**There is no such thing as an Incognito Mode**

**Click on “Incognito Mode,” and we think (or hope) that we are not being tracked, and can go where we want to go on the internet, in anonymity.**

**We should have known that anonymity is impossible on the internet. Once a person logs on the internet, the person’s location is known. If a person is at home, your address will known, and**

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**Incognito Mode Isn’t Doing What You Think It’s Doing**

**Heidi Mitchell*, The Wall Street Journal* | Page R006, 27 November 2023**

**THERE IS** an urban myth that says online shoppers who doggedly search for certain items on the web get tagged by algorithms that then cause them to see higher prices than others shopping for those same items.

The solution for many people: They choose private mode on their web browsers, believing that cloaking their identity can help them get better prices.

But while such “private” settings as Google Chrome’s Incognito mode or **Apple’s** Safari private browsing mode do offer some benefits, getting a better price isn’t one of them.

“All these private modes do for shoppers is basically erase your search history from the device you’re on and prevent the browser from using your cookies to see your browsing activity across different sites,” says Benjamin Barrontine, vice president of executive services at 360 Privacy, a company that specializes in protecting clients’ digital identity. This is a great feature if you share a laptop with your children and you want to hide the presents you’re purchasing for them, but companies’ pricing is typically based on a number of factors—timing, location, how much an item in that category’s company paid to rise to the top of your search results—that don’t have to do with you personally or how often you search for a product.

A Google spokesperson confirms that cookies, or information stored on your device, are remembered in the current Chrome browsing session while in Incognito mode but then deleted immediately after closing out the session. If you return in Incognito mode to make the purchase, the websites will see you as a new user and won’t remember what you left in your cart. You essentially have to start your search anew, but with the benefit of blocking anyone who shares that device from seeing what you were researching.

Ultimately, experts say, private modes give shoppers a false sense of anonymity and a feeling that they are gaming the system, when all they are doing is hiding past searches. “You should know that your internet-service provider and even your network administrator at work, if you’re searching on a work device or network, may still see what you’re searching,” says Barrontine. “Private mode is not so private, after all.”

In fact, the big tech companies most likely know with near certainty who it is that is doing this supposedly secret searching, even in private mode.

“When you go on to Amazon. com in private mode and search for a bathrobe, even if you’re not logged into the site, Amazon is 99.9% sure of who you are because of the digital fingerprint they’ve developed for you over time,” says Ken Carnesi, chief executive and cofounder of DNSFilter, a software firm that protects companies from attacks at the domain name system level. That’s because Amazon would still know how you arrived at its site based on the link you clicked, your IP address, your ZIP Code, many of your preference settings and loads of other device-specific attributes. A company spokesman declined to comment.

The tech firms may not know that it is specifically *you* scouring their sites, but they’d know the search came from your home, which operating system you’re using, which language is your default and other details pa od sa “A a that point to you.

“That’s why, even when you’re not in private mode later on, if you didn’t close out that private window, you may still see bathrobes being pitched to you,” Carnesi says. “All the tracking is likely still passed through to the company who paid for the ad you clicked on.”

Contrary to popular belief, pricing for highly fluctuating, big-ticket items isn’t impacted by private searches, says Kevin Williams, an associate professor at the Yale School of Management who recently published a aper looking at airlines’ methods of dynamic pricing. Williams says in the case of plane tickets, Airline pricing doesn’t take into account any of your personal information except location,” as in the country of origin. Using a virtual private network (VPN) can obfuscate your device’s physical location, and may turn up a better fare, but might require some trial and error, Williams says. There are benefits for shoppers to using private mode. The search bar won’t auto-fill with prior searches. You can keep your searches private on a public device or borrowed computer. And you can use a credit card that will later be wiped so your children won’t have access to funds without permission.

For true privacy, consider hopping through a search engine like Brave.com, which doesn’t ever track your searches or your clicks.

“Unlike with other search engines, you and your data are not the product here,” Carnesi says. And your partner will never know about that bathrobe you forgot to actually purchase. *Heidi Mitchell* *is a writer in Chicago. She can be reached at* *reports@wsj.com**.*

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**Hybrid or Electric: The New Car Battle Is Tesla vs. Toyota**

**The Wall Street Journal | Page B001, 27 November 2023**

A year ago, the debate between EVs and hybrids looked settled. Now, Elon Musk’s vision for an electric-vehicle future is being challenged anew by **Toyota** and its re-energized hybrid plans.

Musk, **Tesla’s** chief executive, wants to make the world electric, targeting annual vehicle deliveries that would overtake Toyota to become the bestselling automaker before 2030. And while that goal is far off, he’s had some success— in the U.S., Tesla’s small lineup has already overtaken some of Toyota’s bestsellers.

A slowdown in EV sales growth in the U.S. is testing Musk’s gamble. At the same time, hybrid vehicles saw a surge in buyers this year, in part because of the success of new offerings by Toyota and its luxury brand Lexus.

“The buzz of electrification in the industry has somewhat mainstreamed hybrids,” David Christ, head of the Toyota brand in North America, said in an interview. “It’s really had an awakening.”

The pitch to customers for buying a hybrid is simple: Such cars are often cheaper than all-electric rivals and get some benefits of electrification with improved MPG compared with a traditional car without the headaches of having to charge like an EV.

The Japanese automaker, first with the Prius sedan more than 20 years ago, helped popularize hybrid technology, which combines batteries with gas-powered motors to improve fuel efficiency. But it is a technology that looked poised to be forgotten as hybrid sales slumped last year and EV sales rose 65%, a



sign for those betting a new era was dawning. “Time to move on from hybrid cars,” Musk tweeted last year. “That was a phase.”

Amid the EV enthusiasm, some investors agreed. Few saw hybrids as a proper Tesla-fighter. Certain investors tried unsuccessfully earlier this year to oust Toyota Chairman Akio Toyoda over the company’s strategy to hedge investments across hybrids, EVs and other technologies. He stubbornly cautioned that the all-in EV approach—favored by some rivals racing to catch up with Tesla—wasn’t what many customers wanted or were prepared for.

Months later, as the likes of Ford and General Motors pulled back their EV plans, Toyoda seemed to gloat. “People are finally seeing reality,” he said last month.

Between its Toyota and Lexus brands, the company in the U.S. sells 26 electrified-vehicle options—including hybrid, EV and other technologies—and saw deliveries of those offerings together rise 20% this year through the first three quarters to a total of about 455,000.

Tesla, which doesn’t release U.S. delivery results, sold about 493,500 all-electric vehicles during that period, a 26% increase, according to an estimate by Motor Intelligence.

Amid a tougher sales environment lately for the U.S. car market, Musk committed to fueling sales growth this year at the cost of profitability to the dismay of some investors. Tesla’s profit fell 44% in the third quarter.

The biggest pot of new customers for Tesla comes from Toyota, according to Strategic Vision, which surveys new buyers. Nationwide, 8% of Tesla’s buyers came from Toyota vehicles.

“Tesla is stealing sales from Toyota left and right—but they are having to drastically reduce their pricing to keep this up,” Alexander Edwards, Strategic Vision president, said. “Toyota on the other hand has kept pricing the same and has allowed dealers to mark up their products.”

The front line for that fight is in California, where Tesla’s price cuts have made the cost of an entry Model 3 sedan, including federal and state tax breaks, less expensive than the suggested starting price of a Camry. Tesla is nipping at Toyota’s lead in market share in the state.

Nationally, Tesla’s Model Y crossover sales overtook Camry this year through September and were fewer than 7,000 vehicles short of Toyota’s best-selling U.S. vehicle, the RAV4 crossover, according to estimates by Motor Intelligence.

In October, Musk told analysts, “To be totally frank, if our car costs the same as a RAV4, nobody would buy a RAV4, or at least they’re very unlikely to.”

He has long been dismissive of hybrids—even though Toyota helped Tesla early on with an investment and sweetheart deal on its first assembly factory. “You want to go all electric because that is the truly sustainable path,” he told The Wall Street Journal years ago. “If you split the baby and you have a car that is trying to be a good gasoline car and a good electric car, you end up being not as compelling as either a pure gasoline or pure electric.”

For its part, Toyota is doubling down on its hybrid strategy. This month at an event in Malibu, Calif., Toyota said that for the first time the Camry, the nation’s top-selling sedan, will only be offered as a hybrid when the next generation vehicle hits U.S. showrooms in the spring.