

2019 ONLINE RENTER STUDY

Part I: Shopping Trends of Today's Renters



A National Study of Renter Behaviors,
Preferences, and Implications

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Study Design, Execution and Report Development

SatisFacts, a division of Internet Brands, is the leading provider of resident surveys focusing on multifamily retention and reputation management. Serving over 3 million units nationwide our surveys provide actionable feedback which helps increase resident satisfaction and your overall bottom line.

Our sister company, ApartmentRatings, is the most comprehensive and trusted resource for renters nationwide. We provide a fundamental platform where users can share their rental experience as well as obtain the foremost information when searching for “home.”





Shopping Trends of Today's Renters

KEY TAKEAWAYS:

Use of Smart Phones and Tablets

Visited Website Before Contacting Property

Sources Used During Search

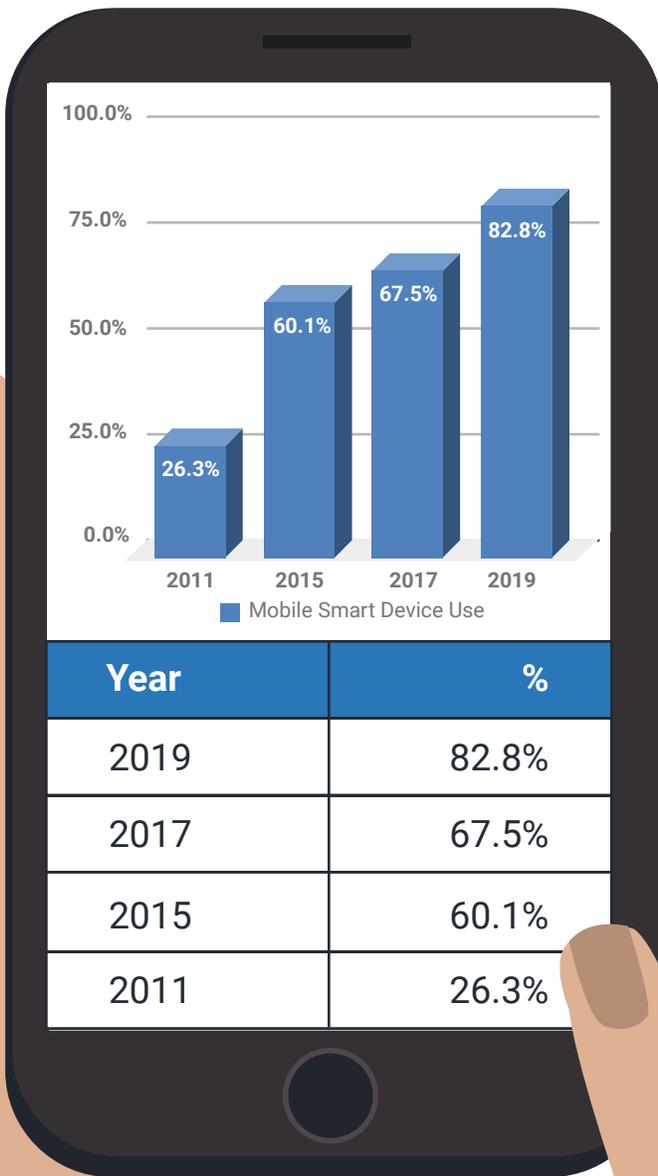
How Much Each Source Is Trusted

Info Desired During Search

What Impacts the Rental Decision

KEY TAKEAWAYS

Use of Smart Phones & Tablets During Apartment Search

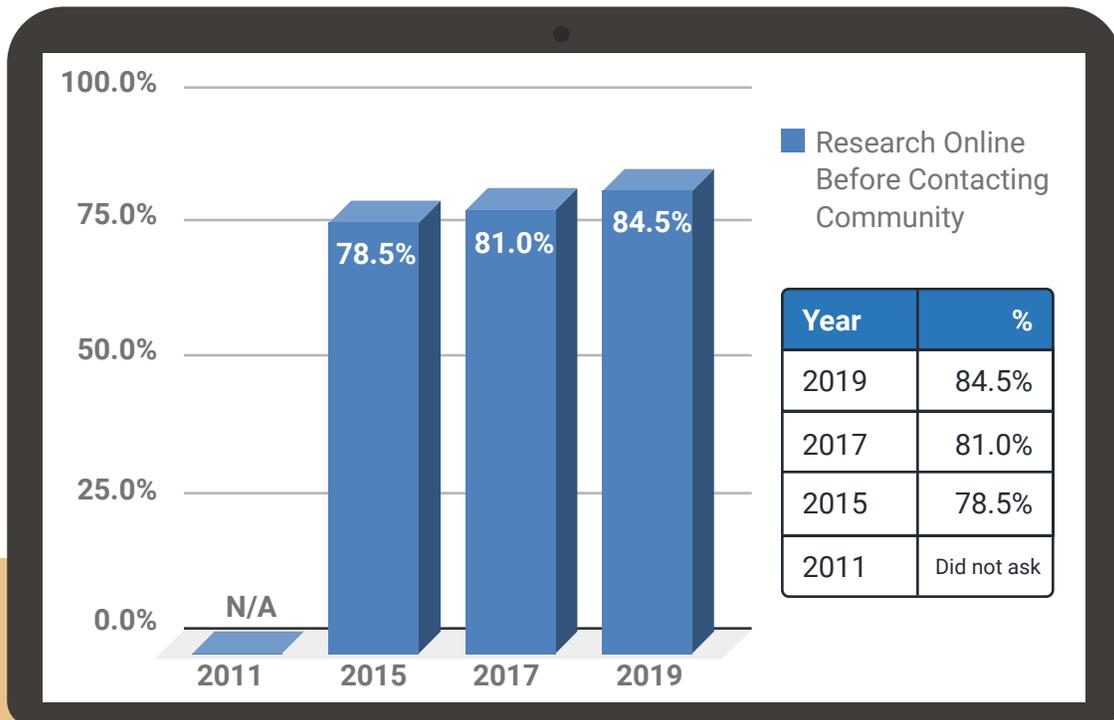


At nearly 83%, the use of smart phones & tablets in the apartment search process experienced yet another substantial increase in 2019, jumping up over 15% from 2017 and over 56% since the study first began in 2011.

KEY TAKEAWAYS

Visit Website Before Contacting Property

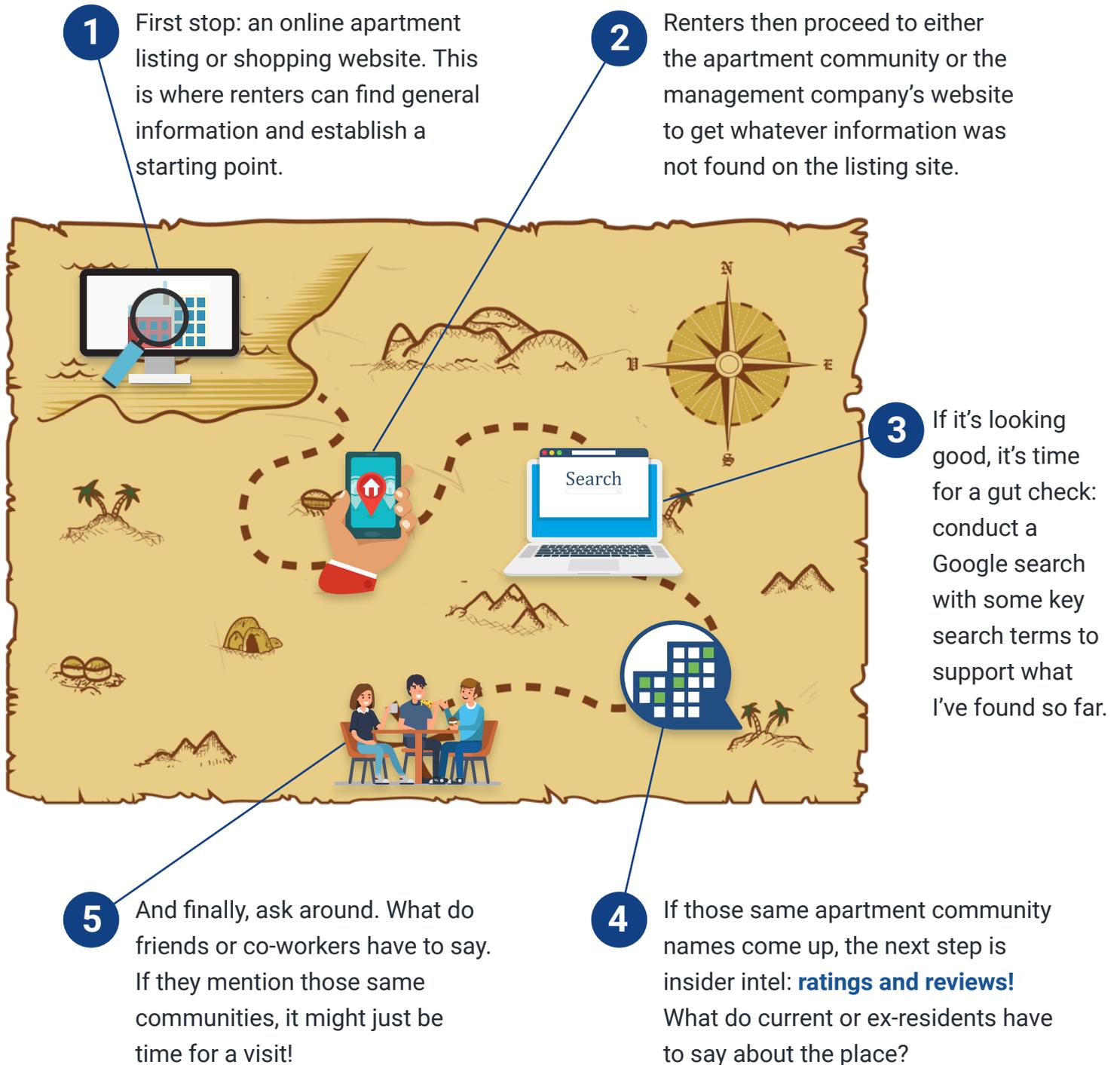
Much like the use of mobile devices, we also see a **significant increase in renters visiting a community's website** prior to contacting the property directly.



KEY TAKEAWAYS

Sources Used During Research

The ranking of sources reads like a treasure map:



KEY TAKEAWAYS

Sources Used During Research

Drive-by has become increasingly less popular; in 2011 68.9% of respondents cited it as a source – in 2019, only 41.7%. Because renters are jumping on their mobile devices instead of jumping in their cars, it's **imperative that a community's online presence tells a complete story**, including reviews that demonstrate the actual resident experience.



KEY TAKEAWAYS

How Much Each Source Is Trusted: Ratings & Reviews

When asked which sources renters trust most, **ratings and reviews surpassed feedback from friends and family** for the first time. Feedback from friends and family was the #1 most trusted in 2011, 2015 and 2017, but renters are now relying on the “wisdom of the crowd.” If enough people are recommending or not recommending a community, then it must be true.

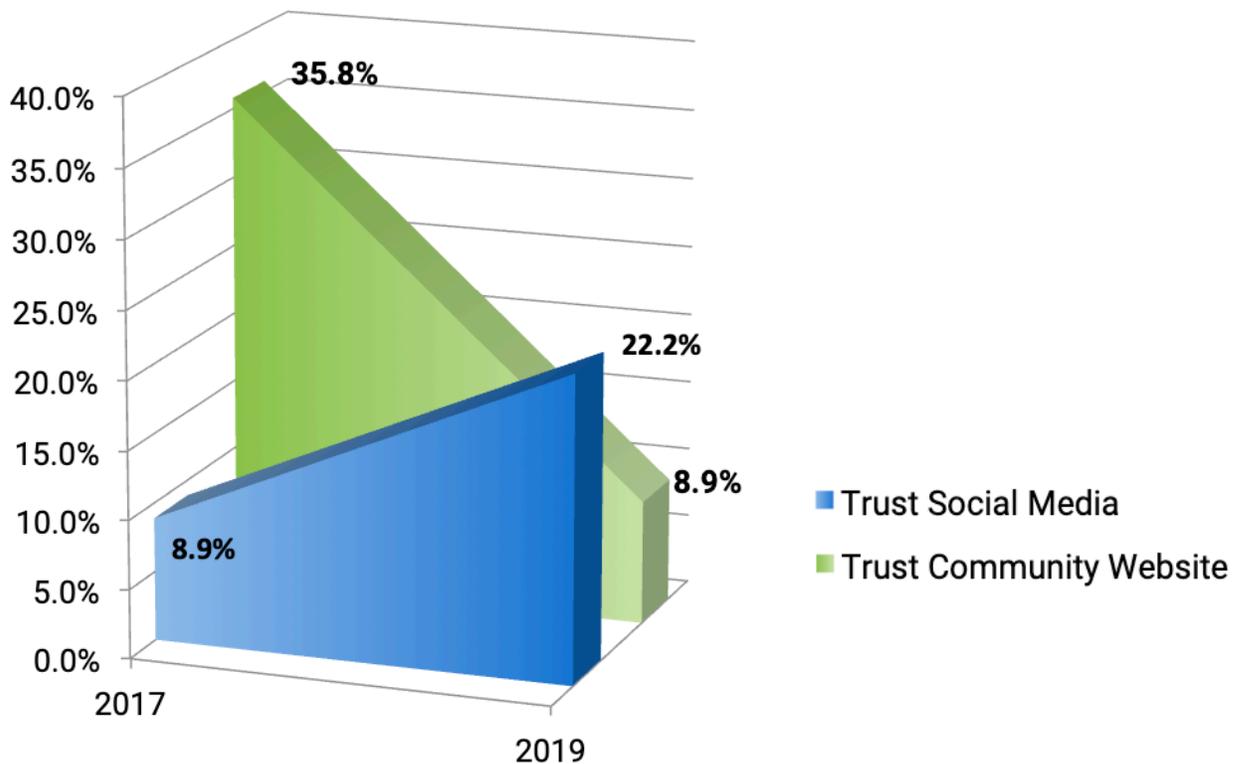


What this means: If you think ratings and reviews have little impact on lead generation, the trend tells us otherwise. The good news is that it's very easy to get into the review game and start asking your residents to share their experiences online.

KEY TAKEAWAYS

How Much Each Source Is Trusted: Community Website Vs. Social Media

All age groups **ranked reviews as the most trusted source** and every region of the country cited reviews as most trusted as well. Trust in a community's website dropped from 35.8% in 2017 to 8.9% in 2019, whereas social media increased from 9% in 2017 to 22.2% in 2019. While community websites are the 2nd most cited source, renters are only there to check off their list of must-haves. Using social media to source 'wisdom of the crowd' gives renters a full picture of the living environment and experience.



KEY TAKEAWAYS

Information Desired During Search

The top-ranking factors were all rated above 4.50 (out of 5), which means renters consider them “extremely important”. Least important was the option to live chat with the community staff (2.87).

Factors	Score
Rents and specials	4.67
Apartment floors plans/design	4.61
Current availability of apartments	4.61
Photographs of the apartments and community	4.61
Information on the apartment community's apartments, facilities, and location	4.58
Ability to easily communicate with apartment community staff	4.54



What this means: Renters want to be able to find all of the information by themselves but want to have a way to reach out to the community staff if needed. If renters can't easily find the key information they are looking for, they'll proceed to another community that makes the search easy.

KEY TAKEAWAYS

What Impacts the Rental Decision

1. Transparency

Viewing the actual model ranked #1 (4.60, extremely important), while viewing a model ranked #14 (3.67, neutral). Renters want to see exactly what they will be getting for the amount of rent they are expected to pay. Model apartments have become increasingly less important with each study. Again, because community websites are less trusted, touring the community is now a means of verification. Renters need reassurance that what they've seen online is accurate in real life. Tours are less about selling and more about confirming.

WEBSITE



REALITY



KEY TAKEAWAYS

What Impacts the Rental Decision

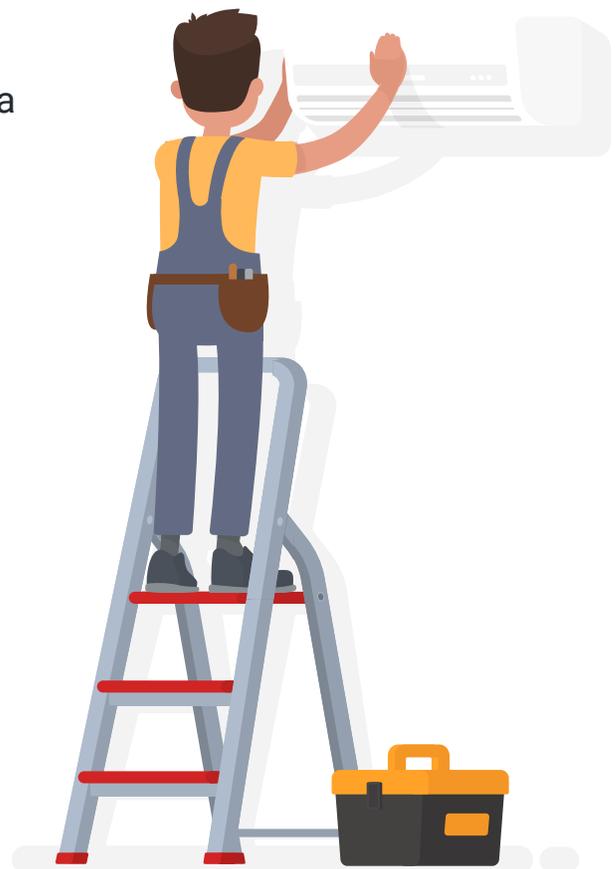


Leasing and renewing online continue their upward trends. The ability to sign and execute a lease online: 2011: ranked #24 (3.17), 2015: ranked #23 (3.23), 2017: ranked #13 (3.54), 2019: ranked #12 (3.69). The ability to renew the lease online is now #9 (3.96). It was #10 and rated 3.72 in 2017.

Leasing sight unseen is also gaining traction as an emerging renter trend. 2011: did not ask, 2015: 10.7%, 2017: 12.7%, 2019 14.4%. Renters have become more comfortable over the years in pulling the trigger due to the wealth of information they are able to access online.

2. Convenience

The desire for online conveniences is steadily growing. The **ability to pay rent online without a service fee is once again ranked #2** as it was in 2017, but grew in importance from 4.38 to 4.54. The ability to submit a service request again ranked #5 but also grew in importance from 4.20 to 4.29.



KEY TAKEAWAYS

What Impacts the Rental Decision

3. High Touch

Although renters have a desire for online conveniences, they still expect a caring and competent management team. **Response times to emails & voicemails ranks #3** (4.33 in 2017 to 4.43 in 2019) and perception of quality customer service is **#4** (4.25 in 2017 to 4.31 in 2019). Choosing a home is a personal decision and renters want to know they will be taken care of.



4. Social Proof

Renters believe they can get a sense of how well they will be treated as a resident by reading reviews from actual residents. Ratings and reviews ranked **#6** for impact on the decision to lease. And in being the most-trusted source, it's not surprising reviews have increased in importance from 4.06 in 2017 to 4.21 in 2019.

A screenshot of a review interface on a tablet. At the top left, it says "OVERALL SCORE" with a 5-star rating. Below this are six categories with their respective ratings: Noise (5 stars), Maintenance (5 stars), Safety (4 stars), Neighborhood (5 stars), Grounds (4 stars), and Office Staff (5 stars). To the right, it says "Verified Resident 645322 • 2019" and "Reviewed 05/27/2019". Below that is a "Recommended" badge. The main review text reads: "There are lots of excellent options at this apartment complex! The grounds are beautifully landscaped with trees and bushes and flowers. All of the staff members that I have interacted with have been friendly and available to help." Below the review is a "VERIFIED COMMUNITY MANAGER" badge dated "05/31/2019" and a response: "Your kind words made our day! We have an awesome maintenance team that works hard keeping the grounds looking beautiful year-round, and we'll definitely pass along your fantastic feedback to them. It's always wonderful to hear from happy residents, and we're so happy to have you as a member of the community. Should you ever need anything, we are here six days a week!" At the bottom, there is a "How was this review?" section with a "Useful" button and a "Report" link.

KEY TAKEAWAYS

What Impacts the Rental Decision

5. No Fluff

Rated below 3.00, these topics are least likely to impact the rental decision – those in red are considered “not important at all”:

Topic	Rating (out of 5)
Green/environmentally-friendly building materials & processes	2.99
Activities & social gatherings sponsored by the apartment community	2.96
The use of alternative energy sources, such as wind, solar, rainwater, etc.	2.82
Mixed-use/live-work-play community (apartments, office, retail)	2.75
Communal gathering spaces that encourage people to sit and talk	2.63
Dog park	2.57
Management company brand name	2.56
BBQ grilling area	2.54
Storage area of bicycles	2.52
Community garden plots	2.50
Business center/cyber café from which to work	2.48
Community social media presence (Facebook or Instagram)	2.40
Communal kitchen/dining area available to all residents	2.39
Playground	2.33
Bike sharing or rental service	2.10
Outlets to recharge electric vehicles	2.07
Car-sharing services (like ZipCar)	1.99
E-scooters nearby (like Bird)	1.92



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To learn more, please contact sales@apratings.com

