

Majority optimistic about Smart Nation projects: Poll

Data shows slight dip in confidence, but 3 in 5 believe Govt can handle SingHealth crisis

Yuen Sin

The recent SingHealth data breach – Singapore’s worst cyber attack to date – has somewhat dampened Singaporeans’ optimism about the Smart Nation push.

But the majority are still confident about the authorities’ ability to handle the crisis, a new survey by the Institute of Policy Studies (IPS) Social Lab found.

Of the 1,027 polled, just over half – or 53.4 per cent – said they are optimistic about Smart Nation initiatives for the next 12 months. This is a slight dip from the 55.9 per cent, when asked about their sentiments in the past year. Three in five were also confident that the authorities can handle the SingHealth crisis.

The cyber attack compromised the particulars of 1.5 million patients at the medical cluster, including Prime Minister Lee Hsien Loong’s personal data and outpatient prescriptions. The breach resulted in a pause on new Smart Nation projects. It was later lifted on Aug 3.

Mr Joseph Gan, president of security solutions firm V-Key, said the Government’s swift response to the data breach helped assure people that it “will not lead easily to identity theft”. For instance, the Monetary Authority of Singapore ordered all financial institutions not to rely solely on the data types stolen, such as names and NRIC numbers, for customer verification.

However, the finding that just about half are sanguine about Smart Nation initiatives in the next year showed that respondents are “not so confident about Singapore’s ability to improve on Smart Nation efforts in the future”, said Mr Anmol Singh, lead analyst at informa-

tion security firm KuppingerCole.

This could stem from a lack of understanding and engagement in Smart Nation initiatives, added Mr Singh. The SingHealth breach could also be a contributing factor. “While the breach is not directly linked to any Smart Nation initiative as such, the tendency of people to relate it with changes happening around them is quite natural.”

Announced in 2014, Singapore’s Smart Nation masterplan involves using technology to make the city work more efficiently in areas such as healthcare and education. Key initiatives include the creation of a national digital identity system, as well as centralising patients’ medical information in a national electronic health record system.

The IPS survey results also surfaced differences in views on Smart Nation initiatives and data protection along the lines of educational levels, which should be addressed to reduce technological literacy gaps,

said the experts interviewed. For instance, 52.8 per cent of diploma and degree holders say they are optimistic about the country’s Smart Nation push, compared with 56.8 per cent of those with secondary school qualifications and below.

Led by IPS Social Lab’s senior research fellow Natalie Pang, the survey polled Singapore residents aged 21 and above between July 27 and Aug 14, after news of the SingHealth attack broke on July 20. The results were released to *The Sunday Times*.

The respondents were randomly selected, and the sample was weighted by gender, race and age to ensure it was representative of the national population.

The findings come ahead of a Committee of Inquiry, starting Tuesday, to look into the contributing factors that led to the SingHealth attack.

The scale of the attack notwithstanding, one in five survey respondents said he was unaware of it. This group tended to be more optimistic about Smart Nation efforts than those aware of the attack.

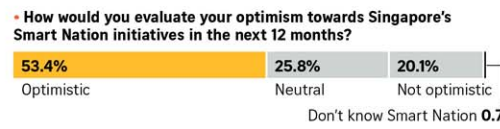
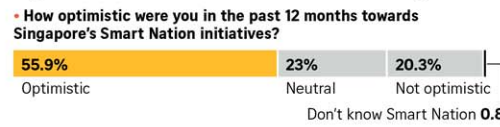
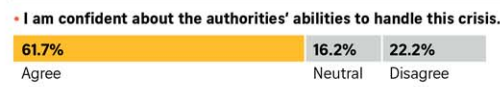
One in three also said that he, or someone close to him, has experienced cyber attacks where his data was compromised or leaked. This is expected, given that Singapore has experienced a number of data breaches besides the recent SingHealth attack, said Mr Singh.

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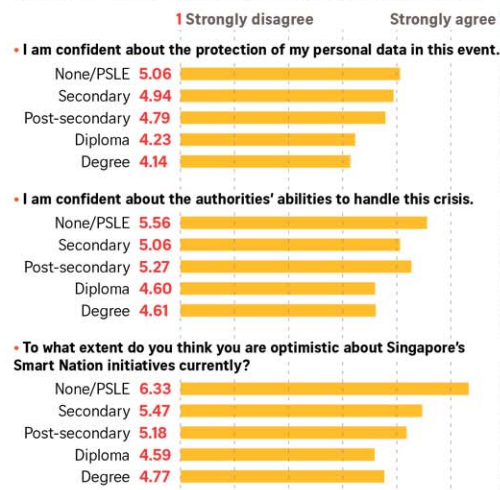
Perceptions of the SingHealth cyber attack

After news of the SingHealth attack broke on July 20, 1,027 Singapore residents aged 21 and above were polled over the phone between July 27 and Aug 14 in an IPS Social Lab survey.



NOTE: Some figures do not add up to 100% due to rounding.

DIFFERENCES IN VIEWS BASED ON EDUCATIONAL QUALIFICATIONS



Source: IPS SOCIAL LAB SUNDAY TIMES GRAPHICS

Poll: Trust in Smart Nation efforts varies by education level

Yuen Sin

Better-educated Singaporeans tend to be more sceptical about Singapore's Smart Nation drive and its ability to protect their data, while those with secondary school education and below tend to be more optimistic, a new survey has found.

The differences along education lines indicate a need for a more targeted approach to reach out to both groups, said experts.

For instance, greater effort should be made to involve those who are more doubtful of the Smart Nation push, said Singapore University of Technology and Design's communication and technology professor Lim Sun Sun.

More citizen participation in plans for future projects can help give them a stronger sense of ownership and more clarity about current policy safeguards, she said. "They will be less likely to feel that (new projects) are being unilaterally forced down their throats."

National University of Singapore law dean Simon Chesterman said the authorities can do more to assure those who are more suspicious of Smart Nation efforts by being more transparent about how and why personal data is collected and shared in the public and private sectors, and explaining to them the safeguards that are put in place to protect such data.

"It may also indicate that we need better communication to ensure that those who are trusting understand that initiatives like Smart Nation will always entail some risk," added Prof Chesterman, who has written about data protection law in Singapore.

Some 52.8 per cent of diploma and degree holders say they are optimistic about the country's Smart Nation push, compared with 56.8 per cent of those with secondary school qualifications and below, a new survey of 1,027 people by the Institute of Policy Studies Social Lab has found. Specifically on the recent SingHealth cyber breach, the less educated tend to have more confidence in the protection of their personal data in the incident.

Prof Lim said this is not surprising.

The better-educated are more likely to be in jobs where they would have been warned about

the risks of data breaches such as in the SingHealth case. "When you know more, you will necessarily be more questioning," she said.

She added that while there are a number of community outreach efforts to equip less-educated groups with digital skills, such as through courses and roadshows, a more "empathetic and mindful" approach needs to be taken when engaging those who are less advantaged.

For instance, some may not have the luxury of time to attend a weekly course on infocomm technology at a community club.

Instead, information on common cyber risks such as e-commerce scams or e-mails that pretend to be from government agencies can be given out to residents in a bite-size and more accessible manner, such as at ad-hoc gatherings at their void decks, she suggested.

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