

EXPLORING PRIVACY-RELATED ASPECTS OF THE CONSUMERS' DIRECT APPROACH

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ABSTRACT: Organizations design marketing communication campaigns by using both the “traditional” (press, radio, television, outdoor) and/or direct media (mail, telephony, mobile telephony, and the internet), in order to attract the consumers and determine them to buy or be interested in the company's products, services and/or brands. Consumers are concerned about how the personal data they provide to organizations, as a response to the marketing campaigns they were exposed to, is captured, processed and employed. The paper explores some aspects related to consumers' attitudes towards the disclosure of personal data to companies and public entities, the assessment of aggressiveness and their perception about privacy in relation to the direct communication tools they were approached by – and presents the results obtained at the level of a sample including Romanian consumers.

Keywords: consumers' privacy, direct communication tools, personal data protection

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Introduction

The organizations must be able to design marketing communication campaigns and select to approach the consumers by using only the instruments accepted and trusted by them. The interactions between these tools suggest that organizations should apply integrated marketing communications to benefit from the synergies (Prasad and Sethi, 2009). Consumers' attitude regarding privacy has been researched in different countries and the results presented show that the consumers are concerned about how their personal data is collected, captured, processed and employed (Dolnicar and Jordaan, 2006). Many researchers were interested to assess the consumers' concern for their privacy in the online environment (Camenisch, 2012; Jensen, Potts and Jensen, 2005; Strauss and Rogerson, 2002; Wu et al., 2012, Steinke, 2002) or to discuss the new media used by organizations in order to engage with their customers (Winer, 2009).

One study showed that if the respondents had a favorable attitude towards the direct marketing media used to approach them by banks, they would be positively influenced to purchase (Page and Luding, 2003). Dervin and Shields (1999) focus on analyzing the users' understandings of telephone privacy concerns, strategies for phone privacy protection and the assessment of the strategies. Evans et al. (2001) showed that when it comes to shopping through direct marketing channels, 88% of the consumers are active in the online environment, 61% by from catalogues and only 18% buy when approached by outbound telemarketing campaigns. There are companies that use the Internet to reach their marketing and sales goals, or for disseminating information, however,

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the tools employed to achieve the expected results should be appropriate, otherwise they have the potential to lead to situations when information is misused. When using the Internet, companies can gather information without the immediate knowledge of consumers, by using different cookies and tracking software. Users only become aware that their information was collected when they receive different type of marketing communication from the companies. The results of the research showed that the respondents find the Internet to be less risky as opposed to telephone or catalogue shopping. Other studies (Udo, 2001; Earp and Baumer, 2003) show that the online environment offers additional chances for organizations to misuse the personal information of consumers, reason for which they become sensitive when online shopping.

The findings from present study show the consumers' concern for their personal data varies based on the intensity of their exposure to different direct marketing tools.

Methodological notes

Several privacy-related aspects of the marketing communication with the consumers have been assessed through this exploratory research approach among which the following regarding: (1) the consumers' attitudes towards disclosing personal data to the companies and public entities, (2) the consumers' assessment of the aggressiveness of the media employed to communicate directly with them, and, (3) the consumer's perception of the importance of the personal data in relation to the direct communication tool used by organizations to communicate with them.

Associated to these objectives, the research conducted has provided information based on which a set of hypotheses have been verified. The data have been gathered at the level of sample including 153 respondents from Bucharest (the Capital city), aged 23 to 34, with a higher education, and holding a professional status of full-time employees, freelancers, entrepreneurs, managers, and students. The data have been collected in January 2012.

Main findings

The research conducted has provided information based on which a set of hypotheses have been verified:

H1: The majority of the consumers do not agree to disclose their personal data to companies or public entities;

There is a significant difference in terms of the respondents' attitude toward disclosing their personal data to the companies, respectively the public institutions and/or authorities: the majority of the respondents (58.1 %) would rather not agree to make this data available to the companies, which confirms the related tested hypothesis, while the similar attitude in relationship with the public entities is quite opposite – the majority of the respondents (56.8 %) would rather agree to make their personal data available to them, which does not confirm the related hypothesis (H1). The consistency of these results is supported by the extremely low weight of the respondents unable to express their attitude (less than 3 % in the total of the sample). The reliability of the measurement is confirmed by the value of the Cronbach's Alpha (0.814).

Table no. 1

Attitudes of the respondents toward disclosing personal data to the companies and public entities (n=153; percentages)

Disclosing personal data to:	Agree	Rather agree	Rather not agree	Not agree	Don't know / Don't answer
Companies	15.7	23.5	33.3	24.8	2.6
Public entities	26.1	30.7	30.1	11.1	2.0

This difference between the companies and public entities in terms of the attitudes toward disclosing the personal data is related to the way consumers perceive the employment of this data: apparently, the consumers tend to believe that companies could employ their personal data in a

more threatening manner for their private space and privacy, while their trust in the appropriate employment of this data by the public entities is significantly higher (Veghes et al., 2012).

H2. the majority of the consumers consider the approach by mail, telephone, mobile telephone, and the internet as aggressive;

The majority of the respondents perceive the approach by telephone (86.3 %) and mobile phone (82.3 %) as being rather aggressive, which confirms the related tested hypotheses, while the internet and mail have been perceived as rather not aggressive, which has confirmed only partially the related hypothesis (H2). The consistency of these results is supported by the very low weight of the respondents unable to express their attitude (less than 4.0 % in the total of the sample). The reliability of the measurement is confirmed by the value of the Cronbach's Alpha (0.779).

Table no. 2.

Consumers' assessment of the aggressiveness of the different direct communication media employed by the companies to approach them (n=153; percentages)

Direct communication media	Aggressive	Rather aggressive	Rather not aggressive	Not aggressive	Don't know / Don't answer
Mail	5.2	13.7	31.4	45.8	3.9
Phone	51.0	35.3	5.9	4.6	3.3
Mobile phone	47.7	34.6	9.2	4.6	3.9
Internet	3.9	5.2	23.5	66.0	1.3

A degree of aggressiveness for each of the considered marketing channels has been established through the transformation of the items of the measurement scale from a qualitative into a quantitative expression (“aggressive” – 4, “rather aggressive” – 3, “rather not aggressive” – 2, and “not aggressive” – 1), is 3.37 (fixed telephony). The average scores expressing the aggressiveness of the considered marketing channels are: 3.37 (telephony), 3.30 (mobile telephony), 1.77 (mail), and 1.46 (internet) (Veghes et al., 2012).

The consumers tend to perceive as more aggressive the approach conducted by marketing channels that involve a direct contact with them – both the telephony and mobile telephony allow the organizations willing to communicate to initiate and have a dialogue with consumers. The mail and the internet instead are perceived as less aggressive because they allow consumers to keep a distance that creates a certain level of comfort in their relationships with the organizations approaching them. The consumers receive the messages regarding the different products, services, and brands without having to participate in a dialogue with the senders: the communication loop closes when consumers demand additional information or make an order for the promoted products and/or services.

H3.1. Consumers' perception of the personal data protection's importance does not differ significantly in terms of the mailing approach;

Four forms of mailing approach have been considered – commercial letters, brochures, catalogs and flyers. The consumers' exposure to the different forms of mailing approach varies from a relatively high level – in the cases of the flyers, catalogs and brochures, to a relatively low one – in the case of the commercial letters. This suggests, on a hand, the lower degree of complexity of the mailing packages currently delivered in the consumers' mailboxes and, on the other hand, the significant distance between what is actually done – a form of advertising delivered by mail, respectively what should be done by the organizations – a direct mail campaign in the real sense of the world.

Table no. 3.

Mail received & Importance of personal data protection

Types of consumers' approach by mail	Importance of the personal data protection					Total	%
	VImp	Imp	AvImp	LImp	NImp		
Commercial letters	34	10	1	1	0	46	30.1
Brochures	70	16	5	1	1	93	60.8
Catalogs	70	21	6	1	2	100	65.4
Flyers	85	24	7	1	0	117	76.5
No mailings received	13	0	2	0	0	15	9.8
	112	28	10	1	2	153	100.0
Percentages	73.2	18.3	6.5	0.7	1.3	100.0	

Notes: VImp – “Very Important”; Imp – “Important”; AvImp – “Average Importance”; LImp – “Less Important”; NImp – “Not Important”. Percents and totals based on respondents; 153 valid cases; 0 missing cases.

The statistical testing of the differences between consumers’ perceptions of the personal data protection’s importance in terms of the considered forms of mailing approach have proven not be significant: as $\chi^2 = 0.002$ for $p < 0.05$, the consumers seem to remain very concerned about the protection of their personal data does not matter what form of mailing they are exposed to. The consumers which have not been exposed to mailings delivered to their mail boxes appeared to be slightly more concerned about the protection of their personal data than those that have received commercial letters, brochures, flyers or catalogs. Catalogs appear to be safer only by comparison to the other mailing forms considered in the research approach: the overall conclusion states that approaching consumers by mail, does not matter the type of approach (forms of mailing) raises concerns among the consumers for the safety of their personal data and the appropriate protection of these data.

H3.2. Consumers’ perception of the personal data protection’s importance does not differ significantly in terms of the mobile approach;

Two forms of mobile approach have been considered – SMS and MMS marketing (sending messages on the consumers’ mobile phones). The consumers’ exposure to the considered forms of mobile approach varies from a very high level (in the cases of the SMS marketing), to an extremely low one (in the case of the MMS marketing). This suggests, on a hand, a rather lower degree of complexity of the mobile marketing effort currently employed to approach the consumer and, on the other hand, the rather poor technological level of the consumers’ mobile phones fleet.

Table no.4.

Mobile approach & Importance of personal data protection

Types of consumers' approach by mobile	Importance of the personal data protection					Total	%
	VImp	Imp	AvImp	LImp	NImp		
By SMS	103	24	8	1	1	137	89.5
By MMS	2	0	0	0	0	2	1.3
No SMS & MMS	8	4	2	0	1	15	9.8
	112	28	10	1	2	153	100.0
Percentages	73.2	18.3	6.5	0.7	1.3	100.0	

Notes: VImp – “Very Important”; Imp – “Important”; AvImp – “Average Importance”; LImp – “Less Important”; NImp – “Not Important”. Percents and totals based on respondents. 153 valid cases; 0 missing cases.

The statistical testing of the differences between consumers’ perceptions of the personal data protection’s importance in terms of the considered forms of mobile approach have proven not be significant: as $\chi^2 = 0.034$ for $p < 0.05$, the consumers seem to remain very concerned about the protection of their personal data does not matter what form of mobile approach they are exposed to.

The consumers which have not been exposed to the mobile approach appeared to be slightly less concerned about the protection of their personal data than those that have been received SMS and MMS. Still, the overall conclusion states that approaching consumers by mobile phones makes them more concerned for the safety and appropriate protection of their personal data.

H3.3. Consumers’ perception of the personal data protection’s importance does not differ significantly in terms of the emailing approach;

Two forms of emailing approach have been considered – domestic and foreign (emails sent to the consumers by domestic, respectively foreign organizations). The consumers’ exposure to the considered forms of emailing approach varies from a very high level (in the cases of the domestic emails), to a relatively low one (in the case of the foreign emails) suggesting a more important presence of the domestic providers of the different goods and services in consumers’ inboxes.

Table no. 5.

E-mail approach & Importance of personal data protection							
Types of consumers’ approach by email	Importance of the personal data protection					Total	%
	VImp	Imp	AvImp	LImp	NImp		
Domestic emails	101	25	8	1	2	137	89.5
Foreign emails	44	9	4	0	2	59	38.6
	112	28	10	1	2	153	100.0
<i>Percentages</i>	73.2	18.3	6.5	0.7	1.3	100.0	

Notes: VImp – “Very Important”; Imp – “Important”; AvImp – “Average Importance”; LImp – “Less Important”; NImp – “Not Important”. Percents and totals based on respondents. 153 valid cases; 0 missing cases.

The statistical testing of the differences between consumers’ perceptions of the personal data protection’s importance in terms of the considered forms of emailing approach have proven not be significant: as $\chi^2 = 0.0002$ for $p < 0.05$, the consumers seem to remain very concerned about the protection of their personal data does not matter what form of emailing approach they are exposed to. Approaching consumers by email seems to represent one of the most common ways to interact with them in a direct manner, as all the respondents included in the sample have been targeted at least once by a domestic and/or a foreign organization. The consumers who have received emails from foreign organizations appeared to be slightly less concerns about the protection of their personal data than those who have received emails from domestic organizations. The overall conclusion states that approaching consumers by email makes them concerned for the safety and appropriate protection of their personal data.

H3.4. Consumers’ perception of the personal data protection’s importance does not differ significantly in terms of the social networking approach;

Two forms of social networking approach have been considered – domestic and foreign (commercial messages placed by domestic, respectively foreign organizations in the social networks where consumers are present). The consumers’ exposure to the considered forms of social networking approach varies from an average level (in the cases of the domestic postings), to a relatively low one (in the case of the foreign postings) suggesting, on a hand a more significant presence of the domestic providers of the different goods and services in the consumers’ social networks and, on the other hands, a relatively poor employment of this way of communication (as almost one-third of the consumers have not been observed any kind of commercial posting).

Table no.6.

Social networking approach & Importance of personal data protection

Types of consumers' approach by socials	Importance of the personal data protection					Total	%
	VImp	Imp	AvImp	LImp	NImp		
Domestic messages	51	13	7	1	0	72	47.1
Foreign messages	17	4	1	0	0	22	14.4
No messages received	38	9	3	0	0	50	32.7
Not aware	15	4	0	0	2	21	13.7
	112	28	10	1	2	153	100.0
Percentages	73.2	18.3	6.5	0.7	1.3	100.0	

Notes: VImp – “Very Important”; Imp – “Important”; AvImp – “Average Importance”; LImp – “Less Important”; NImp – “Not Important”. Percents and totals based on respondents. 153 valid cases; 0 missing cases.

The statistical testing of the differences between consumers’ perceptions of the personal data protection’s importance in terms of the considered forms of social networking approach have proven not be significant: as $\chi^2 = 0.005$ for $p < 0.05$, the consumers seem to remain very concerned about the protection of their personal data does not matter what form of social networking approach they are exposed to. Approaching consumers through social networks seems to represent a less common way to interact with them, but a none-the-less concerning for the safety and appropriate protection of their personal data. Those consumers who have not observed the commercial messages and those who have been exposed to domestic messages in social networks appeared to be slightly less concerned about the protection of their personal data than those who have been exposed to foreign messages or those who were not at all exposed to commercial messages in the social networks.

H3.5. Consumers’ perception of the personal data protection’s importance does not differ significantly in terms of the press direct response approach;

More than half of the consumers have been aware of their exposure to press direct response, a bit more than a quarter of them have not observed it, and just a low percentage of them were not aware of their exposure to press direct response approach. Furthermore, virtually all respondents that are aware of their exposure to press direct response consider the protection of their private space as a topic of utmost importance (91.66%) and even those that are not aware of their exposure to press direct response consider the protection of personal data as important or very important (94.75%).

Table no.7.

Press direct response approach & Importance of personal data protection

Types of consumers' approach by press	Importance of the personal data protection					Total	%
	VImp	Imp	AvImp	LImp	NImp		
Aware	70	18	6	1	1	96	62.7
Not aware	13	2	0	0	1	16	10.4
Not observed	29	8	4	0	0	41	26.8
	112	28	10	1	2	153	100.0
Percentages	73.2	18.3	6.5	0.7	1.3	100.0	

Notes: VImp – “Very Important”; Imp – “Important”; AvImp – “Average Importance”; LImp – “Less Important”; NImp – “Not Important”. Percents and totals based on respondents; 153 valid cases; 0 missing cases.

The differences identified between the perceptions of various types of consumers in terms of awareness to press direct response and their perception regarding the importance of personal data was proven statistically insignificant ($\chi^2 = 6.395$, $p < 0.05$). As a result, we can infer that consumers consider the protection of their personal data important, regardless of their approach to direct press

response. It is worth to stress that awareness towards press direct response does not impact overall concern towards protection of their private space.

H3.6. Consumers' perception of the personal data protection's importance does not differ significantly in terms of the outbound telemarketing approach;

The majority of the consumers were exposed to outbound telemarketing campaigns, being called at least once, suggesting that companies are communicating directly to potential customers.

Table no. 8.

Outbound telemarketing approach & Importance of personal data protection

Types of consumers' approach by telephone	Importance of the personal data protection					Total	%
	VImp	Imp	AvImp	LImp	NImp		
Approached	76	21	5	0	2	104	67.9
Not approached	34	7	4	1	0	46	30.1
Not observed	2	0	1	0	0	3	1.9
	112	28	10	1	2	153	100.0
Percentages	73.2	18.3	6.5	0.7	1.3	100.0	

Notes: VImp – “Very Important”; Imp – “Important”; AvImp – “Average Importance”; LImp – “Less Important”; NImp – “Not Important”. Percents and totals based on respondent; 153 valid cases; 0 missing cases.

Once again, about 68% have been subjected to telemarketing instruments. Amongst these, about 93% consider the protection of their private space as important or very important, leading to an overall conclusion that telemarketers should take all the necessary precautions to alleviate potential harmful uses of consumers' private data in their approaches, as well as show discreteness and restraint in their contacts. Once again, we have found the differences between groups to be not significant ($\chi^2 = 8.380$) for $p < 0.05$, so we can infer that consumers do not differ significantly in terms of their perception of the importance attributed to personal data protection, either if they have or have not been subjected to outbound telemarketing techniques. Thus, we can confirm that hypothesis H3.6 has been correct.

H3.7. Consumers' perception of the personal data protection's importance does not differ significantly in terms of the catalog approach;

The most consumers have received catalogs from companies (65.35%), whilst 24.18% were not subjected to this marketing technique. Once again, we can see that the overwhelming majority of those that have been approached consider that the protection of their personal data is important or very important (94%), a figure that is similar to that resulted from the group of consumers that have not been approached through catalogs by organizations that employ direct marketing techniques (83.78%).

Table no. 9.

Catalog approach & Importance of personal data protection

Types of consumers' approach by catalogs	Importance of the personal data protection					Total	%
	VImp	Imp	AvImp	LImp	NImp		
Approached	74	20	3	1	2	100	65.3
Not approached	27	4	6	0	0	37	24.1
Not observed	11	4	1	0	0	16	10.4
	112	28	10	1	2	153	100.0
Percentages	73.2	18.3	6.5	0.7	1.3	100.0	

Notes: VImp – “Very Important”; Imp – “Important”; AvImp – “Average Importance”; LImp – “Less Important”; NImp – “Not Important”. Percents and totals based on respondents; 153 valid cases; 0 missing cases.

The difference between the three groups (those approached, those not approached and those who did not observe this criterion) proves to have been statistically insignificant ($\chi^2 = 10.546$) for

$p < 0.05$, so we can infer that H3.7 has been proven correct and consumers' perception towards the importance of personal data protection does not differ significantly in terms of their exposure to direct marketing through catalogs. The overall conclusion states that approaching consumers by catalogs makes them concerned for the safety and appropriate protection of their personal data.

H3.8. Consumers' perception of the personal data protection's importance does not differ significantly in terms of the ecommerce approach;

Finally, about two thirds of the consumers made online acquisitions and online one third has not bought anything online. There is a very small percent who did not observe the companies' ecommerce approach.

Table no. 10.

E-commerce approach & Importance of personal data protection

Types of consumers' approach by e-commerce	Importance of the personal data protection					Total	%
	VImp	Imp	AvImp	LImp	NImp		
Approached	70	19	7	1	2	99	64.7
Not approached	38	9	2	0	0	49	32.0
Not observed	4	0	1	0	0	5	3.2
	112	28	10	1	2	153	100.0
Percentages	73.2	18.3	6.5	0.7	1.3	100.0	

Notes: VImp – “Very Important”; Imp – “Important”; AvImp – “Average Importance”; LImp – “Less Important”; NImp – “Not Important”. Percents and totals based on respondents; 153 valid cases; 0 missing cases.

As different for previous stimuli investigated, we can observe that a much more significant number of consumers have had contact with e-commerce efforts (3.26%, as opposed to 26.79% for press direct response or 13.72% for social media approached). The statistical difference between the groups was proven, once again, to be not significant ($\chi^2 = 4.719$) for $p < 0.05$, so we can determine that our hypothesis H3.8 stating that consumers' perception of the personal data protection's importance does not differ significantly in terms of the ecommerce approach was correct. The overall conclusion states that approaching consumers by online commerce makes them concerned for the safety and appropriate protection of their personal data.

Conclusions, limits of the research and further research directions

The research conducted has provided several conclusions regarding the impact of privacy-related aspects over the marketing communication with the consumers:

- there is a significant difference in terms of the attitudes of the consumers towards disclosing their personal data to the companies, respectively the public entities, as the companies are believed to employ the personal data in a more threatening manner for their private space and privacy. Both the companies and the public institutions/authorities should solicit the consumer's agreement before collecting personal data as a proof of safeguarding his/her private space and privacy;
- the consumers tend to perceive more aggressive an approach conducted by media (marketing channels) that involve a direct contact (such as the telephone and the mobile telephone), and less aggressive the approach using media that allow them to keep a distance that creates a certain level of comfort in their relationships with the organizations (such as the mail and the internet);
- finally, direct communication tools such as mail, mobile phone, email, social networks, press direct response, outbound telemarketing, catalogs or ecommerce are important to be used when communicating to the consumers, but companies must be very careful about the way in which they capture, process and employ the personal data they have obtained, since consumers are concerned about these aspects.

As an *overall conclusion*, the research reveals that the consumers are concerned about the

safety and protection of their personal data no matter by which direct communication tool they have been approached by the organizations. Moreover, an active and defensive consumer should be approached by the organizations using a combination of communication media including the internet and other less aggressive media, only with the previous consent of this consumer, in a trusted context of collecting, processing, and employment of the personal data, aiming to generate a certain result such as buying of a certain product, service or brand.

The main *limits of the research* derive from its exploratory nature and regard the size and the structure of the investigated sample, respectively the formulation of the research objectives and the related hypotheses. The *further directions* of research should take into consideration at least: (1) the improvement of the sample by covering other segments of consumers in terms of age (35 and more years old), residence (other urban cities), and education (average educated consumers), and (2) increasing the depth of the research approach by including, as research objectives, of the elements regarding the effects, on micro and macroeconomic levels, of the inappropriate employment of the consumers' personal data.

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