

MAPPING THE PRIVATE SPACE OF THE ROMANIAN CONSUMER: MICRO AND MACROECONOMIC IMPLICATIONS

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ABSTRACT: According to the Law No. 677/2001 on the Protection of Individuals with Regard to the Processing of Personal Data and the Free Movement of Such Data, any information referring to an identified or identifiable person, particularly with reference to an identification number or to one or more specific factors of his physical, physiological, economic, cultural or social identity is defined as personal data.

An analysis of the consumers' perceptions regarding the processing and protection of their personal data reveals that almost anything may be associated to an individual and becomes personal, but not anything personal deserves a protection as described by the law. The paper presents the results obtained through a survey conducted on a sample of 394 Romanian consumers and discusses the micro and macroeconomic implications of mapping the consumer private space.

Keywords: consumer private space, privacy, personal data, direct marketing

JEL codes: M31, D12

Introduction

The Law No. 677/2001 on the Protection of Individuals with Regard to the Processing of Personal Data and the Free Movement of Such Data establishes that “personal data” is “any information referring to an identified or identifiable person”, where an identifiable person is “a person that can be identified, directly or indirectly, particularly with reference to an identification number or to one or more specific factors of his physical, physiological, psychological, economic, cultural or social identity”. In relationship with this definition, the “personal data processing” refers to “any operation or set of operations that is performed upon personal data, by automatic or non-automatic means, such as collecting, recording, organizing, storing, adapting or modifying, retrieval, consultation, use, disclosure to third parties by transmission, dissemination or by any other means, combination, alignment, blocking, deletion or destruction” (The National Supervisory Authority for Personal Data Processing, 2014).

Inspired by the Directive 95/46/EC of the European Parliament and of the Council on the protection of individuals with regard to the processing of personal data and on the free movement of

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such data, actually – as the both titles reveal – an almost completely transposition and integration of the European provisions into the Romanian legal environment, the law has changed considerably the way the direct marketing campaigns are planned and conducted and, at a more extended level, the overall development of the direct marketing industry in Romania. Despite the very high importance and sensitivity of this topic, the law regarding the personal data protection has been introduced with a consistent consultation of all the stakeholders of the direct marketing industry – companies employing its tools, providers of specialized services, legal authorities and, last but not least, the consumers.

Still, the philosophy expressed by the law, according to which anything that can be associated to a person is “personal” and, consequently, anything “personal” requires “protection”, is more than questionable. Indeed, the concerns for protecting the privacy of the consumer are to be considered by all the entities operating in the direct marketing industry and enforced by the authorities but in more specific and clearly defined limits established based mainly on what the beneficiaries of privacy demand or at least expect. The consumer view on what is personal and what is not, what to be kept private and what could be disclosed to the public, finally, on what is personal and deserves legal protection must prevail and represent the starting point in designing the legal environment regarding the personal data protection.

Literature Review

Privacy represents a concept with a respectable history that formally begins at the end of the nineteenth century with the expressions of the citizen’s right to peace and happiness, defined by the Pacific Railway Commission in 1887 as “the right to personal security” (Langenderfer and Cook, 2007), respectively individual’s “right to be left alone”, approached and explained by Louis Brandies in 1890 (Wirtz, Lwin, and Williams, 2007).

In their attempts to define and explain the conceptual meanings of privacy, different authors have approached the subject from various angles. Brierley Newell (1996) has observed that privacy has a differentiated value in terms of philosophy (seen as a necessary part of human existence), psychology (contributor to the ego development and maintenance), sociology (supporting human relationships, particularly intimacy), respectively law and politics (a basic human right). Unfortunately, there were not expressed as many points of view approaching the subject of privacy from an economic perspective. The diversity of the visions regarding this topic allows drawing the conclusion that privacy may mean different things to different people and different cultures may have different needs for privacy (Murray and Renaud, 2012).

The marketing perspective over the content and meaning of privacy shall focus on the personal data regarding the consumers and, in concordance with the definitions advanced by Westin, in 1968, and Schoeman, in 1984, could be considered as a claim, entitlement or right of an individual to determine what personal information (data about himself/herself) may be communicated to others, the measure of control an individual has over personal information and intimacies of his/her personal identity (Jóri, 2007). The privacy should be considered in connection with its particular area of application, the *consumer’s private space*, described by the amount of information regarding the demographics, psychographics, and behavioral characteristics of the individuals, and the rights they should have to disclose or not their personal data, and to have this data protected through the appropriate laws and means (Vegheş, 2009).

Together with the private information (all data and information about a person) and private activities (all individual actions a person is reluctant to make public), private space (seen as a secret space of a person including his/her body, his/her habitation, diaries and correspondence, travel luggage, virtual space) is one of the three dimensions of the privacy defined as “personal secrecy unrelated to matters of public interest” (Sun, 2008, quoted in Shao, 2012). The right to privacy refers to the right of a person to keep private his personal information, activities and space that is

not of legitimate public interest or concern, essentially to determine how to deal with his/her privacy (Shao, 2012).

Consumer privacy is an important issue for marketers that will have to balance the need for data with the consumers' concerns about the privacy of their personal purchase information and to create a comfortable and secure commercial environment (Graeff and Harmon, 2002). Still, the information privacy appears to be relatively ambiguous for the consumers that may have different privacy thresholds depending partly on internal factors, such as their involvement in data collection or the perceived trustworthiness of companies collecting their data, and partly on external factors, such as the collected data, ways, situations and purpose of data collection (Long et al., 1999).

In a context where privacy and protection of personal information have become primary concerns, consumers tend to take actions to preserve their personal data and identity in order to increase their trust and feelings of controlling their personal information while marketers must acknowledge these concerns by communicating transparently and consistently privacy policies and offering opt-in programs (Pope and Lowen, 2009). Building trust is critical in the development of relationships between organizations and consumers, reduces customers' concern with privacy and control over the use of their personal information and increase the willingness to disclose personal information for some form of compensation (Tsarenko and Tojib, 2009).

Studying the consumers' perceptions associated to the invasion of information privacy, Schwaig et al. (2013) have found that consumers tend to respond negatively to the organizations' personal information processing practices when they perceive that their information privacy has been invaded. Preventing the negative tangible consequences for these organizations is essential and requires a careful management of the consumers' privacy perceptions in terms of their personal data collection, processing, protection, external transfer to third parties, in an overall context described by the consumer's 'need to know' about how their personal data is employed.

The organizations intending to conduct direct marketing campaigns should carefully weigh all the specific characteristics of the consumers, their transformation in personal data and the related matters of personal data processing, in order to differentiate between what is personal and what not, what personal data are relevant for the design and implementation of the campaign, all these under the requirements of a legal framework that is a rather restrictive one.

Methodological Notes

Data regarding the private space of the Romanian consumers have been collected through a survey conducted on a sample of 394 consumers. They have been gathered under a research effort that aimed to investigate two main dimensions: the amplitude of the Romanian consumers' experiences when interacting with different direct marketing tools employed by the organizations present in the market, respectively their perceptions related to several aspects concerning their privacy and personal data protection.

The research objectives and the related research hypotheses of this approach refer to the:

O1. Assessment of the importance the consumers associate to the personal data protection in terms of the overall perception of the subject's importance and the particular perceptions in terms of the object, necessary laws and level of regulation of the personal data protection;

H1.1. Consumers associate a high importance to the protection of their personal data;

H1.2. Consumers demand protection for their personal data both as consumers and citizens;

H1.3. Consumers consider necessary the laws providing protection of their personal data;

H1.4. Consumers expect protection of their personal data at international level.

O2. Assessment of the consumers' expectations regarding the institutional framework of the personal data protection;

H2.1. Consumers expect protection of their personal data by both public and private institutions;

- H2.2. Consumers expect protection of their personal data mainly from the National Supervisory Authority for Personal Data Processing.
- O3. Assessment of the consumers' expectations regarding the categories of personal data that needs to be protected through appropriate laws, regulations and/or mechanisms;
- H3.1. Consumers have different levels of expectation in terms of the categories of personal data that need to be protected through appropriate laws, regulations and/or mechanisms;
- H3.2. The consumer's private space tend to include a limited amount of categories of personal data, mainly demographics and relational data.
- O4. Assessment of the attitudes of the consumers toward different aspects of processing their personal data by the organizations and public entities;
- H4.1. Consumers tend to have reserves in disclosing their personal data to organizations;
- H4.2. Consumers tend to have reserves in disclosing their personal data to public bodies;
- H4.3. Consumers demand to agree before disclosing their personal data to the organizations;
- H4.4. Consumers demand to agree before disclosing their personal data to the public bodies;
- H4.5. Consumers tend to rather disagree on the use of their personal data in the promotion of organizations' products and/or services;
- H4.6. Consumers tend to rather disagree on the collection of their personal data when buying the organizations' products and/or services;
- H4.7. Consumers tend to rather disagree on the processing of their personal data after buying the organizations' products and/or services;
- H4.8. Consumers tend to rather not know their rights regarding their personal data.
- O5. Assessment of the consumers' buying intentions for different products and/or services after being approached by the organizations through the direct communication channels;
- H5.1. Consumers tend to have reserves to buy after being directly approached by mail;
- H5.2. Consumers tend to have reserves to buy after being directly approached by telephone;
- H5.3. Consumers tend to have reserves to buy after being directly approached by mobile phone;
- H5.4. Consumers tend to have reserves to buy after being directly approached online.

The structure of the research sample included respondents from Bucharest, other cities and rural areas, aged 18 to 59, with different levels of education and net monthly income, coming from different occupational categories (Table 1).

Table 1

Structure of the research sample (n=394)

Sampling criteria	Frequencies	Percentages	Sampling criteria	Frequencies	Percentages
Gender			Occupational status		
Male	194	49.2	Full-time employees	262	66.8
Female	200	50.8	Freelancers	12	3.1
Age groups			Managers	19	4.8
18 to 29	195	49.5	Owners/entrepreneurs	38	9.7
30 to 44	100	25.4	Retired/housewife	9	2.3
45 to 59	99	25.1	Students	34	8.7
Residence			Unemployed	3	0.8
Bucharest	227	58.1			

Other cities	131	33.5	Net monthly income		
Rural areas	33	8.4	Less than 350 lei	28	7.2
Education			350 to 700 lei	80	20.6
Primary	2	0.5	701 to 1400 lei	108	27.8
Secondary	152	39.0	1401 to 2800 lei	76	19.6
Higher education	236	60.5	2801 lei and more	96	24.7

Source: authors' contribution

A questionnaire including 47 items have been employed under a simple random sampling procedure to collect primary data in April and May 2013. A total number of 723 questionnaires have been filled in by the respondents. After validation, 394 have been included in the final structure of the sample. The corresponding error margin is $\pm 4.94\%$.

Main Findings

The topic of personal data protection is a very important one for three-quarters of the respondents (75.6 %). Assessed on a semantic differential scale, the importance of the personal data protection has obtained an average score of 4.69. The opinions expressed by respondents confirm the real concern for having their personal data protected against the attempts of collecting, processing, storage and later use. This position demand that organizations shall have a more cautious behavior in their activities involving the personal data of their customers and/or prospects while the entities specialized in the personal data protection shall create and maintain a legal background capable to provide an effective protection of this data.

The necessity for appropriate laws and regulations for personal data protection is supported by almost all of the respondents (87.3 %), just an extremely small minority considering that this type of laws is rather useless. For the majority of the respondents (68.0 %), the laws regarding the personal data protection must cover the status of the individuals both as consumers and as citizens, with a particular attention given, somewhat surprisingly, to the individuals' status as citizens. The respondents seem to be more concerned by the potential violations of their rights related to their personal data protection and affecting their private space made by the non-commercial entities, such as the public authorities and bodies. Instead, they are less concerned by the potential violations of their privacy-related rights by the commercial entities: a possible explanation of this situation may be the perception that individuals are able to counteract easier the potential abuses committed by the companies by comparison to those made by the public entities.

The trust in the legal provisions referring to the protection of personal data as well as in their appropriate enforcement represents another sensitive topic. Only 15.0 % of the respondents are feeling comfortably when protection of their personal data is handled at national level, by domestic laws and regulations, 38.6 % feel the need for a protection provided at European level (within the European Union), while 46.4 % feel themselves safer under the protection of a supra-European, international level. The preference for a protection of the personal data ensured through an international law expresses, on a hand, the relatively limited trust in the capability of the specialized domestic entities to provide an effective protection of the consumers' private space and, on the other hand, a certain expectation that the pressure generated applying the specialized legal provisions and consideration of the best European and international practices, will lead to an improved protection of the consumers' personal data and privacy. The need for an extensive personal data protection at international level may also be the result of an increased mobility of the consumers which are present, physically or virtually, in the international markets of the different products and services.

Respondents tend to have a greater reliance when their personal data is protected under a public-private partnership: 46.2 % of them consider that an association of public and private entities ensure a more effective protection of the personal information than solely a public entity (33.1 %) or a private entity (20.8 %). The balance created through this public-private partnership may be seen in relationship to the concern of respondents to protect their personal data and private space both as consumers and as citizens. Public bodies, together with the private entities, can share the areas of protection and intervention in connection to the privacy-related rights and may cooperate for providing effective protection under a “balance check” type of mechanism.

As an average, respondents have indicated two or three institutions which, in their opinion, must enforce and ensure the protection of personal data, the most frequently mentioned being the National Supervisory Authority for Personal Data Processing (74.6 %), the Association for Consumer Protection (60.4 %) and the National Authority for Consumer Protection (47.7 %). Other institutions mentioned by the respondents are the Ministry of Administration and Interior (23.1 %), the Directorate for Persons Record and Databases Management (23.1 %), while peripheral mentions have been also made for the Government of Romania (14.7 %), the Romanian Direct Marketing Association (12.9 %), the Romanian Ombudsman (7.6 %), the Group for Social Dialogue (1.5 %) or the Foundation for an Open Society (1.0 %). These results support the following conclusions:

- (1) the National Supervisory Authority for Personal Data Processing plays the major role in ensuring the protection of the consumers’ personal data: its level of awareness and good recognition in the market, as well as the set of resources and competencies owned allow and, to a certain extent require, to administer the field;
- (2) to ensure a more effective protection, the National Supervisory Authority for Personal Data Processing may take into consideration the development of partnership with a private entity of whose mission and objectives cover the issues related to the protection of individuals’ personal data, such as the Association for Consumer Protection;
- (3) protection of the individuals’ personal data and privacy-related rights, both as consumers and as citizens, must be one of the priorities on the agenda of several public entities, such as the National Authority for Consumer Protection, the Ministry of Administration and Interior, the Directorate for Persons Record and Databases Management or even the Government of Romania, whose participation and active involvement appears to be expected by the respondents;
- (4) the Romanian Direct Marketing Association, as an authorized representative of the domestic direct marketing industry, has also the mission to cooperate, within a public-private partnership, with all the public or private bodies involved in the creation and implementation of a legal background able to provide an effective protection of consumers’ personal data and a platform favoring the development of the direct marketing campaigns and activities conducted in the Romanian market.

The object of the personal data protection is represented by the characteristics and/or features that can be associated to a natural person, which are expressed by his / her personal data. Respondents have been asked to assess a set of variables related to their geographical, demographic, psychographic or behavioral characteristics in terms of their personal nature and the perceived need to have this “personal data” protected by law.

The investigated set included 27 variables grouped in four categories: (a) demographics – gender, age, profession, occupation, level of education, net monthly income, personal and family’s wealth; (b) psychographics – political preferences, religious options, sexual orientations, visited websites, household equipment with different goods, household access to different services, hobbies and interests; (c) identity data – first and last name, place of work, content of the electronic correspondence, personal identification number, series and number of the identity document, health

status, legal status, biometrical data and (d) relational data – mailing address, telephone number, mobile phone number, e-mail address, personal web (page or site) address.

Table 2

Consumer preferences in terms of their personal data protection

Demo graphics	% of respon den ts	Psycho graphics	% of respon den ts	Identity	% of respon den ts	Relation al	% of respon den ts
Gender	7.6	Political preferences	26.4	First and last name	14.1	Mailing address	58.6
Age	17.0	Religious options	20.8	Place of work	50.8	Phone number	60.2
Profession	31.7	Sexual orientations	20.8	Personal Id number	91.9	Cell phone number	78.2
Occupation	32.0	Visited websites	31.0	ID serial number	87.3	E-mail address	52.0
Education	15.0	Home access to goods	34.0	Electronic correspondence	47.2	Personal web address	21.3
Income	71.6	Home access to services	24.1	Health status	34.0		
Personal/ Family wealth	74.9	Hobbies & interests	11.4	Legal status	43.1		
				Biometric s data	59.1		

Source: authors' contribution

The private space of the Romanian consumer appears to have an average density being populated with eleven or twelve out of the initial set of 27, slightly below the average of 13.50 variables. This means that, although concerned for protection of their personal data, the respondents consider “personal” a limited amount of data with different content and significance from an individual to another. Thus, when data referring to a certain individual is perceived as “personal”, then the protection needed by that individual for his / her “personal data” also becomes “personal”.

The most frequently indicated variables by respondents as being “personal” and demanding an appropriate protection are, in the descending order of the number of mentions: the personal identification number, series and number of the identity document, mobile phone number and personal and/or family’s wealth: while the least “personal data” indicated, in the ascending order of the number of mentions, are: gender, hobbies and interests, level of education, age, religious preferences or options, sexual preferences or options, personal web (page or site) address and the household’s access to certain services.

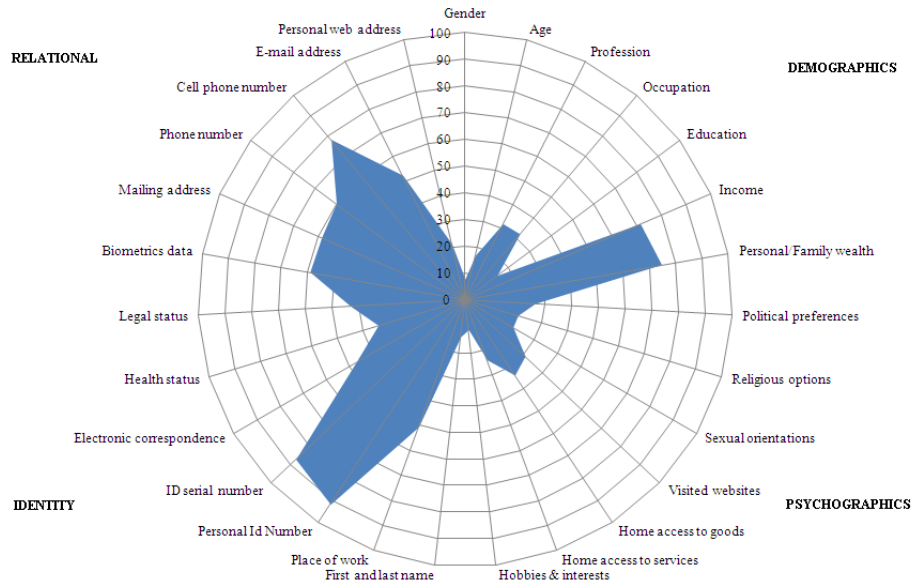


Figure 1. Map of the consumer private space
 Source: authors' contribution

The consumer's private space appears to be described mainly by the variables regarding the identity of individuals, which have been mentioned by 40.43 % of the respondents, together with the relational (23.38 %) and demographic (21.60 %), while the least represented are the psychographics (14.57 %). If within the perimeter of the consumer's private space are included eleven or twelve variables, as an average, four or five out of them refer to the consumer's identity, two or three to the aspects related to his or her relational, respectively demographics and only one or two to the psychographics of the consumer. To create a more reasonable description of the consumer's private space (as it is revealed by the present research approach), a supplementary requirement has been considered: a minimum frequency of appearance of 50.0 % for each demographic, psychographic, identity and relational element mentioned by respondents.

In this context, the results of the research show that the private space of the Romanian consumer tends to include five identity elements (personal identification number, series and number of identity documents, biometric data, first and last name, place of work), four relational elements (mobile phone number, telephone number, mailing address and e-mailing address) and two demographic elements (personal and family's wealth, and the net monthly income). Somewhat surprisingly, no psychographic elements were representatives enough to be included in the private space of the Romanian consumer. From a consumer to another, the elements describing the consumer private space may differ, more or less, in terms of consumers' gender, age, residence, profession and level of income.

Table 3

Attitudes of the respondents toward processing of their personal data by the organizations and public entities (valid percentages)

Statements	Agree	Rather agree	Rather not agree	Not agree	Don't know / Don't answer
I have no reserves to disclose my	16.4	23.1	26.9	32.1	1.5

personal data to an organization when interacting with it					
I have no reserves to disclose my personal data to a public body when interacting with it	23.9	32.9	20.6	20.6	2.1
Organizations I am interacting with shall ask for my agreement before I disclose my personal data to them	83.7	11.5	2.0	2.3	0.5
Public bodies I am interacting with shall ask for my agreement before I disclose my personal data to them	73.1	18.5	5.1	2.8	0.5
Organizations shall not use my personal data in promoting their products and/or services	67.9	15.4	6.4	9.7	0.5
Organizations shall not keep my personal data when I buy their products and/or services	38.3	24.9	20.3	15.2	1.3
Organizations shall not statistically process my personal data after I buy their products and/or services	42.1	26.7	17.0	10.7	3.4
I am well aware of the rights I have regarding the personal data protection	41.9	28.1	18.7	8.2	3.1

Source: authors' contribution

The respondents have expressed significant reserves toward disclosing their personal data to the organizations are interacting with, 59.0 % of them being concerned or at least concerned while 39.5 % were open or rather open to provide personal information to the organizations. Surprisingly, the attitude toward disclosing personal data to the public bodies is quite opposite: most of the respondents (56.8 %) agree or rather agree to disclose their personal information, while 41.2 % of them would consider it with caution. This difference in terms of the consumers' attitude toward disclosing their personal data to organizations, respectively public bodies may be explained by the higher trust the consumers tend to have in public entities than in private ones in connection to the potential threats, mainly abuses and/or frauds they may suffer as a result of the transactions made with different products and services providers, related to the inappropriate treatment of their personal data.

The agreement organizations and public bodies shall obtain from the part of consumers before capturing their personal data is mandatory: the majority of the respondents has indicated that expect organizations (95.2 %) and public bodies (91.6 %) to solicit the agreement before aiming to capture their personal data. The difference between organizations and public bodies appears as less significant in this respect: both the private and public entities should capture, process and/or later use consumers' personal data only after obtaining the consumer's agreement in this respect. The result confirms the importance associated by the consumers to the opt-in mechanism, which demands for the expression of their previous consent before the personal data collection, as an effective tool in defending their private space and privacy.

Capturing, statistically processing and later employment of personal data, seen in connection with the marketing communication and selling of the products and/or services provided by the different organizations, represent sensitive topics to which consumers have an overall defensive attitude. The majority of the respondents (83.3 %) consider that organizations should not use their personal data in the marketing communication campaigns aiming to promote their products and/or services. The main consequences of this attitude consist, on a hand, in a negative attitude toward the organizations' attempts to communicate directly, interactively and personalized with their consumers, respectively on the other hand, in a potential decrease of the direct marketing campaigns to be conducted in the Romanian market.

The majority of the respondents consider that organizations should not statistically process their personal data (68.8 %), respectively that should not store their personal data collected after buying products and/or services (63.2 %). Consumers tend to capitalize the importance of their private space and to protect their privacy in front of the marketing attempts of the organizations. If the concerns regarding the later use of the personal data are understandable, those regarding the statistical processing, respectively the storage of this data are questionable. The unfavorable consequences that can be associated with the statistical treatment of consumers' personal data or even to the storage of this data are hardly identifiable: maybe an inappropriate offer or a message, delivered to a more or less wrong audience, may be a direct marketing campaign conducted in a near or a more distant future. Anyway, nothing (significantly) harmful for the consumers' private space, but a proof in supporting the right to be forgotten, which has been recently included in the content of laws safeguarding the personal data protection and privacy.

Finally, most of the respondents (70.0 %) are well aware of the rights they have regarding the protection of their personal data, which substantiate the opinions expressed in connection with the different aspects concerning the consumer's private space and privacy.

Table 4

Buying intentions of the respondents in terms of the ways they are approached by the organizations (valid percentages)

Statements	Agree	Rather agree	Rather not agree	Not agree	Don't know / Don't answer
I have no reserves to buy products and/or services from the organizations approaching me by mail	25.8	25.1	26.1	16.6	6.4
I have no reserves to buy products and/or services from the organizations approaching me by telephone	14.4	20.0	28.7	28.5	8.5
I have no reserves to buy products and/or services from the organizations approaching me by mobile phone	17.2	18.7	31.3	23.8	9.0
I have no reserves to buy products and/or services from the organizations approaching me online	21.4	32.0	28.4	14.2	4.1

Source: authors' contribution

The assessment of the consumers' intentions to buy different products and/or services after being approached by the organizations has illustrated the reserves toward their approach by telephone or mobile phone, respectively a higher openness toward the approaches conducted by mail or online. The majority of the respondents do rather not agree to buy products and/or services in connection of which the organizations have communicated by telephone (57.2 %) or by mobile phone (55.1 %). Instead, the majority of the respondents do rather agree to buy products and/or services promoted by the organizations by mail (53.9 %), respectively online (53.4 %).

The approaches conducted by telephone or mobile phone is perceived as "too direct", too invasive, while those conducted by mail or online are perceived as less invasive in the consumers' private space, the resulting reaction consisting in an attempt to keep a safety distance capable to ensure or even to enhance the protection of the consumer's private space and privacy.

Conclusions

Consumers tend to associate a high level of importance to their personal data protection both in terms of the overall perception of the overall subject's importance and the particular perceptions regarding the object, necessary laws and level of regulation of the personal data protection. The research has confirmed the individuals' need for an appropriate protection of their personal data both as consumers and citizens, with a particular attention given to their status as citizens, the necessity of having the corresponding laws capable to provide an effective protection and the expectation for having their personal data at international level. All these results support in a consistent manner the overall high level of importance the individuals associate to the protection of their personal data.

Ensuring an effective protection of the consumer's private space and privacy requires a suitable institutional framework for the personal data protection. The research has confirmed that consumers expect a more appropriate and effective protection as a result of the partnership between the public bodies and private entities, which balances responsibilities of personal data protection covering the individuals' rights both as consumers and citizens and has the National Supervisory Authority for Personal Data Processing in foreground.

Consumers have different expectations regarding the categories of personal data they need to be protected through appropriate laws, regulations and/or mechanisms. The research results prove that, on a hand, not anything that can be associated to a person is "personal" and, on the other hand, that not anything "personal" deserves a protection by law. There are significant differences between the four categories of personal data considered – demographic, psychographic, identity and relational, as well as inside each of these categories, some of this data being perceived as "more personal" and, consequently, deserving (an increased) protection by law.

The research has also confirmed that content of the consumer's private space is rather limited and includes, in the case of the Romanian consumers, mainly demographic, identity and relational data. This results supports the necessity for a distinctive consideration of the personal data content, which should be followed by a logical transposal of this differentiation into an updated version of the domestic, European, even international, laws and rules defining and operating the meaning of "personal data".

The attitudes of the consumers toward the different aspects of processing their personal data by the organizations and public entities – where the term "processing" has been approached having in mind the obvious differences between the capturing, statistical processing and later employment of this data – are rather defensive. Consumers tend to be reserved in disclosing their personal data to organizations but have an opposite position on disclosing the same data to the public bodies, which, apparently, they trust more. Consumers tend to have a reluctant attitude towards the organizations

attempts to use their personal data in marketing communication and promotion, to capture (collect) their personal data during the buying process, respectively to statistically process their personal data after buying of the different products and/or services. Contrary to the expectations, the consumers appear to be well aware of the rights they have in terms of the personal data protection, which may bring an improved substantiation to their opinions and attitudes on this subject. These results supports the necessity for a distinctive consideration of the content of personal data processing, which should be logically transposed into an updated version of the domestic, European or international laws and rules defining and operating the meaning of “personal data processing”.

There is a significant differentiation between the consumers’ buying intentions for different products and/or services after being approached by the organizations, in terms of the direct communication channels they are exposed to. Telephones and mobile phones appear to generate a defensive attitude and rather reserved buying intentions, while the mailing and online approach appear to facilitate a more favorable attitude and increased buying intentions.

These results may be seen as the starting point of the discussion regarding the potential micro and macroeconomic impact: an inappropriate approach of the consumer’s private space, which can be translated through an invasion of his or her privacy, may generate an unfavorable, defensive attitude characterized mainly by a lack of trust within the organization, its products, services and brands, which will affect directly the relationships with its customers and prospects, as well as the buying of the different products and/or services provided in the market. Consequently, the lower buying intentions will generate lower sales that, seen in a macroeconomic perspective, may affect the profitability of the organization and its overall competitiveness in the market.

The existing legal framework regarding the personal data protection, set mainly through the Directive 95/46/EC issued by the European Parliament and the Council of the European Union, respectively the Law No. 677/2011 issued by the Romanian Parliament, has established a real ecosystem of personal data including mandatory rules to be followed by all the stakeholders – controllers, processors, third parties and recipients. The appropriate functioning of the ecosystem requires improved definitions of personal data and personal data processing, which are expected to create a more flexible and facilitating environment for the collection, statistical processing, storage and later employment of this data, to determine a consistent increase in the consumers’ trust in the organizations employing their personal data and a higher openness towards the direct marketing approaches, all in order to support the sustainable development of the direct marketing industry.

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