HUMAN, TECHNOLOGY AND COGNITION REPORT 2026

RESULTS OF TECHNOLOGY INTERACTION SURVEY

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

HOW PEOPLE INTERACT WITH TECHNOLOGY. WHAT IT MEANS TO THEM, WHY THEY USE IT AND WHAT CONCERNS THEM MOST.

This report presents findings from a survey of 101 respondents on how people interact with, respond to, and are affected by technology in their daily and professional lives. The survey was conducted in 2025 by Strat Futures Pty Limited to better understand human and technology interaction, with a focus on challenges people experience to support development of the Cognitive Readiness platform.

Technology use in this sample is universal but not uncomplicated. Every respondent uses a phone or computer, most use AI tools and the vast majority say that use comes with a cost in lost time, strong emotional activation, concern around data and privacy and/or a nagging uncertainty about trust, truth and influence.

People rely on technology daily, value what it lets them do (which is, above all, to stay close to the people they love), yet simultaneously feel shaped, tracked, and sometimes overwhelmed by it.

TECHNOLOGY IS RESHAPING HUMAN COGNITION

Across every age group and demographic, respondents describe sustained challenges to cognitive processing, attention, emotional regulation, decision quality, and the ability to establish truth. These are not isolated complaints. They are consistent across the sample.

70% of respondents feel overloaded by information and describe active, effortful strategies to manage it.

99% of those who those answered the behavioural effects question (n=82) reported losing track of time (78%), experiencing strong emotional reactions (42%), or making an unexpected decision after using social media or AI (21%).

56% of respondents are concerned about privacy and personal data collection.

41% of respondents are concerned about technology‘s influence on them and a further 37% have some mixed concern, such as algorithmic control, shrinking attention spans, and the way that engagement has been engineered. Only 22% are not concerned about influence.

13% say establishing truth online is no longer possible at all, even as most others describe active verification habits.

This report outlines the findings from the 2025 Technology Interaction survey. For more on implications and policy considerations, follow our work at Strat Futures.

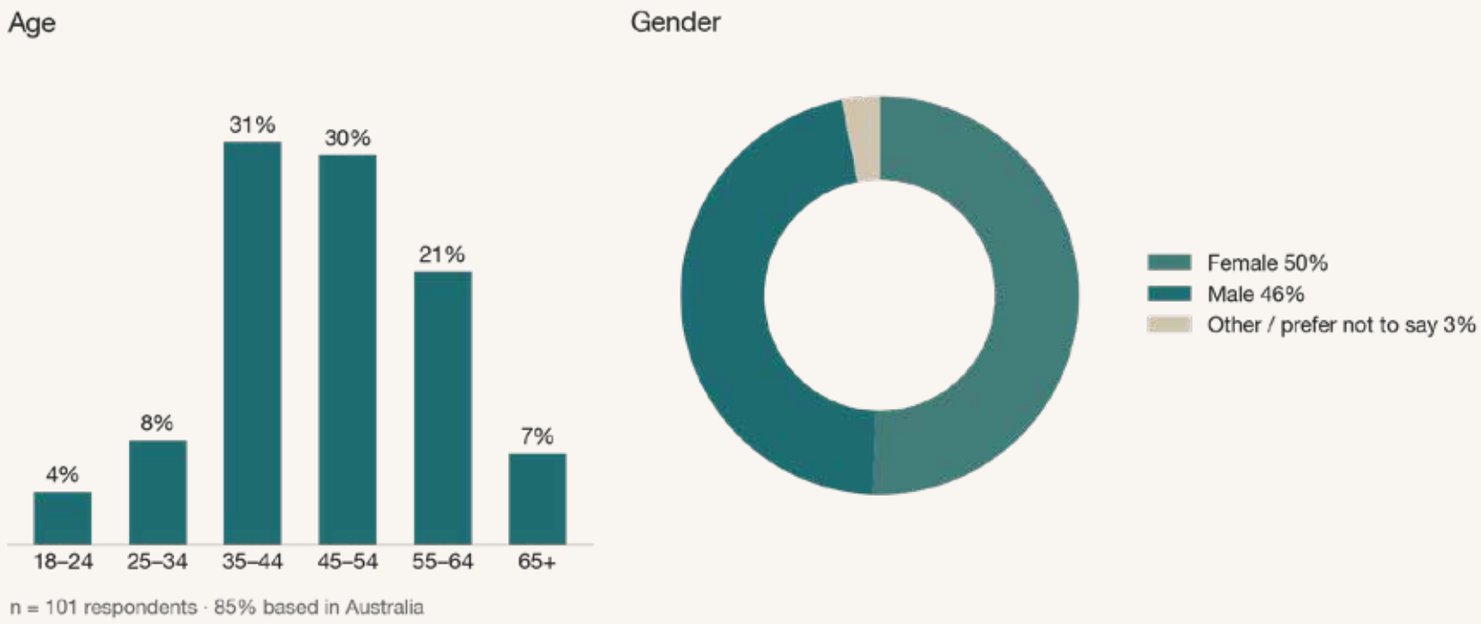
METHODOLOGY & DEMOGRAPHICS

WHO WE HEARD FROM

Survey respondents were mostly Australian (88.67%, n-86), with the rest from overseas (11.34%, n=11); US, UK, Canada, NZ, Singapore, Belgium and India.

Gender was reported by 99 of 101 respondents (2 skipped). Of those who responded, 50 identified as women (50.5%), 46 as men (46.5%), and 3 as other/prefer not to say (3.0%).

The age and gender distribution is set out below.



The 35-64 cohort represents 82% of respondents, providing robust data on the technology experience of working-age adults at peak career stage. No respondents under 18.

METHODOLOGY

The survey was distributed online on social media platforms, by signal and text message and completed by 101 respondents.

The survey comprised a combination of structured binary, multiple-choice, and open-ended qualitative questions. Open-ended response counts reflect those who provided substantive answers to each question; not all 101 respondents answered every open question.

The intention was to better understand the impacts and challenges of technology and our interaction with it, to support development of the Cognitive Readiness Platform.

KEY IMPACTS OF TECHNOLOGY ON COGNITION AND BEHAVIOUR

COGNITION, TECHNOLOGY AND BEHAVIOUR CHANGE

The responses converge on five recurring pressure points, each explored in this section.

- **Attention**, which is the resource people report losing first and most consistently.

- **Digital and Information Overload**, which is common and mostly met with retreat rather than durable coping systems.

- **Truth and Information Trust,** where personal judgment does most of the work and a real minority feel it has stopped working.

- **Privacy and Data Collection,** where concerns are concrete and specific, centred on tangible harms like identity theft and third-party data sale.

- **Technology Influence**, concern is widespread but countermeasures scarce and mostly individual habits.

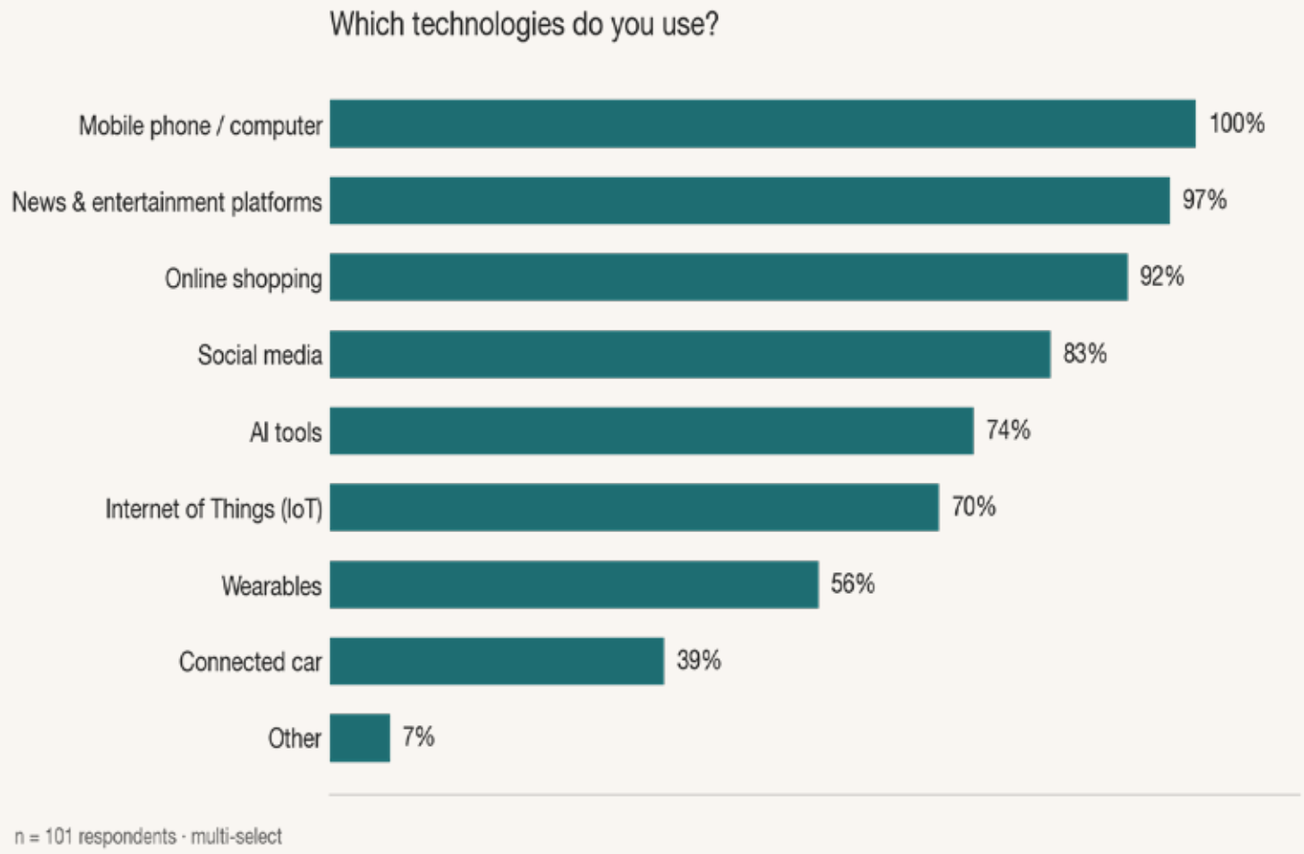
A handful of responses reference military or operational contexts directly, service in the defence force, reliance on technology “on operations” and concern about “cognitive warfare”. This sample includes experts and people already primed to think about technology in terms of its use in society and security as well as readiness and resilience.

HOW RESPONDENTS USE TECHNOLOGY

USE IS UBIQUITOUS AND SOMETIMES INVISIBLE

Mobile phone and computer use was universal (100%). News and entertainment platforms (97%) and online shopping (92%) nearly so. Social media use sits at 83%.

74% of respondents explicitly identify as AI users, although though the figure is almost certainly higher as 91 respondents described specific AI use in their own words, beyond the 75 who ticked the AI checkbox.



HOW PEOPLE USE AI

For many people, AI isn‘t a tool they choose so much as one that arrived pre-installed; in location based apps, search results and streaming recommendations.

“Unintentionally yes.”

“It‘s in a lot of products I use every day, but I don‘t actively seek them out.”

Where people do seek AI out deliberately, the pattern is practical, and often professional. The most common uses were; writing and drafting, work tasks, and research. Sentiment ranges from fully integrated to actively resisted.

“I use AI (foremost LLM) daily as a digital twin to perform numerous functions: search, research, analysis, decision support, editing, and to discuss ideas with.”

“I use it as a tool to find answers to questions. I don‘t trust the responses 100%. I would tend to validate with alternatives.”

“It‘s increasingly expected in my workplace, but I still resist.”

“Sparingly, if possible, but it‘s so integrated into everything now it is difficult to avoid.”

ATTENTION AND FOCUS

ATTENTION AND FOCUS ARE THE PRIMARY CASUALTIES

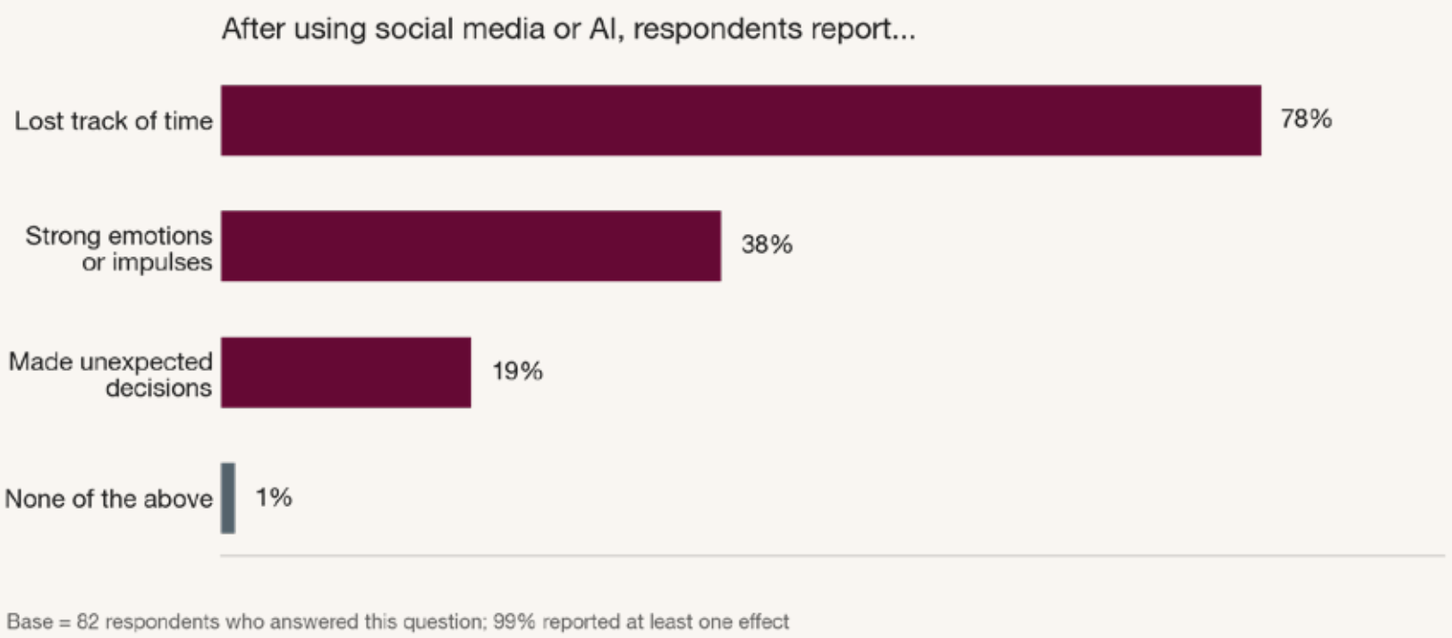
Of everything technology does for people and the impacts it has on people in this survey, the most consistent and specific reported change is the loss of attention itself.

Asked what happens after they use social media or AI, 82 respondents answered and 81 of them (99%) reported at least one behavioural effect. Losing track of time was reported far more often than any other single effect, and 15 respondents reported all three effects at once. See chart on next page.

“It‘s 9.30 at night, and I scroll for 5 minutes and it‘s quarter to midnight...”

“Doom scrolling reels and find an hour has gone by. Feel like I have wasted my own time.”

ATTENTION AND FOCUS CONTINUED



"Social media... the algorithms tend to be designed to keep you scrolling."

The same theme resurfaced unprompted in two questions asked later in the survey ("biggest problem" and "what would improve cognitive performance." Focus and notifications dominated these responses even over privacy, misinformation, overload in general. They key concern was the specific inability to sustain attention on one thing.

"Being able to focus with so many different notifications."

"The ability to concentrate without distraction is always a struggle."

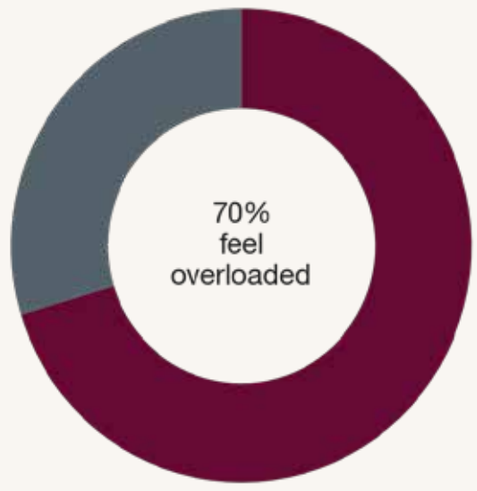
"Blocking everything else out and just being able to do one thing. Pausing updates from email etc. Like plane rides are focused time."

Attention loss is also the one effect respondents describe as designed into platforms rather than accidental several explicitly named the business model behind it, not just their own willpower, as the cause.

"Social media is based on rigorous research to manipulate human emotion and behaviour: it is built into the business model."

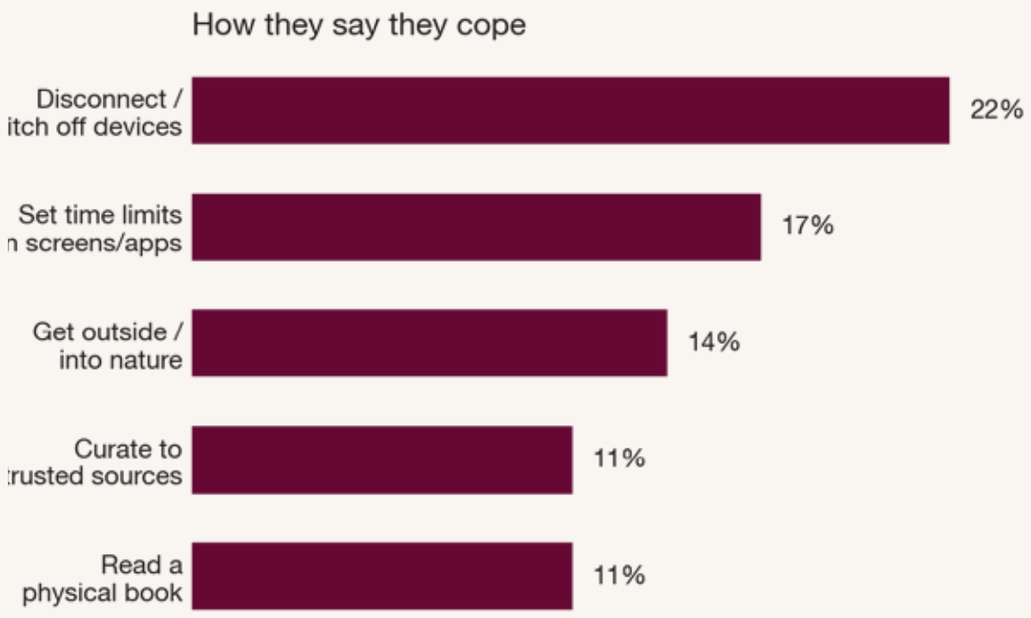
INFORMATION OVERLOAD AND STRATEGIES

CURRENT STRATEGY IS RETREAT, NOT RESILIENCE



Seventy percent of respondents say they feel overloaded by information or technology, as shown on the image to the right. What respondents describe doing about it is instructive–they retreat. The single most common response, by a clear margin, is to disconnect or switch devices off entirely. It is not yet clear to many how to build a sustainable way of engaging with technology with the volume of information.

Every one of the top strategies is a form of withdrawal; switching off, setting a hard time limit, leaving the phone behind to go outside, retreating to a physical book. These are legitimate and often healthy responses, but they are individual and manual. They are something a person does in each moment rather than systems and structures and can be easily overlooked or forgotten in difficult moments.



“Switch off. Delete apps off phone. Read a book. Cook. Time with kiddos.”

“I have left the ADF and currently working on good mental health practices... A digital detox is sometimes required, and I attempt to read a book to shift my mind.”

“Try to get off the web for a bit and get back to the basics — read a book, go to the gym, spend time with real people face to face.”

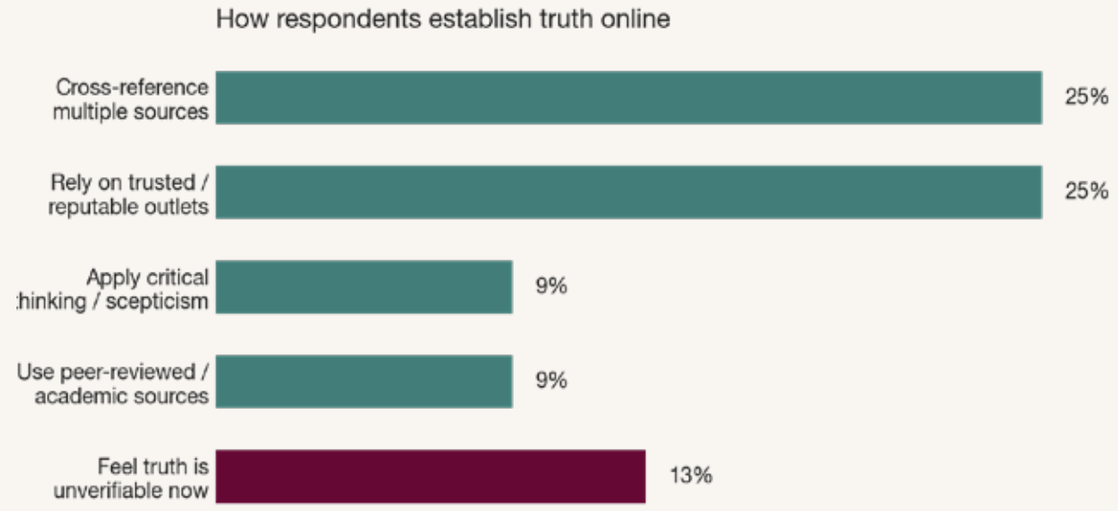
“Information overload is the modern condition. I cope by having highly developed selection mechanisms and seeking constant process of selection and assessment in my work so that I can make informed judgement in a context defined by info overload.”

A smaller number described having no strategy at all (“I don‘t”), and none described a structural or systemic fix. No one pointed to a tool, setting, or system that had durably reduced how overloaded they feel. The coping repertoire here is personal, effortful and repeated. It permeates their professional and personal lives.

TRUTH AND INFORMATION TRUST

ESTABLISHING TRUTH AND VERIFYING INFORMATION

Asked how they establish what‘s true online, respondents overwhelmingly described active personal judgment rather than external tools or systems. Cross-referencing multiple sources and relying on outlets they already consider reputable were the two leading strategies, tied at roughly a quarter of responses each.



“Multiple sources, real world checks, and my own analytics and research — plus, importantly, life experience and a sceptical mindset.”

“I‘m conscious of having some measure of agency over the attentional choices available to me.“

“Taking a ‚trust but verify‘ stance is also effortful. And it also makes using social media a massive minefield.“

“I remain skeptical of most information, apply critical thinking, prompt in certain ways to limit untruths, read from a variety of sources, and use my own judgement.”

“With great difficulty. Comparing multiple high-quality sources is a good place to start. Validating things empirically where I can, but it is getting harder, especially with AI generated content.”

But this personal system has a breaking point. Thirteen percent of respondents said, in effect, that the system no longer works and that truth online is currently unverifiable, not just difficult to verify.

“I don‘t know what is real. How do you know what is real anymore?”

“Truth is subjective and depends on who you ask these days.”

“Shutdown or paralysis or impulsive decision-making.” [Answering how they manage information overload]

Because the dominant strategy is personal rather than institutional, it depends entirely on an individual‘s time, training, and vigilance. This is precisely why a meaningful minority say they have lost confidence in this capacity, for themselves and society write large.

ALGORITHMIC INFLUENCE

INFLUENCE ABSENT EFFECTIVE COUNTERMEASURES

Seventy-five percent of respondents expressed concern about technology‘s influence over them once qualified and mixed answers are counted alongside clear “yes” responses. Only 22% firmly said they weren‘t concerned.

n = 98 respondents who answered · 75% express concern once qualified/mixed responses are included

The worries were specific. Algorithmic feeds narrowing what they see, shrinking attention spans, and a sense that engagement itself has been engineered.

“I am concerned about the potential for tech shrinking my intellectual horizons through algorithmic bubbles.”

“Some platforms are created to keep your attention on them. Human attention has become a commodity online.”

What‘s largely missing is a durable response to match the concern. Where respondents did describe doing something about it, the fix was small, individual, and easy to lapse on; not a systemic change to how they use technology.

“I have no notifications, charge phone in another room in house and don‘t have social apps on phone.” & “I try to avoid it by restricting usage.”

These are real steps, but they depend on continuous personal discipline rather than a structural change. This is a meaningfully different to the kind of resilience that respondents describe wanting when asked directly what would help them.

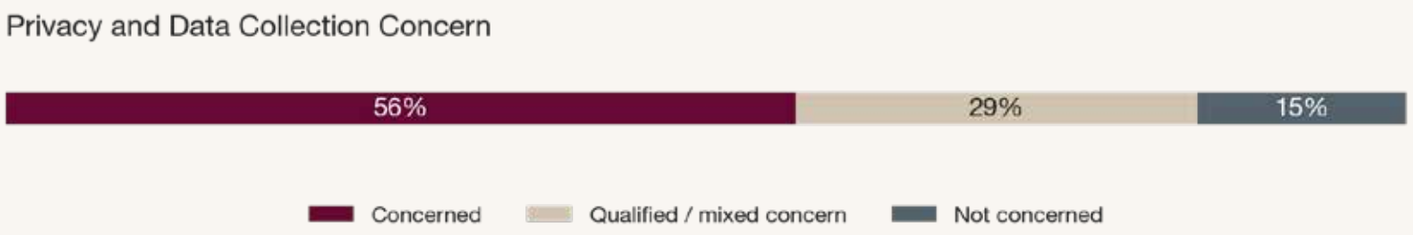
DESIRE TO IMPROVE TECHNOLOGY AND COGNITIVE PERFORMANCE

Concern about influence often came alongside a desire to improve the technology ecosystem and harness human cognitive performance. There was significant concern about how some technology influences human behaviour, such as nudges from platforms, data privacy, and the potential for misuse (e.g., targeted advertising, information warfare, and disinformation).

PRIVACY AND DATA COLLECTION

CONCERN ABOUT COLLECTION OF DATA AND PRIVACY BREACHES

Concern about personal data collection was a prevailing concern. 56% of all respondents were clearly concerned. Their data concerns were concrete and specific, including identity theft, third-party sale of personal information, and surveillance. An additional 29% had mixed or some concerns. Only 15% were not concerned.



n = 101 respondents

"I am concerned about malicious actors getting a hold of data that would enable other activity such as identity theft."

"I'm concerned that I don't really know what info is being collected on me."

For a meaningful minority, concern has turned into, a notably different posture than the active, effortful habits seen around truth-seeking.

"Too late to care now. We are already being tracked."

"Privacy has been dead for a while."

Some responses named the stakes in strategic terms, framing data collection as something that could be "likely used by malicious actors towards cognitive warfare or in conflict."

PRIVACY REMAINS A KEY ISSUE FOR AUSTRALIANS

93% say protecting personal information is important to them.

87% say they are more concerned about their privacy than they were 5 years ago.

2026 Australian Community Attitudes to Privacy Survey, conducted by Office of the Australian Information Commissioner

WHAT TECHNOLOGY MEANS TO PEOPLE

CONNECTION OVER CONTENT

The greatest source of technology related joy is human connection, not technology itself. The majority of respondents cited connection with family and friends as their primary source of technology-related joy. The technology is the conduit; the human relationships, the point. The value people get from technology is articulated as distinct from, and sometimes in tension with, what the technology is optimised for.

Asked what brings them joy, respondents didn‘t talk about technology in the abstract, they talked about people. Messaging, video calls, and shared photos with family and friends were by far the most common answer. Music was mentioned and were well ahead of gaming, AI tools or social media.

> *“My sister shares pictures of my nieces and this brings me joy.”*
>
> *“My family text chat group because I love my kids.”*
>
> *“Video calls to be close to family.” & “Music and family”*

A smaller group pushed back on the question‘s framing entirely. Fourteen respondents explicitly said technology brings them no joy, describing their devices as tools, necessities, or sources of obligation rather than pleasure. This is 14% of those who answered, or nearly one in seven.

> *“I am a reluctant user of technology. Addicted but not loving it.“*
>
> *“Technology doesn‘t bring me ‚joy‘. They are tools.”*

Survey respondents were very interested in improving individual and structural cognitive resilience to the challenges and many express concerns about the impact on their families (young and old) and communities. Unprompted, a sizeable minority expressed a desire to improve technology ecosystems and business models.

WHAT TECHNOLOGY MEANS TO PEOPLE...

STRONG DESIRE FOR IMPROVED COGNITIVE PERFOMANCE

The majority of respondents expressed an interest in improving their cognitive performance. They want tools or strategies to improve their focus, make better decisions, interact with AI appropriately, healthily and productively and recover from decision fatigue. Additionally, a broad group seek to use technology to connect better with other people.

"I think I have some measures in place but keen to see what else is on offer and how I can improve, before during and after decisions. Like thinking recovery."

"Understanding more about how to improve and be more resilient to digital threats. I want to be the best, so anything I can do to improve that I am interested in."

"Knowing I've set the foundations for peak cognitive performance."

"Knowing how to improve my every day and big decisions."

"Knowing I am making good decisions is important to me."

"More time and ability to verify information to make decisions more quickly."

"The ability to trust and discern."

"Improved stamina with focus and energy."

"Blocking everything else out and just being able to do one thing. Pausing updates from email etc. Like plane rides are focused time."

CONCLUSION

HOW PEOPLE INTERACT WITH TECHNOLOGY. WHAT IT MEANS TO THEM, WHY THEY USE IT AND WHAT CONCERNS THEM MOST.

The Technology Interaction Survey 2025 documents a population that is deeply embedded in digital technology, broadly–with many also acutely–aware of its risks, and largely without systemic strategies to manage its impact on cognition, judgment, and wellbeing.

Key conclusions emerge directly from the data:

- Behavioural alteration is near-universal. 99% of respondents, that answered the behavioural question, experienced, at least one impact (time distortion, emotional activation, or unexpected decisions) from technology use. This is a near universal challenge.

- The dominant coping strategy is retreat. Whether for overload, emotional impact, or attention erosion, the primary response is to step away. This is effective only as long as the stepping away lasts, and most people cannot step away from the technologies their lives and work depend on. Retreat is a valid but temporary fix, not a durable capability for operating well amid high information volume. Resilience is required.

- AI has become a mainstream decision-support tool before trust frameworks exist. At least 74% use AI platforms, many daily. Yet respondents consistently acknowledge they do not trust AI outputs. This is a significant and underexamined risk.

- Trust is a personal skill under strain. Finding and verifying truth is individualised and fragile. The strategies people use (trusted sources, cross-referencing and gut instinct) are personal, effortful, and inconsistent. They are individual habits and 14% have effectively concluded that skill no longer works at all. In a world where AI-generated content is proliferating, this fragility will worsen.

- Data collection and privacy concerns prevail. Respondents name concrete harms (identity theft, data sale) rather than diffuse unease, and for a sizeable minority, has become resignation rather than vigilance.

- Concern about influence outpaces action on it. Three in four express some concern but the countermeasures described are small, individual, and easily abandoned rather than systemic and long lasting solutions.

- The desire is for increased human cognitive readiness, not more productivity tools. Respondents who engaged with the cognitive performance question asked for confidence in decision quality, sustained focus, and resilience. These are human capabilities, not technology features.

Technology has the potential to rewire human cognition. We need rigorous academic research to understand this phenomenon, and tangible ways to protect and improve it.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Dr Miah Hammond-Errey is the founding CEO of Strat Futures, host of the Technology & Security and Cognitive Edge Podcasts and an adjunct Associate Professor at Deakin University. Miah developed and leads the Cognitive Readiness and Resilience platform for leaders who make high stakes decisions.

Dr Miah Hammond-Errey spent eighteen years leading federal government analysis, operational and liaison activities in Australia, Europe, and Asia. She has been awarded medals, citations and awards for operational service, leadership and excellence. Her 2024 book, Big Data, Emerging Technologies and Intelligence: National Security Disrupted was based on her PhD. She is a 2026 NATO Defense College Fellow.

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STRAT FUTURES PTY LIMITED | ABN 99 676 335 210 | AUSTRALIA
STRATFUTURES.COM | DRMIAH@STRATFUTURES.COM.AU