

Trust in Data

**UNDERSTANDING
ATTITUDES
TO DATA IN A
REGULATED WORLD**



A report examining levels of trust in data
for marketing professionals in the UK



Introduction.

Data forms the lifeblood of the modern business.

Its value is felt both by individuals and entire organisations. At the personal level, it is the bridge between the marketing department and their customers – holding the key to the effective targeting required to engage them throughout their buying journey. At the company level, it informs the organisation’s strategy through valuable insights about the behaviour of consumers and competitors. Without data, many companies would simply cease operations.

INTRODUCTION

But as stories in the media about the impact of data loss, misuse or mishaps show, data also creates a point of vulnerability for a business. Companies seeking to maintain the security of their data face both a continuing arms race with hackers and the struggle to update and maintain their legacy systems and data. At the same time, attitudes among regulators and the general public to data misuse are hardening. The implications for companies who operate with bad data practices are becoming ever more serious.

Against this background, it is vital that marketers are able to trust the data they use. Marketers need to have confidence the data is being collected, stored, and used properly. Whether that's by their own company or third-party data suppliers they work with.

This report examines marketers' trust in data. It is based on a survey done by Comscore earlier this year. For this research, 563 marketing professionals were asked a variety of questions, including how much marketers trust the different kinds of data they use, how that trust has changed over the past year, and what they believe would be the implications of using poor quality data. The sample covered a wide range of experiences, data use cases, and marketing-related roles. Full details of the survey respondents can be found in the appendix.

KEY FINDINGS

1

Unsurprisingly, marketers place the most trust in the data generated by their own companies. But they often need to augment it with third-party data in order to fill gaps or validate what they collect themselves. However, a quarter of those who use third-party data use it because they don't trust their own company's data.

2

As regulation of data is increasing, so is the overall level of trust in data. However, it's also true that more experienced marketers are more skeptical about data than their less-experienced colleagues. This could suggest that experience with data really is a key factor for how much trust marketers have in it.

3

A third of marketers said their trust in data had not changed in the past year because “nothing has changed” in the data landscape. That's despite high-profile scandals, like those involving Cambridge Analytica and Facebook, and the introduction of stricter rules around data use, including Europe's General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR).

4

Startlingly, a fifth of marketers believe that there would be “no significant impact” if they used poor quality data.

How marketers use data.

Essentially, marketers use two types of data in their work: data generated or collected by their own companies (first-party data) and data generated or collected by other organisations (third-party data). Data from other organisations can be further divided into two types: data freely available online, and data that's paid for.

FIGURE 1

What types of data, if any, do you regularly use? (Assume that "regularly" means at least once a week.)

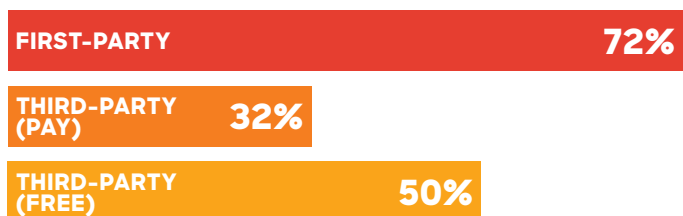


Figure 1 shows how widely each type of data is used, according to the research. Almost three-quarters of respondents (72%) said they use first-party data. A third (32%) pay for third-party data and half (50%) use free third-party data.

Looking at what companies are using data for, the most common task was "general industry research". This was followed by "evaluating campaign effectiveness", "media planning", "market analysis" and "campaign optimisation".

FIGURE 2

In your current role, how do you (or your team) use data? (Top 4 uses)



Examining these uses in more detail, the research showed some differences in how marketers use the different types of data (Figure 2). Overall, the most common uses of data were general industry research (49%), followed by evaluating campaign effectiveness (47%) and media planning (42%). When looking by type of data, however, these rankings change a bit.

While evaluating campaign effectiveness is the top use for first-party data, it ranks only fifth and fourth for paid and free third-party data, respectively (media planning remains second for all categories). The main difference was found in the general industry research category. Using data for this purpose is the most common use for both types of third-party data, but only the fourth most common for first-party data. These results tend to make sense, given that third-party data, especially very broad data sources available for free online, are likely a starting place for marketers looking to understand industry trends.

HOW MARKETERS USE DATA

FIGURE 3

You indicated that you use third-party data from other sources. Please select all reasons you use third-party data.



Figure 3 digs further into why marketers use third-party data. The most common reasons centre around augmenting the company’s existing data, whether that’s expressed as a need to gain better understanding of market trends (54%), gather data from multiple platforms (53%) or find data that the company doesn’t have (52%).

However, a quarter of respondents said a reason for their use of third-party data was because they had greater trust in data from sources outside their own company. This issue will be discussed in more depth in the next section of this report.

“GDPR, the Cambridge Analytica scandal, and other recent events have brought greater scrutiny to data usage. Some marketers might be apprehensive about using third-party data sources due to issues around trust. However, are there too many gaps in their first-party data to tell the whole story?”

Michael Craig
VICE PRESIDENT, SALES UK
COMSCORE

Debbi Dougherty

VICE PRESIDENT,
B2B MARKETING,
VIBER RAKUTEN

“The data that Comscore gives us really complements the data we see internally, to help us figure out what direction to take and also what partners to work with.”

Trust in data.

Marketers place different degrees of trust in different types of data. The most trusted data is first-party data, since people would generally expect that the user is at least somewhat aware of how their company collects and stores its data. According to the research (Figure 4), about two-thirds of marketers who use their own company's data generally place a high degree of trust in it. That's compared to 31% who were neutral and only 3% who expressed low levels of trust in this data.

FIGURE 4

What is your level of trust with the accuracy of your companies first party data?



By contrast, trust in third-party data was much lower, likely because the knowledge of how it is collected and stored is harder to come by. Only a quarter of those who use paid third-party data (25%) expressed a high degree of trust in that data, with 71% neutral and 4% rating their level of trust as low. Finally, free third-party data was the least-trusted of the three types. Even then, only 5% of these free data users said their trust in such data was low, with 14% saying it was high and most feeling neutral (81%).

The difference between these trust levels may be explained by the fact that people have higher expectations of something they have paid for. But it is also likely that companies will have a closer relationship with someone they are paying to supply data than they would with someone supplying data for free.

Thus, they have more opportunity to dig into the veracity of the data involved. Alternatively, lower trust levels may also be the result of poor experiences with third-party data.

TRUST IN DATA

“Conducting product methodology and product design workshops with clients in the past two years, I’ve seen much more focus on methods of data collection and storage. It’s much more of a concern than it was five or ten years ago.”

Dean Logan

SENIOR DIRECTOR RESEARCH & DEVELOPMENT,
MULTIPLATFORM MEDIA PRODUCTS
COMSCORE

FIGURES 5 & 6

In general, how has your trust in data changed over the past year? Based on your years of experience working with data, how has your trust in data changed over the past year? (Think about “data” as a general term, not specific to your company’s data.)



The research then looked at how marketers’ levels of trust in data had changed after a turbulent year for data privacy and transparency (Figure 5). Overall, only 11% of respondents said their trust in data had decreased in the past 12 months, while almost half (45%) said it had increased, and 42% said it had remained the same.

Why such a surge? On one hand, it could reflect a positive view of recent efforts by regulators and data owners to improve how data is collected, handled, and stored. Certainly, one of the main reasons given by research respondents for having greater trust in data than a year ago is that there is now more and better regulation.

On the other hand, and perhaps of greater concern for marketers, increased trust may reflect a lack of knowledge or understanding of the data landscape.

When looking at how marketers’ trust in data was affected by their levels of experience (Figure 6) generally, less-experienced data users were found to be more trusting of data. The results showed that 51% of those with two years of experience or less said their trust in data had increased. Those with more experience were more skeptical - only 40% of those with more than five years’ experience said they had more trust in data than a year ago. This was significantly lower than the “under two years” cohort.

This suggests another area where more education may be needed. Organisations should want their employees to be skeptical about the data they are using (or thinking of using). They could make this type of training a priority - spend more time developing staff to look at data with a critical eye.

51%
INCREASE
IN TRUST

**THOSE WITH TWO YEARS
OR LESS OF EXPERIENCE**

40%
INCREASE
IN TRUST

**THOSE WITH MORE THAN
FIVE YEARS OF EXPERIENCE**

TRUST IN DATA

FIGURE 7

In general, how has your trust in data changed over the past year? (Which of the following best describes how frequently you (or someone on your team) uses data.)

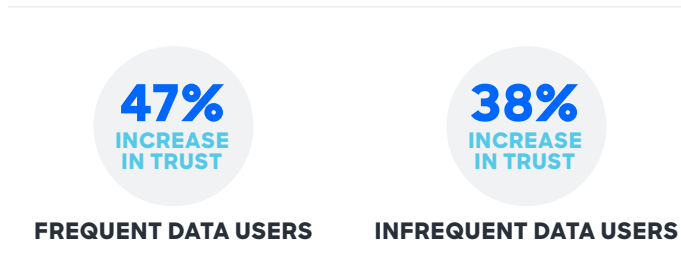


Figure 7 breaks the same findings down by how often respondents use data. This analysis reveals a somewhat different pattern. A higher proportion of marketers who are frequent users of data trust it more now than a year ago, compared to infrequent users (a few times a month or less). Almost half (47%) of frequent users said their trust has increased, while only 38% of those who only use data a few times a month said the same.

Rather than a loss of trust, very infrequent users instead reported that their level of trust in data had simply stayed the same. This may reflect a nervousness about data among infrequent users, a disquiet that is exacerbated by controversies and scandals, but is dispelled by greater familiarity and understanding. Indeed, the main reason given by survey respondents for their trust in data increasing is having had more experience with it.

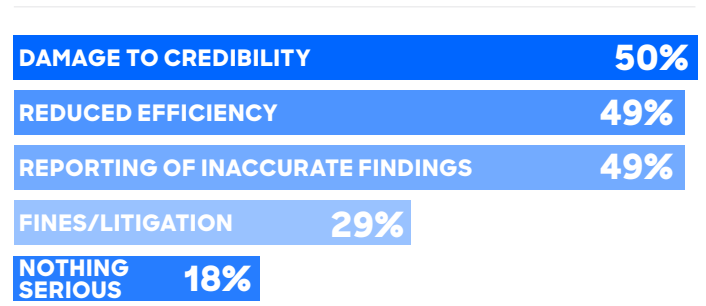
Ian Essling

SENIOR DIRECTOR, SURVEY INSIGHTS,
COMSCORE

“It’s a concern for the industry that 20% of people said nothing too impactful would happen as a result of using bad data. This should be 0%. Regardless of your role, data quality matters.”

FIGURE 8

If you were to receive poor quality data, what would be the implications of using that data, specifically to your business?



It’s also possible that simply feeling more experienced could give some marketers a false sense of security

– a belief that even if they were to use bad data, the implications would not be too severe. Questioned about this, although damage to credibility was top (chosen by 50%) almost a fifth of respondents (18%), said they thought “nothing too impactful or serious” would result from using poor quality data (Figure 8). Among the other implications selected were reduced efficiency (49%) and the reporting of inaccurate findings (also 49%). Less than a third (29%) foresaw fines or litigation, or a significant financial impact.

Other responses seem to bear out the idea that neither the recent controversies about data, nor the introduction of new legislation in the area (including GDPR), have had any impact on marketers themselves. For example, the main reason people gave for their trust in data staying the same (30%) was that “nothing has changed”. In the best-case scenario this could mean that these people are using the correct procedures to collect and handle data. In the worst-case scenario, it could also be a cause for alarm. The data landscape clearly has changed and marketers need to change with it. So this could also mean that a third of marketing professionals need further education in this area.

Conclusion.

Trust in data is a set of concentric circles.

At the centre, first-party data is most trusted, followed by paid-for third-party data then, in the outermost ring, free third-party data. While companies trust first-party data the most, they need to augment it with third-party data either to fill in gaps or to validate it.

Everyone in the organisation needs to know the implications of using poor quality data.

Despite a continuing stream of stories in the media about data-related scandals and their impact, nearly 20% of respondents felt that using poor quality data would not have a significant impact on their business. Organisations need to make sure their staff knows that data quality is a serious issue for everyone.

Companies shouldn't wait for experience to breed a healthy skepticism.

The research shows that people's trust in data tends to decline as they become more experienced in its use. Rather than waiting for that skepticism to develop, companies should be training their staff on how to develop a critical eye for data quality.

Professionalism in data use includes understanding the landscape.

The research also showed that almost a third of respondents said that their trust in data hadn't changed because they didn't think the data landscape had changed in the past year. Europe saw the introduction of GDPR in 2018 and expects the introduction of the e-privacy directive this year. The data landscape has clearly changed over the last twelve months. Organisations need to think about how they can encourage their marketers to be aware of the key trends and issues in data and its use.

Companies need to be able to trust the third-party data they use as highly as they do their own.

Two-thirds of respondents trust their first-party data, but only a quarter reported the same level of trust in the third-party data that they pay to use. Companies need to close that trust gap. They need to be more rigorous in their evaluation of third-party data providers to make sure they're working with organisations whose data they can trust.

For more information on this research or Comscore's measurement and survey solutions, please visit us at comscore.com/learnmore

APPENDIX

Details of the research

FIGURE 9

Approximately what are your company's annual global revenues? If unsure, give your best estimate.

Less than £100,000	78	14%
£100,001 - £500,000	62	11%
£500,001 - £1,000,000	81	14%
£1,000,001 - £10,000,000	119	21%
£10,000,001 - £50,000,000	91	16%
£50,000,001 - £100,000,000	34	6%
More than £100,000,000	43	8%
Not sure	55	10%
Total	563	100%

FIGURE 10

Approximately how many people does your company or organization employ in total (in all locations)? If unsure, please give your best estimate.

1 - 19	108	19%
20 - 50	50	9%
51 - 99	79	14%
100 - 499	139	25%
500 - 999	79	14%
1,000 - 4,999	48	9%
5,000+	55	10%
Not sure	5	1%
Total	563	100%

FIGURE 11

Which statement below best describes your current employment status?

Business owner	68	12%
Employed full-time for pay (35 hours or more per week)	359	64%
Employed part-time for pay (under 35 hours per week)	65	12%
Self-employed (full or part-time)	71	13%
Total	563	100%

APPENDIX (CONTINUED)

Details of the research

FIGURE 12

Which of the following best describes your role or position within your company or organization?

Manager+ level	430	76%
Under Manager level	118	21%
Other	15	3%
Total	563	100%

FIGURE 13

Which of the following BEST describes how frequently you (or someone on your team) uses data. These data can be either produced by your company or obtained from a third party.

Every day or nearly every day	346	61%
A few times a week	148	26%
A few times a month	56	10%
Once a month	13	2%
Not sure	0	0%
Never	0	0%
Total	563	100%

FIGURE 14

How many years of experience do you have working with data?

Less than a year	23	4%
1-2 years	98	17%
3-5 years	204	36%
6-9 years	116	21%
10+ years	120	21%
Not sure	2	< 1%
Total	563	100%