



**RESEARCH PRESENTATION PROPOSAL FOR FTC PRIVACYCON**

**PRIVACY AS BARRIER OR TEACHABLE MOMENT?**

**A PRELIMINARY EXAMINATION OF PRIVACY'S ROLE IN BROADBAND ADOPTION**

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Many privacy policy discussions overlook the extent to which concerns about the collection, use, and security of personal information online impact decisions to adopt broadband and the many tools and services that it enables. This is unfortunate because there is data to suggest that these kinds of concerns play influential roles in determining whether an already skeptical non-Internet user will elect to go online. Of the approximately 25% of the U.S. population that remains unconnected to broadband, nearly half don't see the service as relevant to their lives. Left unaddressed, lingering doubts about the robustness of online privacy and data security, which are evident in many under-adopting communities, will continue to undermine efforts to engage non-users and close stubborn digital divides. Moreover, failure to connect more of the unconnected may hamper efforts to fully realize the transformative potential of broadband in key sectors like healthcare, education, and energy, segments where the collection and use of personal information will play critical roles in delivering life-enhancing services, the benefits of which will likely accrue most immediately and profoundly to those in under-adopting communities (e.g., senior citizens, minority groups, and low-income households).

From the perspective of informing privacy policy going forward, acknowledging these concerns and allocating resources to address them could offer a unique opportunity for policymakers and other stakeholders to glean important and heretofore unheard insights about how to craft effective policies for *all* consumers. To date, this particular set of issues has not received sufficient attention from thought-leaders, as most privacy discussions tend to focus on current uses by current users. Omitting the concerns of a quarter of the population means that the worries of tens of millions of people are not being taken into account during the policymaking process. This paper will seek to correct this unfortunate dynamic and begin filling a major void in the knowledge-base.

The paper will begin with a brief survey of data tracing general attitudes towards online privacy and the extent to which data privacy and security concerns have been and continue to be barriers to broadband adoption. This analysis will also consider whether and how privacy-related concerns among both broadband adopters and non-adopters might be hindering broader acceptance and use of telemedicine services, digital learning platforms, smart utility services, and similar offerings that rely on granular user data to be effective.

The heart of the paper will present findings from a first-in-kind qualitative analysis of efforts to address privacy-related barriers among non-users. These findings will be based on extensive interviews and engagement with leading groups working to bring non-adopters online. The goal of this outreach will be to gather additional data about contemporary privacy attitudes of non-adopters – in relation to the Internet generally and to specific services (e.g., telemedicine, online learning, etc.); to more accurately gauge the extent to which privacy and data security concerns impact broadband adoption decisions; and to identify effective methods for addressing and overcoming these concerns. Targeted groups will include those working with and training newly connected senior citizens; middle school and high school age students from low-income households; unconnected adults enrolled in IT-focused workforce development programs; and those providing coding training to students of all ages.

The paper will conclude by identifying preliminary findings about best and worst practices for addressing privacy as a barrier to broadband adoption. It will also set out a series of next steps for addressing these and related issues in a more comprehensive manner by policymakers at the state and federal levels.