

SPAM Statistics and Status in Saudi Arabia

Introduction

SPAM measurement is essential to evaluate the evolution of SPAM and the effectiveness of the anti-SPAM framework in the Kingdom. This article describes the findings on the magnitude of SPAM in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, including its use for Phishing and spreading viruses, awareness of SPAM, the current anti-SPAM measures used, and its impact on the various stakeholders in Saudi Arabia. It also describes the key features related to the problem of SPAM in the Kingdom.

This article focuses on three aspects. First, the definition of SPAM and related SPAM indicators where “SPAM rate” is defined as the percentage of SPAM compared to the total number of received messages. Second, the identification of sources for SPAM related statistics where, in addition to interviews, filters and anti-SPAM tools used by organizations and ISPs were the main source for determining email SPAM while gateways and servers owned by Mobile Service Providers were used to calculate SMS SPAM. Third, the collection of SPAM statistics achieved by inspecting published reliable data and by conducting survey, interviews and discussions with relevant personnel including Communications and Information Technology Commission (CITC), Saudi Arabian Monetary Agency (SAMA), King Abdulaziz City for Science and Technology (KACST), Ministry of Commerce (MOC), Ministry of Interior (MOI), companies, financial services institutions, Internet Service Providers (ISPs), Data Service Providers (DSPs), bulk SMS licensees, mobile operators, solution providers and others.

SPAM Statistics Status

Although the SPAM rate differs depending on where the SPAM is being measured, SPAM appears to be a serious problem in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia. According to the data gathered by ISPs, the average eMail SPAM rate in the Kingdom was 54%. Other sources such as Anti SPAM Product vendors suggest that the SPAM rate ranges between 40% and 60%. For instance, Symantec reports SPAM rate to be 59% for the year 2006. Message Labs report the SPAM for the year 2006 to be 48% and for the year 2007 (till July) to be 43%. On the other hand, Fax SPAM was not considered to be a major source of SPAM with less than 6% SPAM rate. The Direct Marketing Messages constitute the major type of SPAM received in the Kingdom reflecting the most majority of commercial SPAM in the globe. As for the SMS SPAM, mobile operators report SMS SPAM rate as 1.7%. Moreover, 65% of the SMS messages are commercial, 20% obscene, 2% political, 3% religious, 5% stock market related and 5% others.

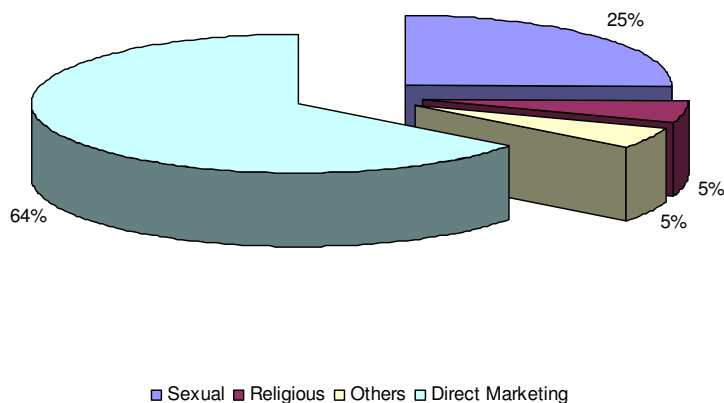


Figure 1: Respondents views on most common types of SPAM

SPAM emails, in addition to being an annoyance to individuals, cause capacity, bandwidth, and staff performance problems. While most of the companies believe that the primary impact of SPAM was on their email server resources, network, and time wasted, ISPs considered that their customers were most affected by SPAM. Bandwidth and productivity were also highly affected.

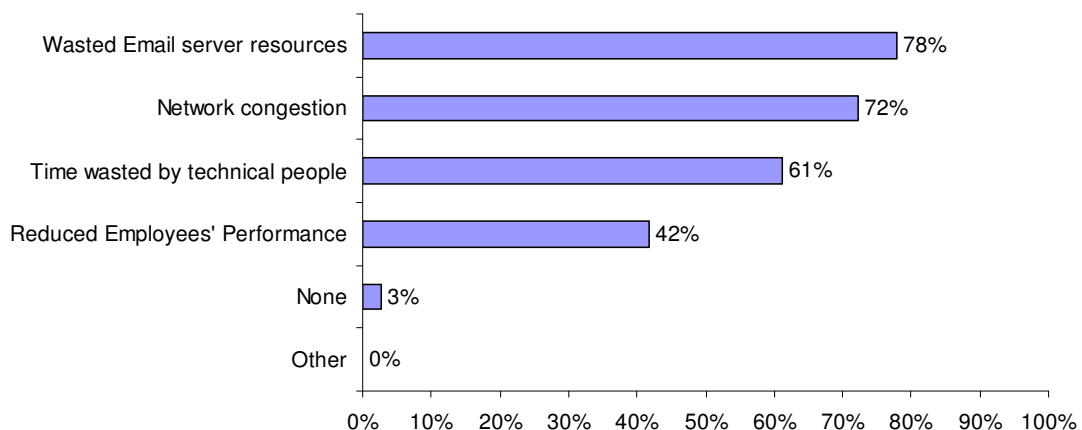


Figure 2: Percentage of companies who consider that SPAM impacted them as per the criteria in the graph

Noticeably, almost 83% of stakeholders have tools targeted at combating SPAM. However, it is worthwhile noting that ISPs focus on filtering the email traffic hitting the mail servers hosted in the ISP's Data center. They do not filter all traffic (especially outgoing traffic) due to the existing constraints in budgets, resources and the shortage of technically capable staff. Indeed, ISPs employing Real-time Blackhole Lists (RBLs) reported lower SPAM rates.

With the absence of a formal complaints reporting process, it is not surprising that most organizations deal with SPAM internally or even ignore the SPAM complaints. On the other hand, half of the banks have procedures in place to report phishing complaints to CITC and SAMA.

As recommended by the well know international bodies, to combat SPAM, different areas shall be addresses, such as legal, enforcement, technical, awareness, industry assistance, etc.

According to the majority of stakeholders, the legal side is of most importance to combat SPAM in the kingdom while having a proper code of conduct between service providers would help substantially in preventing SPAM.

The following diagrams highlight on some more findings for Saudi Arabia.

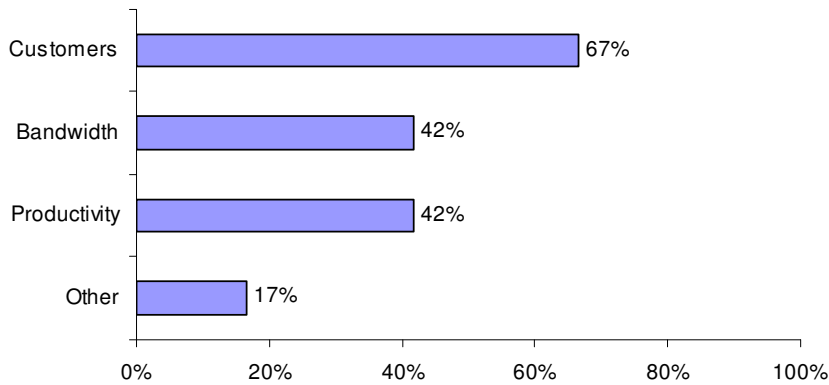


Figure 3: Percentage of ISPs who consider that SPAM impacted them

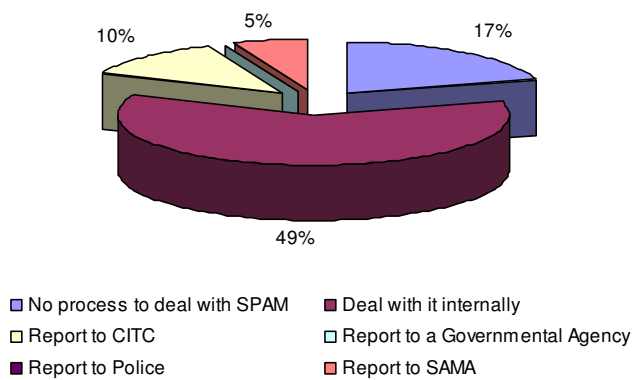


Figure 4: Percentage of the stakeholders who take one of the actions listed in the graph when SPAM is detected