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Survey: Consumers see potential of artificial intelligence but raise serious concerns

According to a survey conducted by consumer groups in nine EU countries [1] published today, consumers believe that artificial intelligence (AI) can bring benefits. However, when asked to evaluate the added value of a number of specific services which already today use AI technology – e.g. home virtual assistants or advertisement on e-commerce sites – most respondents are not convinced.

Consumers also voiced various concerns such as the issue that AI could lead to an increased abuse of personal data. In fact, when it comes to particularly intrusive technologies, such as voice recognition, many consumers – 68% in Germany and 71% in Belgium – have little trust that their privacy is protected.

A large number of respondents say that they do not think that current legislation is adequate to effectively regulate AI-based activities. Just one fifth of respondents say that current rules protect them from the potential harm AI poses. EU plans for a law on AI therefore are very much in line with people's expectations. [2]

The survey shows that consumers have confidence in AI's potential but they want to remain in control. More than two thirds of respondents tell us that users should have the right to say "no" to automated decision-making.

Other findings of the survey include [3]:

- Knowledge of AI is still relatively low with 21% of consumers saying that they have never heard of it or have no idea of its presence.
- Consumers expect services based on machine calculations to be able to help with predicting traffic accidents (91%) or predicting their health (87%) or financial problems (81%).
- Consumers report having experienced "bad service", which 41% of respondents for instance have reported when it comes to the information provided for loan proposals based on automated decisions.

Monique Goyens, Director General of The European Consumer Organisation (BEUC), commented:

"AI powered products and services – from voice assistants to chat bots – are increasingly entering consumers' lives. Still, 43% of respondents to our survey feel ill-informed about AI or have never heard about it. And while consumers believe that AI can bring benefits,

they also say that it is not delivering yet. Many also raise serious concerns with up to five out of ten stating that AI will lead to unfair discrimination.

“The survey shows that consumer organisations have their work cut out to play a role in informing consumers about useful, safe, and legally compliant AI applications and how best to use them.

“It is concerning that a majority of consumers do not trust that their privacy is protected when using AI tools such as smart watches or voice assistants. Consumers tell us that they are worried about the risk that companies and governments can deploy AI to manipulate their decisions and that AI will lead to unfair discrimination. EU legislators need to take these concerns seriously and make sure consumers are protected and can trust this technology.

“Current consumer protection, privacy and liability rules are simply not fit for purpose to protect consumers from the negative consequences of AI. The EU is planning to propose rules on AI: they are urgently needed. Consumers must be protected from risks such as discrimination or manipulation.”

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[1] The survey was conducted simultaneously by consumer groups from nine EU countries (Test Achats/Test Aankoop – Belgium; Forbrugerrådet Tænk – Denmark; UFC-Que Choisir – France; vzbv – Germany; Altroconsumo – Italy; Federacja Konsumentow – Poland; Deco Proteste – Portugal; OCU – Spain and Sveriges Konsumenter – Sweden) throughout November and December 2019.

[2] For some of the questions, respondents in Denmark, France, Germany, Poland and Sweden had the possibility to answer with “no opinion”.

[3] More detailed figures are available in this [summary report](#).

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