

Cisco Consumer Privacy Report: Increasing Use of Data Subject Access Rights, Majority Say AI Is Eroding Trust

The annual Cisco Consumer Privacy Survey, a study including the opinions of over 2,600 respondents of varying demographics in 12 countries, indicates that consumer awareness of data privacy rights is continuing to grow and that AI has some work to do to earn public trust.

There was a small jump in the growth of consumers exercising Data Subject Access Rights from 2022 to 2023, with particular increases among those under the age of 45. A little over half say they are willing to share anonymized data to improve AI systems, but 60% say that existing use of AI by organizations has already eroded trust.

Consumer privacy awareness highest among millennials, zoomers

Subtitled “Generation Privacy,” Cisco’s 2023 consumer privacy survey takes special note of the fact that the age groups under 45 (roughly the cutoff point between Generation X and Millennials) are much more active in exercising data rights than their older counterparts. These groups also believe that government should be taking the lead in establishing and enforcing data privacy laws (which are popular with all demographics in all countries surveyed).

Opinions are more divided on AI and data localization, however. There is great concern about the risks of AI, particularly to consumer privacy, and even at this early stage trust in the organizations that use it has eroded to a considerable degree. And though there is strong awareness of privacy rights and interest in defending personal boundaries, the added costs of data localization (to prevent access by foreign governments) continue to be a hard sell.

Previous Cisco consumer privacy studies have established the category of “privacy actives,” consumers that not only show high awareness of rights but will dump a service provider if they feel their rights are not being respected. While over 80% of respondents say that they care about data privacy and will spend more money for better protection, the privacy active cohort is the 46% of this group that says it has already acted on concerns by switching service providers or devices. Almost half of the privacy actives are under the age of 45, with most of the remainder under the age of 65.

Use of Data Subject Access Rights (DSAR) is also largely the province of the under-45 age group, with a similar skew (and DSAR actions dropping off even more sharply after the age of 65). This is also true of data deletion requests.

About one-third of respondents, particularly the younger set, see national government as the necessary leader on consumer privacy. This is followed by a roughly even split between local governments, organizations/companies, and simply putting most of the onus of privacy protection on the individual. There is relatively little interest at this point in consumer privacy associations, at least as a leading force in getting regulation into place.

Major demographic differences in awareness of consumer privacy law

Awareness of consumer privacy laws remains worryingly low overall (46% global average), but does have some very significant national skew. Awareness is doing best (among the dozen countries

surveyed) in India, the UK and Italy, where well over half of respondents say they are informed on their regional privacy laws. Toward the bottom of the ladder is Australia, Japan and (surprisingly) Germany, where no more than one out of three say that they are aware of laws and protections. There is a strong correlation between awareness of privacy laws and feelings of confidence in being able to protect personal data.

Age also strongly impacts feelings of competence to protect personal data. Respondents are solidly above 60% here until age 45, at which point confidence drops to just a little over half of respondents. At age 65, under half of respondents say they feel confident in keeping their data safe and private.

Data localization is popular as a concept, with 76% saying they feel it is a good idea. That is, until they see how much their bills might go up if it is implemented. It then drops to 44% support, with 89% of organizations saying that they would have to take on added cost (and pass some of it to the consumer) to make it work. Consumers are also concerned that shifting data to local processing will cause them to lose features and functions of apps and services that they presently use.

AI is another area in which opinions can become substantially divided based on circumstances. Almost half feel that AI could be used to improve their lives, with only 22% dead-set against it. And a little over half said that they would be willing to share anonymized personal data to improve AI. But 62% report being concerned by existing uses of AI, 60% say that current uses of AI have eroded trust in organizations, and 77% believe organizations need to be careful with AI going forward. However, 75% said that an AI ethics management program and being more transparent about consumer privacy impacts would make them feel more comfortable. 72% also said that audits for bias would make them feel at least “somewhat” more comfortable.

Generative AI is still not as familiar to the average person as it is to the business and creative world. A little over half are still not aware of it, and 36% of respondents said they were occasional but not regular users of things like ChatGPT. Of the 12% that are regular users, over 86% said that they are concerned about information they enter being shared beyond their control and the AI generating wrong information. 75% are concerned that AI might eventually take their job. However, in spite of this only half said that they were not entering personal or confidential information into the AI systems.