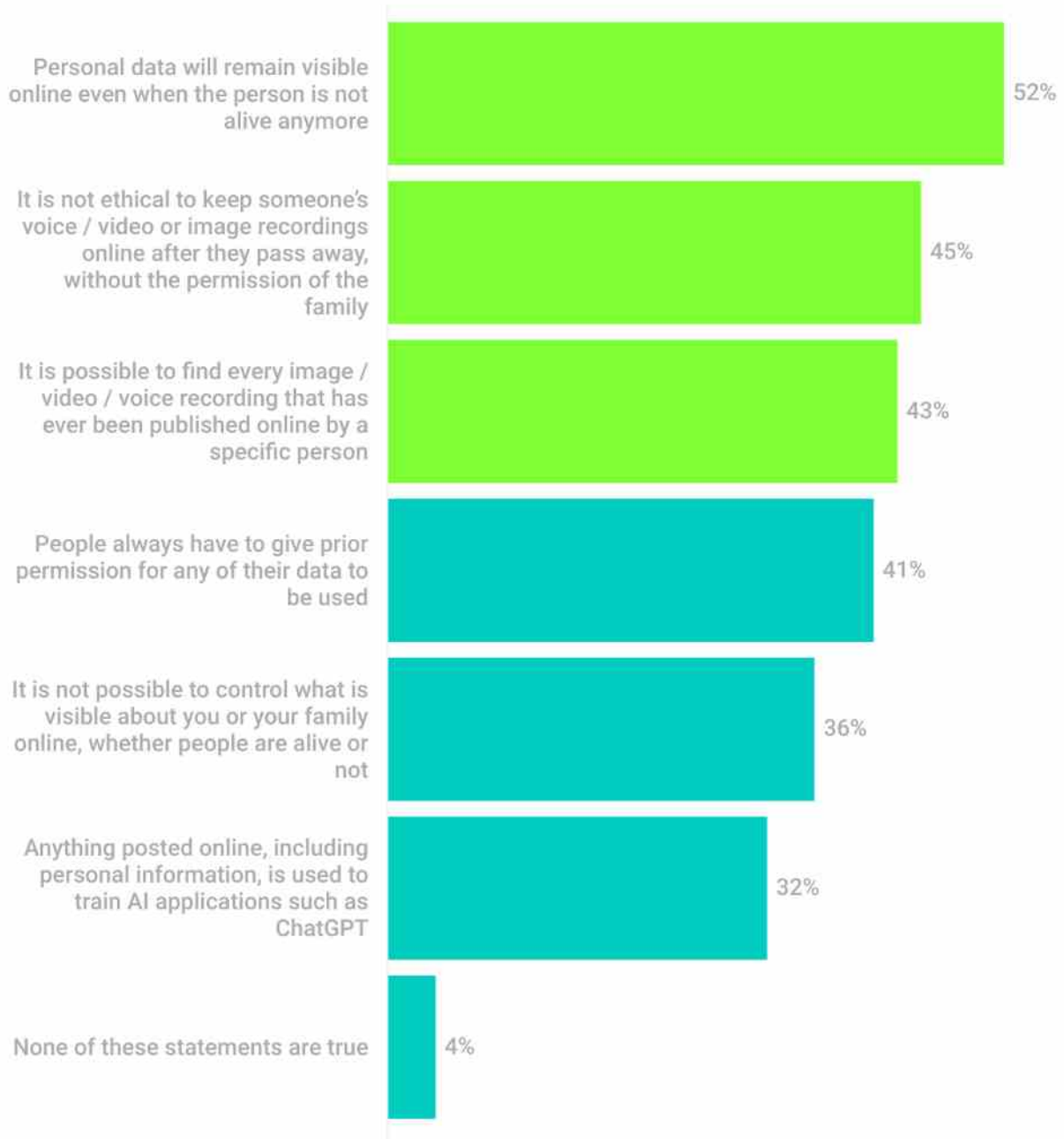
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Also 32% believe that anything posted online, including personal information, is used to train AI applications such as Chat GPT, without seeking permission of the owner of this data, whilst 41% are convinced that it requires their explicit permission for any of their personal data to be used.

## **The ethics of eternal digital footprints are unclear, and many consumers are uncomfortable with their lack of control**

More than half (52%) are sure that anyone's personal data will remain visible online even when the owner of that data is not alive anymore. 45% say that it is not ethical to keep video, voice or image records online without the permission of their family after someone has passed away, especially because these records can be found (and used) by anyone at any time.

## Which of the following statements are true?



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More than a third (36%) state explicitly that control over what is visible about you or your family is an illusion once it has been posted on the internet, no matter whether someone is still alive or not. Modern search tools do not even require a name or any personal information – feeding the right AI application an image or two is enough to find every single visual record of that face, whether the seeker belongs to the family or is a complete stranger. Using a fake name on social media



(chosen as a way to protect their identity by 29% of global consumers) will not change that fact but at the same time creates more reasons not to trust other people online.

## **The idea of a digital representation of a loved one after their death makes many consumers very uncomfortable**



Two thirds (66%) of consumers globally agree that seeing images or stories about people who have passed away can be upsetting to those who were close to them when they were alive (only 11% actually disagree). Whether it can help family and friends who have lost someone they love to see their social media and other online accounts receive likes or comments is more difficult to judge for consumers, of whom 40% agree and 28% disagree; most of the rest (29%) sits on the fence.

Using AI or a social media platform to create a presence of a deceased person splits the global consumer community more drastically: whilst 35% agreed that it's perfectly fine to create a digital identity of someone who is no longer alive, through photos, videos or other mementos, to help those left behind to cope with their loss, 38% actively disagreed. This is clearly a sensitive subject and the widespread uncertainty over the unauthorized use of content posted online can only increase that sensitivity.

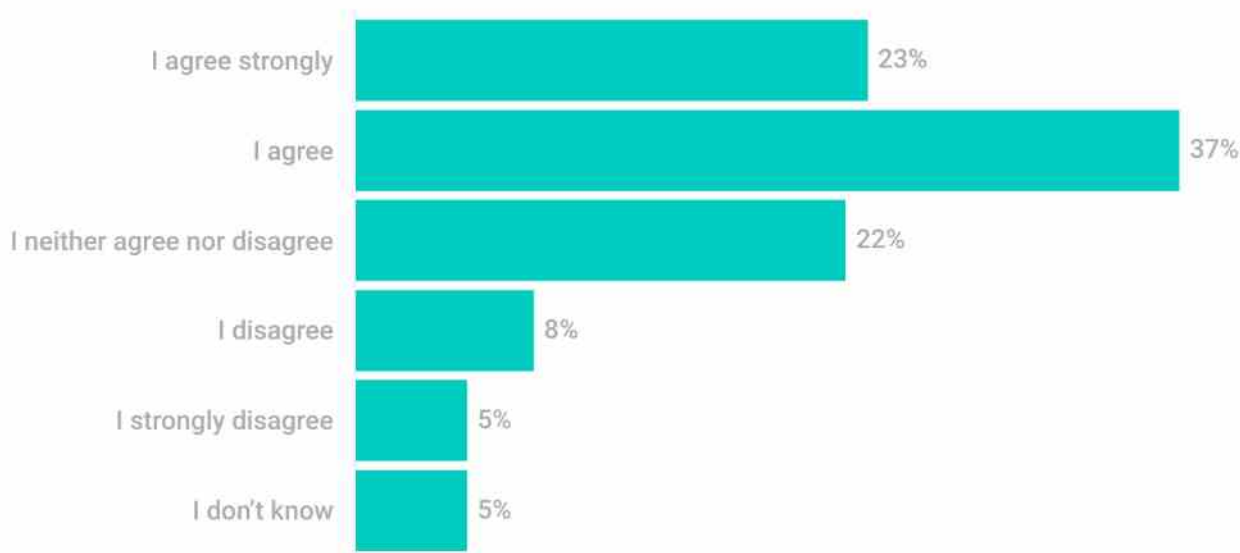
## **The deceased are believed to be even more vulnerable to data and identity theft**

If anything, doing so could become a problem, consumers say: 58% agree that the online presence of people who have passed away can be recreated using AI, which could create problems for their family (only 16% actively disagree). Especially when, as 61% of global consumers believe, the identities of the deceased are particularly vulnerable to identity theft with no-one left to monitor



what is happening to the information they posted online.

**The identities of the deceased are particularly vulnerable to identity theft. How do you feel about the following scenario?**



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## **Make a will about your online presence**

The only measure consumers can take to control what happens to their digital footprint after their death is to make this part of their testament and put in place an executor to make sure their instructions are carried out in full. 63% agree that anyone who has an online presence should specify in their will (testament) what is to be done with their data and social accounts.

Platform providers would then be responsible for handling social media accounts and all personal information about the deceases in accordance with the instructions given by the deceased.

The topic of digital oblivion is not contemplated often by consumers who have so many other things to deal with when a loved one dies, their social media presence, for example, must be a very low priority. However, with the knowledge that stolen identities can cause a great amount of trouble to family members, it makes sense to consider making legal provisions as part of a will.

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*[1]. A global study with 10,000 consumers in EU, UK, APAC, CIS, LatAm, and META, including the UK (1000), Germany (1000), France (1000), Spain (500), Italy (500), Portugal (500), Brazil (500), Mexico (500), Russia (500), Kazakhstan (500), India (500), China (500), Indonesia (500), Turkey (500), KSA (500), UAE (500), and South Africa (500); Fieldwork dates: 17-30 June, 2024.*

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*[2]. All participants are aged between 18 and 40, interested in new technologies, using Social media, Online gaming, Movie streaming, or Apps/the internet for listening to music or podcasts. [Back](#)*

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