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Mattison Thompson, F.; Siamagka, N.-T.

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# Counteracting consumer subversion: Organizational privacy ethical care as driver of online information sharing

Frauke Mattison Thompson<sup>1</sup>  | Nikoletta-Theofania Siamagka<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Marketing Division, Amsterdam Business School, University of Amsterdam, Amsterdam, Netherlands

<sup>2</sup>Department of Economics, Aristotle University of Thessaloniki, Thessaloniki, Greece

## Correspondence

Frauke Mattison Thompson, Amsterdam Business School, University of Amsterdam, 1001 NL Amsterdam, Netherlands.  
Email: [F.H.MattisonThompson@uva.nl](mailto:F.H.MattisonThompson@uva.nl)

## Abstract

With an ever-increasing hunger for consumer data by firms, and despite many organizational efforts to reduce consumer privacy concerns, consumer subversion behavior towards information provision persists. Organizational privacy ethical care, an organizational behavior that goes beyond legislative action and moral codes, provides a new theory of how to overcome this issue. Across three studies, we develop and test theory which suggests an organizational ethic of care approach to privacy will have a positive impact on reducing consumer subversion behavior (i.e. increase consumers' willingness to share information and the accuracy of information they share). The correlational and causal results indicate that perceived organizational privacy ethical care is a positive driver of the amount and the accuracy of information consumers are willing to share with firms. The results also suggest partial support that this relationship is mediated through perceived information control and trust towards the organization. Thus, we provide some support for a better corporate approach to privacy, beyond previously suggested legislative and social responsibility standards, which allows for the reduction of consumer privacy concerns and subsequent subversion behaviors.

## KEYWORDS

consumer privacy, consumer subversion, information sharing, organizational privacy ethical care, perceived information control, perceived trust

## 1 | INTRODUCTION

The capture and use of consumer information have become fundamental for organizations and marketers, as it allows for improved customization of advertising and promotion strategies, as well as personalized and targeted products and services (Gabisch & Milne, 2014; King & Jessen, 2010). Whilst some consumers appear to act indifferent to privacy loss through personal information sharing (Acquisti et al., 2015; Kokolakis, 2017; Massara et al., 2021; Norberg et al., 2007), a large number of studies have documented rising

consumer privacy fears due to an increasing collection and use of personal information by organizations (Brandimarte et al., 2012; King & Raja, 2012; Lwin et al., 2007; Martin & Murphy, 2017). Privacy concerns lead consumers to engage in subversion behavior, that is, decline information requests (Glenn & Monteith, 2014; Goldfarb & Tucker, 2012), or provide false information to enable them to use the service without having to provide actual, detailed information about themselves (Norberg & Horne, 2014; Plangger & Montecchi, 2020; Plangger & Watson, 2015; White et al., 2008; Xu et al., 2012). To remain competitive, firms must find mutually beneficial strategies or

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mechanisms to decrease privacy concerns and counteract consumers' reluctance to engage in information sharing.

Prior research suggests that consumer privacy subversion behavior can be overcome by organizational privacy-enhancing factors (Aguirre et al., 2015; Foxman & Kilcoyne, 1993; Martin & Murphy, 2017; Nill & Aalberts, 2014). Building on a justice-based perspective, research has noted that firms can increase consumers' perceived control over their information, thus increasing their willingness to share (Culnan & Bies, 2003; Etzioni, 2019; Schmidt et al., 2020). Using rational motives for moral/ethical reasoning, other studies have found that firms can increase information sharing by generating trust in the organization (Culnan & Bies, 2003; Limbu et al., 2012). While providing valuable insights that help explain privacy-enhancing factors that influence the levels of consumer privacy concerns, these studies do not appear to fully decrease privacy concerns or help counteract consumers' reluctance to engage in information sharing. We argue that an organizational privacy ethical care perspective can improve on these shortcomings.

Based on Nicholson and Kurucz (2019) and Lawrence and Maitlis (2012), we define Organizational Privacy Ethical Care as: "the level of genuine, enduring consideration and active attention a company pays to, and puts on the reduction of its customers' information privacy concerns." An ethic of care by organizations emphasizes affective relationships and focus on people's needs. It comprises firm attitudes and activities involved in caring as a fundamental orientation towards others (Gilligan, 1982; Held, 2005; Lawrence & Maitlis, 2012; Nicholson & Kurucz, 2019; Noddings, 2003). An ethic of care perspective implies a natural, care-based concern for the good of others (Baier, 1987), motivated by feeling (Nicholson & Kurucz, 2019; Noddings, 2003). It goes beyond a moral perspective (Held, 2005; Lawrence & Maitlis, 2012), that is, an obligation to care, and beyond a rule-based obligation prescribed by legislative regulation (Lawrence & Maitlis, 2012). While an ethic of care perception has hitherto only been adapted in a firm-employee context, earlier research suggests that some knowledge from the business literature may also be applicable in the business-consumer context (Eastlick et al., 2006).

Hence, in this study, we build on the theory of organizational ethical care (Lawrence & Maitlis, 2012) and adapt it to the consumer privacy context. We develop and test the theory that perceived organizational privacy ethical care has a positive impact on consumers' willingness to share information online and on the accuracy of that information. Specifically, we delineate a model whereby an organization's privacy ethical care is a key driver of perceived information control and trust towards the organization, increasing the amount of information individuals are willing to share, and the accuracy of information they are willing to provide online. These two outcomes, the amount and the accuracy of information (two direct consumer subversion behaviors), are important for firms, as the more they know about their consumers, the more accurately they can target them. Similarly, the more accurate the data, which they use to analyze consumer behavior, the less resources are wasted on targeting consumers with inaccurate marketing activities.

We first test our theory via a correlational study using a sample of 413 consumers from the United States. Our results show that perceived organizational ethical care is a positive driver of the amount of information consumers are willing to share with firms. We further find that perceived organizational ethical care, mediated through perceived control, and trust towards the organization, has a significant positive effect on the accuracy of information consumers are willing to share with firms. In addition, comparing changes in explanatory power, we show that our model, including organizational privacy ethical care, significantly outperforms our base model, which uses privacy regulation as an independent variable.

We ran two additional experimental studies testing the causal effect of organizational privacy ethical care on the amount and accuracy of information consumers are willing to share. Study 2 shows a significant main effect of organizational privacy ethical care on both amount and accuracy of data consumers are willing to share. Study 3 builds on Study 2 and includes our previously studied mediators (information control and trust toward the organization) and a moderator (i.e., interaction type: personal vs. impersonal). The results illustrate a significant mediation in the relationship between manipulated organizational privacy ethical care and accuracy of information consumers are willing to share, through perceived information control. This finding also holds for the amount of information consumers are willing to share, in the case of personal interaction. We also find a significant effect of trust on both the accuracy of information and the amount of information consumers are willing to share. Finally, we couldn't establish the role of interaction type as a moderator. These findings partially confirm the results of our correlational study. Hence, overall, we offer some support for the theory that a privacy ethic of care by an organization has a significant positive effect on consumer information sharing, and the accuracy of the information they are willing to share.

We make several important contributions to the literature. First, we contribute to the literature on consumer privacy by extending the concept of ethical care from a firm-employee setting to a consumer privacy context. Previous research has focused mainly on justice-based perspectives or rational motives to increase consumers' willingness to share information (Culnan & Bies, 2003; Etzioni, 2019; Limbu et al., 2012). Yet, these studies have failed to consider how organizational privacy ethical care can affect consumer data sharing. An ethic of care perspective responds to limitations of justice-based perspectives to understanding consumer privacy dilemmas and consumers' willingness to share their personal information, especially by emphasizing the emotional rather than the rational motives for moral reasoning and behavior by organizations (Held, 1990). By adding a new antecedent, that is, an organization privacy ethical care perspective, we show a significant positive effect on consumer information sharing, and the accuracy of the information they are willing to share, beyond what can be done with existing measures. Hence, we advance our understanding of consumer privacy by showing that organizational ethical care can increase the accuracy and the amount of information consumers are willing to share,

providing a novel and effective way for organizations to decrease consumer privacy fears and consumers' subversion behavior.

Second, we contribute to the literature on consumer subversion. This literature has primarily looked at identifying reasons for why consumers engage in subversion behavior with regard to information sharing and how this is manifested (Glenn & Monteith, 2014; Goldfarb & Tucker, 2012; Norberg & Horne, 2014; Plangger & Montecchi, 2020; Plangger & Watson, 2015; White et al., 2008; Xu et al., 2012). Across three studies, we extend knowledge by providing evidence that organizational privacy ethical care, as mutually beneficial strategy or mechanism, increases consumer willingness to share information and the accuracy of information being shared. We thus provide support that organizational privacy ethical care can counteract consumers' reluctance to engage in information sharing with firms and at the same time may decrease consumer privacy concerns.

We further contribute to the literature on organizational ethical care (e.g., Carmeli et al., 2017; Lawrence & Maitlis, 2012; Nicholson & Kurucz, 2019) by describing the process through which organizational privacy ethical care can positively impact consumer data sharing behavior, specifically the amount and the accuracy of information willing to be shared with organizations by consumers. We provide correlational and partial causal support that the relationship between perceived organizational ethical care and the accuracy of information consumers are willing to share is mediated by perceived information control and trust towards the organization. By doing so we are the first to bridge the literature on organizational ethical care and consumer privacy, apply the concept in a B2C context, and extend knowledge of how consumer data sharing can be effectively managed by organizations. In addition, only recently, Carmeli et al. (2017) have conducted an empirical study into organizational ethical care, yet their work falls short in applicability in the consumer behavior literature, as it focuses on firm-employee interaction only. Thus, based on previous literature (e.g., Carmeli et al., 2017; Lawrence & Maitlis, 2012; Nicholson & Kurucz, 2019), we develop and validate an 8-item scale to measure perceived organizational privacy ethical care in the context of online consumer privacy.

## 2 | THEORY AND HYPOTHESES

Consumer privacy concerns (see Acquisti et al., 2015; Aguirre et al., 2015; Hong et al., 2019; Martin & Murphy, 2017; Norberg et al., 2007) and resulting consumer subversion behavior (e.g., Glenn & Monteith, 2014; Norberg & Horne, 2014; Plangger & Montecchi, 2020; Plangger & Watson, 2015), are driven by several distinct antecedents. First individual dimensions, for example previous privacy invasion experience, personality differences, cultural dimensions, and internet knowledge (e.g., Dinev et al., 2006; Hong et al., 2019; Xu, 2007). Second, environmental dimensions such as government legislation or privacy notices (Culnan & Bies, 2003). And finally, organizational dimensions, that is, firm transparency and personalization of services through technical solutions adopted by organizations to protect users' privacy, such as opt-in technology allowing for greater data control by consumers or the exchange of privacy

for price changes (Aguirre et al., 2015; Hong et al., 2019; Martin, 2015; Schmidt et al., 2020).

Research looking at individual dimensions of consumer privacy concerns (such as perceived lack of information control and a lack of firm trust) and their resulting levels in willingness to share their personal information, suggests that by controlling and manipulating these, organizations are able to reduce consumer privacy concern and subversion behavior, and increase consumer data sharing (e.g., Aguirre et al., 2015; Hong et al., 2019; Martin & Murphy, 2017; Nill & Aalberts, 2014). Similarly, studies looking at adapting organizational dimensions, that is, firm transparency, personalization of services through technical solutions (opt-in technology), or environmental dimensions, such as the display of a privacy notice), suggest that using these dimensions can reduce privacy concerns and subversion behavior, by allowing for greater perceived data control (Aguirre et al., 2015; Hong et al., 2019; Martin, 2015; Schmidt et al., 2020). Overall, these studies thus tend to suggest that increasing firm trust and perceived data control, leads to a greater willingness to share personal information (for an overview of selected drivers and inhibitors of consumers' information sharing see Table 1).

Despite these insights, consumers' privacy concerns and subversion behavior persist (Goldfarb & Tucker, 2012; Hong et al., 2019; Norberg & Horne, 2014; Plangger & Montecchi, 2020; Plangger & Watson, 2015; Xu et al., 2012). Hence, it may be important to examine the effects of other antecedents, ones that go beyond current known antecedents, that allow for a more symbiotic relationship between firms and customers, and their effectiveness in reducing consumer privacy concerns still increasing consumers' willingness to share their personal information. We suggest that an organizational ethic of care towards privacy may be able to fill this gap, as it goes beyond previously established regulatory and moral perspectives.

Prior research suggests that an ethic of care contrasts other legislative and moral perspectives that emphasize rational, universal, or rule-based and impersonal approaches (Held, 2005; Lawrence & Maitlis, 2012). An ethic of care by organizations emphasizes affective relationships and people's needs, based on "a felt concern for the good of others and for the community with them" (Baier, 1987, p. 721). It focuses more on relational forms of interaction, thus fostering more care and compassion for all agents (Gittell & Douglass, 2012). Organizational behavior research has been fairly limited regarding an ethic of care perspective (Carmeli et al., 2017; Lawrence & Maitlis, 2012; Worline & Dutton, 2017), and is, to the best of our knowledge, nonexistent in the consumer behavior literature. Yet, existing studies show that care reduces work-based anxiety (Kahn, 2001), and increases proactive engagement in organizational practices that signal intrinsic care and concern (Houghton et al., 2015; Lawrence & Maitlis, 2012). Recent literature also shows that creating an ethic of care within an organization can lead to greater employee satisfaction and increase their willingness to participate in organizational innovations such as sustainability behaviors (Carmeli et al., 2017; Lawrence & Maitlis, 2012). It can also promote employee perceptions of self-worth and value (Worline & Dutton, 2017), and supports feelings of relatedness and well-being (Bammens, 2016). Hence,

**TABLE 1** Selected drivers and inhibitors of consumers' online information sharing

Theoretical framework	Key constructs, definitions, and findings	Example studies
Consumer control	Increasing perceived control over personal information usage, release, or control over access to information, can lead to greater willingness to share information	Brandimarte et al. (2012); Culnan (1995); Malhotra et al. (2004); Martin and Murphy (2017); Milne and Gordon (1993); Milne (1997); Norberg and Horne (2014); Phelps et al. (2000); Schmidt et al. (2020)
Organizational trust	Increasing perceived organizational trust can lead to greater willingness to share information; higher levels of trust can lead to the reduction of consumer subversion behaviors, such as falsifying information	Aguirre et al. (2015); Gabisch and Milne (2014); Lockamy and Mothersbaugh (2020); Malhotra and Malhotra (2011); Martin (2016); Martin and Murphy (2017); Miyazaki (2008); Mothersbaugh et al. (2012); Norberg and Horne (2014); Romanosky et al. (2014); White (2004); Wirtz and Lwin (2009)
Privacy legislature	Privacy notices/policies provide a necessary but not sufficient condition for meeting consumers' privacy expectations. In addition, industry self-regulation, and government legislation, separately and in combination with consumer perceived control, influence privacy concerns	John et al. (2011); Romanosky et al. (2014); Xu et al. (2012)
Moral/ethical norms/transparency	Ethical norms surrounding information exchange perceived as fair, can alleviate privacy concerns, promote trust and disclosure, and reduce falsifying behaviors. Increased data transparency may reduce subversion and other forms of negative consumer response	Caudill and Murphy (2000); Lwin et al. (2007); Martin (2016); Foxman and Kilcoyne (1993); Martin and Murphy (2017); Nill and Aalberts (2014); Norberg and Horne (2014); Wirtz and Lwin (2009)

it may also go beyond previously established regulatory and moral privacy perspectives.

We adapt the theory of ethical care to the context of consumer privacy and suggest that an organizational ethic of privacy care can reduce consumer privacy fears and increase their willingness to share information about themselves, better than established privacy antecedents. We argue that in the context of consumer privacy an organizational ethic of care entails establishing, communicating, and "living" a genuine, enduring consideration for the reduction of its customers' information privacy concerns, and actively paying attention to consumers' perceived levels of information privacy concern. This will lead to higher levels of trust and perceived control, and thus to a decrease in consumer privacy subversion behavior and a greater willingness to share information.

An organizational privacy ethic of care may be established by heavily advertising and promoting an organization's genuine care for consumer privacy. In addition, firms should ensure that when consumers share information that they don't experience any negative emotions (collection is overtly, consumers are informed of how the data will be used, and consent is given for the collection), to ensure that the disclosure of the information is not experienced as privacy intrusion. Third, it is imperative to actively and continuously engage with customers on matters relating to perceived privacy intrusion and to promote an active discourse between the firm and customers. This promotes genuine care for consumer privacy concerns and the well-being of consumers and could be achieved through an open (online) forum, direct telephone hotline, or an advertising campaign. Similarly, active and swift responses through social media, amplified by WOM, might be a good solution to promote genuine care.

In sum, we theorize that organizational privacy ethical care influences consumers' willingness to share their personal information and impacts on the accuracy of information being shared. We argue that consumers' perceived control and levels of trust towards the organization mediate this relationship. Below we detail our hypotheses.

## 2.1 | Organizational privacy ethical care and perceived information control

Research concerned with perceived consumer information control often draws upon social contract theory to provide a link between organizational behavior and consumer privacy (Phelps et al., 2000). Based on various prior studies (e.g., Culnan, 1995; Milne, 1997; Milne & Gordon, 1993), a social contract exists any time an individual provides personal information to a firm or another person. Social contract theory helps understand perceptions of fairness and justice in consumer-firm relationships (Donaldson & Dunfee, 1994; Dunfee, 1999), suggesting that when a firm collects personal information about a consumer, this practice is identified as fair, if the consumer has full awareness and control over whether the information is gathered, and how it is subsequently used (Malhotra et al., 2004). In situations where consumers are unaware of information collection, information usage, or are unable to opt-out of information gathering and usage, a social contract has been violated (Culnan, 1995; Phelps et al., 2000).

Whilst social contracts are a legitimate moral perception of firm-consumer relationships, since all firms and consumers differ, social

contracts may also be limited in their effectiveness, as the “morality” of such contracts might be conditional or situational, and both parties may have conflicting conceptions on the matter (Donaldson & Dunfee, 2002; Nussbaum, 2004). Furthermore, many firms display moral blindness when it comes to adhering to social contracts (Donaldson & Dunfee, 2002; Nussbaum, 2004), as social contracts are frequently not seen as principles of obligation, resulting in limited consumer control at best (e.g., Culnan, 1995; Phelps et al., 2000).

We posit, that since an ethic of care is more than a moral code or social contract subject to variance in interpretation and “moral blindness,” but rather entails a deeply rooted form of natural felt care that fosters compassion between both parties (Carmeli et al., 2017; Gittell & Douglass, 2012), it overcomes the limits of social contract variance, and may thus provide real perceived control to consumers. It does so by instilling strong perceptions of genuine, affective consideration and active attention on its customers’ well-being (Bammens, 2016; Carmeli et al., 2017) by focusing on principles of care and compassion centered on fulfilling consumer needs (such as their concerns for control over their personal data) and promoting consumers’ best interests.

In addition, through an ethic of care, an organization vows to pay attention to the narrative used between them and consumers (Gilligan, 1982; Held, 2005). We suggest that this narrative may also increase consumers’ perceived control over their own data. Through an active, ongoing narrative by the firm on what is being done with personal data, consumers can gain greater awareness of these processes. Higher awareness of information use allows consumers to exercise greater control over personal data management (e.g., Culnan, 1995; Phelps et al., 2000). Thus, the narrative involved in an ethic of care supports the provision of perceived information control.

Overall, we thus argue that there are fewer conflicting conceptions and higher levels of perceived control over personal information (than with simple social contracts) through a privacy ethic of care approach by firms. This is based on the above reasoning, that through a privacy ethic of care an organization promises to pay attention to its consumers’ needs (Gilligan, 1982; Held, 2005), and consumers can feel natural, genuine care, communicated through a consistent, ongoing narrative of how the firm views and protects their information privacy, increasing their perceived information control. Therefore, we argue that perceived organizational privacy ethical care is positively related to high levels of perceived control a consumer has over their own personal data provided to the firm. Hypothesis one therefore states:

**H1:** Organizational Privacy Ethical Care has a positive effect on the perceived level of control a consumer has over their information provided to the organization.

## 2.2 | Organizational privacy ethical care and organizational trust

An ethic of care can lead to an increase in employees’ willingness to participate in organizational innovations such as sustainability

behaviors (Carmeli et al., 2017; Lawrence & Maitlis, 2012). This observed effect may be attributed to social identity theory (Bauman & Skitka, 2012; Hogg & Terry, 2000). Work on social identity theory argues that a person’s identity is notably shaped by the organizations they are a member of (Abrams & Hogg, 1988), or by the firm they are a consumer of (Fournier, 1998; Lamond et al., 2010; Underwood et al., 2001). Firm identity is driven by organizational reassurance, concern for safety and security, and highlighting and representing care for important values. Research also shows that individuals are drawn to firms that exhibit caring, honest, pro-social attributes (Slaughter et al., 2004).

Consumer-firm identity has also previously been linked to high levels of trust (Chaudhuri & Holbrook, 2001; He et al., 2012). Studies show that high levels of firm identification are driven by affective brand attachment, which provides a favorable link to firm trust (Dunn & Schweitzer, 2005). Hence, strong firm identification is a significant trust-making mechanism (Borgen, 2001). Identification-based trust develops when both parties know and are able to predict the other’s needs, preferences and choices and also share some of those same needs, preferences, and choices as one’s own (Lewicki & Bunker, 1996). Here, trust exists because the parties effectively understand and appreciate the other’s wants; they have a mutual understanding. The other can also be confident that his/her interests will be protected and that no monitoring of the actor is necessary. In addition, May et al. (2015) suggest that social identification can also drive moral identification, which represents the link between organizational care, kindness, and compassion with individuals’ firm identification.

Subsequently, in line with the above, and based on social identification theory (Bauman & Skitka, 2012; Borgen, 2001; He et al., 2012), we suggest that organizational ethical care influences consumers’ perceived trust towards an organization. Since ethical care is based on a deep structure of values-centered on fulfilling consumer needs, promoting consumers’ best interests, and valuing consumers’ contributions, ethical care also shapes consumers’ concepts of self, since consumers draw inferences about themselves from firms and how they are treated by these (Tyler et al., 1999). In turn, since firm identification leads to higher levels of trust (Borgen, 2001; Dunn & Schweitzer, 2005; He et al., 2012), we argue that through the process of social identification theory, organizational privacy ethical care leads to high levels of consumer perceived trust towards that organization. Organizational ethical care can create consumer trust, as consumers seek congruence in their own values and that of the firm they interact with (Fournier, 1998; Lamond et al., 2010; Underwood et al., 2001). Given that an ethic of care enhances the identification an individual develops towards an organization (Carmeli et al., 2017; May et al., 2015), and that consumer firm identity has a positive effect on consumers’ perceived levels of trust, it is not unreasonable to suggest that an ethic of privacy care leads to high levels of perceived trust towards the organization. Therefore, in hypothesis two we argue:

**H2:** Organizational Privacy Ethical Care has a positive effect on the level of trust a consumer has towards the organization.

## 2.3 | The mediating effect of perceived control

Consumer privacy control has been looked at in the literature through two different lenses. One defines control as the ability of consumers to voice or exit to influence changes in organizational privacy practices they find to be objectionable (Malhotra et al., 2004), and thus refers to control as a form of behavioral control one has over their own personal data, such as data collection, secondary use, and access (Milne & Rohm, 2000; Phelps et al., 2000; Stewart & Segars, 2002). This literature finds that information control is usually addressed by the use of fair information practices (Olivero & Lunt, 2004), such as opt-ins or opt-outs, or privacy notices allowing consumers to decide whether to share their personal information or not. Studies within this literature stream have shown, however, that these mechanisms do little to instill consumer control, and have little impact on consumers' likeliness to disclose information (Carlton, 2019; Norberg & Horne, 2014).

The second lens through which control has been studied in consumer privacy literature is that of psychological control, or perceived control (e.g., Aguirre et al., 2015; Hong et al., 2019; Martin, 2015; Xu et al., 2012). Perceived control is defined as an individual's belief about the presence of factors that may increase or decrease the amount of control over personal information (see: Xu et al., 2012), and directly affects behavioral intentions (Hajli & Lin, 2016). Thus, perceived information control is an important aspect of consumer privacy perceptions and their data sharing willingness (Altman, 1975). Studies show that high levels of perceived information control lead to reduced privacy concerns (Malhotra et al., 2004), and a greater willingness to disclose personal information (Olivero & Lunt, 2004). In the context of location-based services, for example, perceived control was also found to be a key factor reducing information privacy concerns (see: Xu et al., 2012). For the purpose of our study we focus on perceived control.

Perceived control over personal information has previously been identified as a mediator between organizational privacy actions and consumer behavior (e.g., Xu et al., 2008, 2010, 2012). For example, studies find that companies that are members of self-policing associations (Xu et al., 2008), or that use seals to underline their data security (Mattison Thompson et al., 2019), enhance consumers' perceptions of control over their personal information. This is because third-party regulatory structures enhance the consumers' beliefs that they are able to control their personal information, albeit by proxy via these third-party associations, by conveying the impression of low opportunistic or negative privacy behavior by firms (Xu et al., 2012). Similarly, government regulations, such as the GDPR (2016) or the Online Privacy Protection Act (1998), are tools with which, by proxy, consumers are given perceived control over their personal information. Again, this is because these laws convey a sense of perceived control over what firms can do with consumer information. Recent work by Xu et al. (2012) indicates that industry self-regulation, as well as government regulation, mediated by perceived control, reduce levels of information privacy concerns. Hence, perceived information

control is an important mediator between external firm regulatory bodies and consumer privacy concerns.

Therefore, we argue that perceived information control mediates the relationship between organizational ethical care and the accuracy and amount of information an individual is willing to share online. Specifically, we argue that consumers who perceive an organization to be high on ethical care, experience higher levels of perceived control over their personal information, because they perceive higher levels of relational forms of interaction (Gittell & Douglass, 2012). These higher levels of ethical care indicate a lower intent by the firm to engage in negative privacy behavior thus fostering perceptions of care and compassion (Gittell & Douglass, 2012). This perceived greater care and compassion by the consumer of the firm will result in a higher willingness to share more information, as well as more accurate information by consumers. Hypothesis 3a/b thus states:

**H3a/b:** The perceived level of information control mediates the relationship between Organizational Privacy Ethical Care and (a) the level of accurate information and (b) the amount of information a consumer is willing to provide to the organization.

## 2.4 | The mediating effect of trust

Trust is perhaps the most important influence on information disclosure (Aguirre et al., 2015; Jarvenpaa et al., 1999; Mothersbaugh et al., 2012; Wirtz an Lwin, 2009). It is defined as the confidence in the reliability of an exchange partner (Morgan & Hunt, 1994). This reliability and confidence are linked to consistency, competence, honesty, responsibility, and benevolence of the actor as perceived by the other party (Kang & Hustvedt, 2014). Trust involves a willingness and intention to act (Castaldo et al., 2010), and has been found to be a positive predictor for marketing outcomes such as loyalty, consumer retention, and purchase intention (Chaudhuri & Holbrook, 2001; Kang & Hustvedt, 2014).

Trust is a central concept of social exchange theory (Rolloff, 1981). Social exchange theory asserts that individuals weigh the costs and rewards in deciding whether to engage in social transactions. If the rewards are determined to outweigh the costs, then the individual is likely to enter into an exchange relationship. Trust is critical to this process because it is believed to reduce the perceived costs of such transactions. Indeed, several studies of interpersonal exchange situations have confirmed that trust is a precondition for self-disclosure because it reduces the perceived risks involved in revealing private information (e.g., Culnan & Armstrong, 1999; Jarvenpaa et al., 1999; Mothersbaugh et al., 2012; Wirtz an Lwin, 2009). Culnan and Armstrong (1999) show that the risks of disclosing personal information are weighed against the benefits when deciding to provide information to a website, and so trust is the key to disclosure in both interpersonal and online relationships. Hence, it is realistic to suggest that trust in a commercial website will influence the level of accurate information, and the amount of information a consumer is willing to provide to that site.

Trust has also extensively been identified as a mediator of firm-consumer relationships (Esch et al., 2006; Morgan & Hunt, 1994). In a recent study, results showed that trust plays a mediating role in consumer perceptions of a company's philanthropic motives in their CSR efforts (Alcañiz et al., 2010). Other research finds that consumer perceptions of firms engaging in PR activities deliberately designed to distract or deceive, negatively impact their trust in the firm (Chen & Chang, 2013). Furthermore, trust plays a mediating role in turning firm CSR action into consumer loyalty (Pivato et al., 2008). Jarvenpaa et al. (1999) found that trust increases confidence in a company, which lowers the perceived risk of electronic exchange with that company and, therefore, increases the likelihood of consumers engaging in electronic transactions. The role of trust in facilitating disclosure may be particularly important in online exchanges where computer-mediated communication replaces physical contact.

Hence, we posit that trust towards the organization mediates the relationship between organizational ethical care and the accuracy and amount of information an individual is willing to share online. Specifically, we argue that consumers who perceive an organization to be high on ethical care experience higher levels of trust towards that organization, because they perceive high levels of benefits and low levels of risk as a result of any transaction with that organization. This firm trust in turn may enhance their willingness to share higher amounts and more accurate data, because such positive ethical care perceptions instill in consumers a positive, more trusting state, which enhances their data sharing behavior. Indeed, extant literature agrees that trusting relationships, such as the ones characterized by ethically caring organizations, foster both trust towards the organization and data sharing behaviors by consumers (Culnan & Armstrong, 1999; Jarvenpaa et al., 1999; Mothersbaugh et al., 2012; Wirtz and Lwin, 2009). Hence, we argue that trust towards the organization is positively associated with the accuracy and amount of information an individual is willing to share online. Hypothesis 4a/b states:

**H4a/b:** The level of trust towards the organization mediates the relationship between Organizational Privacy Ethical Care and (a) the level of accurate information and (b) the amount of information a consumer is willing to provide to the organization.

## 2.5 | The moderating effect of interaction type

Extant literature notes that, particularly in an online context, but increasingly also in an offline context, much of a person's daily interactions with a business are either direct (via a human salesperson), or indirect (via self-service technologies). A study by Schoenbachler and Gordon (2002) argues that in indirect interactions, customers often cannot see the product/service or even the "salesperson." Thus, there is an inherent level of distrust that is not as prevalent in a traditional retail context. Similarly, Collier and Sherrell (2010) argue that since consumers cannot freely control indirect interactions as these are often standardized rather than allow for customized interaction (particularly in the context of information provision), consumers may

perceive lower levels of control. In addition, higher levels of direct interaction are perceived by consumers to signal lower intent by the firm to engage in negative privacy behavior (Gittell & Douglass, 2012), potentially increasing both perceived control and trust.

An ethic of care by organizations emphasizes affective relationships and a focus on people's individual needs, based on "a felt concern for the good of others and for the community with them" (Baier, 1987, p. 721). Organizational ethical care focuses on relational forms of interaction, fostering on care and compassion for all agents (Gittell & Douglass, 2012). By doing so, we argue, a firm is able to instill both higher levels of perceived control and perceived organizational trust. Both of these dimensions determine self-disclosure behaviors (Aguirre et al., 2015; Hong et al., 2019; Mothersbaugh et al., 2012; Wirtz and Lwin, 2009). Since indirect interactions with firms tend to instill higher levels of distrust and lower perceived consumer control, we argue that interaction type (i.e., personal vs. impersonal) has a moderating effect on the relationship between organizational privacy ethical care and perceived control, as well as organizational trust, such that the effect is stronger for personal interactions, and weaker for impersonal interactions. Hypothesis 5a/b thus reads:

**H5a/b:** Interaction type (personal vs. impersonal) moderates the relationship between Organizational Privacy Ethical Care and (a) perceived control and (b) the level of trust towards the organization, such that for more personal relationships, the effect becomes stronger.

## 3 | METHODS

### 3.1 | Scale development and validation

Due to the lack of an established measure of perceived organizational privacy ethical care, we firstly designed a survey to develop and validate a new scale. The initial item pool was created and adapted from existing literature (e.g., Carmeli et al., 2017; Lawrence & Maitlis, 2012; Nicholson & Kurucz, 2019), as well as new items that were developed specifically to capture perceived privacy ethical care based on pertinent studies. This initial item pool consisted of 12 items (see Web Appendix). These items were subjected to expert screening to establish face validity (Netemeyer et al., 2003). Four judges were used and all four found the items relevant to the focal construct (perceived organizational privacy ethical care). On a 7-point relevance scale, only two items received a score of 6. Thus, all items were retained and included in the survey.

The sample was recruited through an MTurk online panel in the United States. Using MTurk to recruit subjects for social-science research has been widely accepted (e.g., Goodman et al., 2013; Minton et al., 2013) and is comparable to traditional mail surveys (e.g., Buhrmester et al., 2016). In total, we collected 450 questionnaires, of which we retained 438 that were fully completed. Using established scale development procedures (Netemeyer et al., 2003), we split the sample into two and we used the first half to

develop the scale ( $N = 219$ ) and the remaining cases to validate it (DeVellis, 1991).

To eliminate differences in response patterns due to varying reference points the first section of the survey asked respondents to choose an online retailer, which they have previously been asked to share personal information with and refer to this firm throughout the questionnaire when answering questions (He et al., 2012; Li et al., 2008; Lin & Chang, 2003). We also asked respondents to indicate the number of years they have had experience with this retailer, to establish familiarity. The study measured all variables using 5-point Likert scales (from 1 = *strongly disagree* to 5 = *strongly agree*), except for the control variables.

The development sample consisted of 60.3% females, 29.7% of the sample graduated from high school, 52.1% had university education, while 18.2% held a postgraduate degree. The validation sample consisted of 62.6% females. 29.7% of the sample graduated from high school, 54.8% obtained a university undergraduate degree, while 15.5% received a master's degree or a PhD.  $\chi^2$  tests for gender and education showed no significant differences between the two samples ( $\chi^2(1) = 0.241, p > .05$  and  $\chi^2(3) = 0.680, p > 0.05$  respectively). Confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) was then performed and through an iterative process and the review of fit and modification indices, as well as parameter change estimates, an 8-item scale was developed. The scale was found to be reliable, valid, and unidimensional. We used identification with the company (adapted from Smidts et al., 2001;  $\alpha = 0.84$ ) to establish criterion validity. Perceived online ethical care was found to be positively related to identification ( $\beta = 0.55, p < 0.001$ ). Table 2 provides the items and relevant details of our scale. Items 1–5 capture the affective, emotional qualities of perceived privacy ethical care (e.g., Baier, 1987; Nicholson & Kurucz, 2019), that is, the genuine and active attention a company pays to and puts on the reduction of its consumers' information

privacy concerns. Items 6 and 7 focus on the firm's active narrative of care towards the consumer (e.g., Gilligan, 1982; Held, 2005); here we focus on the communication with the consumer to show active and genuine care for consumers' information privacy concerns. Lastly, item 8 reflects the long-term perspective of perceived privacy ethical care (e.g., Carmeli et al., 2017).

Our scale thus holistically reflects the emotional (affective), narrative, and long-term notions of our perceived ethical care construct, defined as: "the consumers' perceived level of genuine, enduring consideration and active attention a company pays to, and puts on the reduction of its customers' (online) information privacy concerns." The values for the eight items were summed and averaged to create our online privacy ethical care construct ( $\alpha = 0.94$ ). The following sections focus on the three studies we have conducted to test our hypotheses, including one survey and two experiments, adding to the literature through the use of two sources of information and the provision of causal effects.

## 4 | STUDY 1

To test our model, we used an online panel from the United States. To ensure the quality of the data, the consumer panel sample was bought from a large online data company (Qualtrics). We used Qualtrics because it allows for quotas to better represent the US population. These were introduced for gender and age based on the 2017 Census data. The United States was selected as our research context due to its high connectivity and internet usage. The United States has almost 90% internet penetration and a large online consumer base, reaching 312 million buyers in 2018 (Statistica, 2019). Despite the increased usage of the internet, three-quarters of the Internet-using American households had significant concerns about online privacy and security risks

**TABLE 2** Organizational privacy ethical care scale results (development and validation samples)

	Factor loadings		t values	
	D	V	D	V
1. This company cares about how its customers experience the disclosure of their personal information online	0.81	0.85	14.21	14.78
2. This company devotes every effort to help its customers feel more comfortable when sharing their personal information online	0.79	0.87	13.86	15.36
3. This company truly cares about how the customers feel about sharing their personal information online	0.79	0.80	13.82	13.63
4. This company listens carefully to its customers' concerns about their privacy online	0.62	0.70	9.98	11.39
5. This company cares about how customers' sharing of personal information online influences their well-being	0.85	0.83	15.21	14.42
6. This company shares information of what is done to protect the online personal information of its customers	0.84	0.81	*	*
7. This company communicate regularly with customers about privacy issues online	0.67	0.72	11.05	11.72
8. This company acts to ensure a positive effect of disclosing information on customers in the future	0.79	0.86	13.71	14.97
<i>Cronbach's alpha</i>	0.92	0.94		
<i>Construct reliability</i>	0.92	0.94		
<i>AVE</i>	0.60	0.65		

\*Parameters fixed to 1.00.

in 2017, and a third indicated that these concerns held them back from specific online activities (National Telecommunications and Information Administration, 2018).

For external validity purposes, we asked participants to choose an online retailer, of which they have previously been requested to share personal information and refer to this retailer throughout the questionnaire when answering questions (He et al., 2012; Li et al., 2008; Lin & Chang, 2003). We also asked respondents to indicate the number of years they have had experience with this retailer, to establish familiarity. The majority of respondents referred to commercial companies such as Amazon, eBay, Groupon, and Paypal (~51%), service companies including the Bank of America, Walmart, and AOL made up the second-largest group (~37%), and search companies such as Yahoo and Google made up the smallest group (~12%).

To enhance quality of the data, we used two techniques. First, we introduced a number of attention filters. Participants were removed from the sample if they failed to pass any of the filters in the survey. Attention filters instructed respondents to select a specific answer, thus any respondent who selected another answer to the one required was automatically eliminated from the sample. Second, we used completion time to further eliminate responses that might

be problematic. In particular, participants were removed from the sample if they failed to meet the minimum completion cutoff point set to 250 s, which resulted in the elimination of seven responses.

A total number of 413 fully completed questionnaires were collected. The majority of the sample were female (51.6%), and obtained an undergraduate degree (45.8%), while 42.6% of our sample held a high school degree. With regard to age, as we used quotas 20.6% of our sample were within the 60–69 age group, 18.9% in the 18–29 year age group, and 16.5%, 18.2%, and 19.1% in the 30–39, 40–49, and 50–59 age groups, respectively, 6.7% were 70 years old, or older.

## 4.1 | Measures

Table 3 provides the detailed items and reliabilities for all the constructs used in our study. For our dependent variables, participants were asked to indicate their level of agreement with specific items indicating their information sharing behavior with their chosen online retailer. Multiple-item scales were used to measure each of these constructs. All variables were measured using 5-point Likert scales (from 1 = *strongly disagree* to 5 = *strongly agree*), and for each relevant

**TABLE 3** Measures

Measure	Cronbach $\alpha$	Composite reliability
<b>Accuracy of information willing to share</b>		
I always give accurate information online when this company asks for my personal details	0.80	0.80
When it comes to this company, the things I reveal about myself online are accurate reflections of who I really am		
<b>Amount of Information willing to share</b>		
When this company asks for my personal information, I reveal a large amount online	0.75	0.75
When it comes to this company, I disclose quite extensive personal information online		
<b>Information control</b>		
I was informed about the personal information this website would collect about me	0.90	0.90
This website explained why personal information was being collected		
This website explained how personal information collected about me would be used		
This website gave me a clear choice before using personal information about me		
<b>Trust</b>		
I trust this company	0.94	0.94
The company is reliable		
The company is dependable		
<b>Regulation</b>		
The existing laws in my country are sufficient to protect consumers' online privacy	0.86	0.86
There are stringent international laws to protect information of individuals on the Internet		
The government is doing enough to ensure that consumers are protected against online privacy violations.		
<b>Organizational privacy ethical care</b>		
See Table 2 for items	0.95	0.95

construct, the values for the items were summed and averaged. The level of accuracy of the information provided to the focal company was measured using a two-item scale adapted from relevant literature ( $\alpha = 0.80$ ), including Phelps et al. (2000) and Du et al. (2012). The amount of information willing to provide was measured through adapting existing scales (Du et al., 2012; Phelps et al., 2000) using a two-item measure ( $\alpha = 0.75$ ).

Our mediating variables, perceived control and perceived trust were measured using adapted scales from Taylor et al. (2009) and Chaudhuri and Holbrook (2001), respectively. Perceived control over personal information captures the level of control a person perceives over their personal information, based on the awareness of collection, usage, and level of transparency the firm provides the consumer with (Aguirre et al., 2015; Hong et al., 2019; Martin, 2015). Perceived trust captures the consumer's ability to rely on the firm to perform its stated function (Chaudhuri & Holbrook, 2001; Morgan & Hunt, 1994). We used four items to measure our perceived control construct ( $\alpha = 0.90$ ). Firm trust was measured using a 3-item scale ( $\alpha = 0.95$ ). Finally, perceived privacy ethical care was measured through the 8-item measure developed above.

We included a number of control variables: age, gender, education level, and industry type. Age was captured through six pre-specified age groups: 18–29, 30–39, 40–49, 50–59, 60–69, and 70 and above years of age. Gender was captured as male and female and was coded as a dummy variable (0 = female and 1 = male). Education level was captured in High School, BA, MA, and PhD. Industry type was coded using nine categories (1 = internet, 2 = financial services, 3 = retail, 4 = media/entertainment, 5 = telecoms, 6 = software/hardware, 7 = reward services, 8 = airlines, 9 = health services). Table 4 presents the means, standard deviations, and correlations between each of the constructs used in the study. Previous research has shown that these may have an impact on consumer data sharing intentions (Sheehan, 2002; Sheehan & Hoy, 2000).

In line with existing literature (e.g., MacKenzie & Podsakoff, 2012), we used procedural and statistical methods to limit and control for potential common method bias. We provided clear instructions to respondents that there are no wrong or right answers and reassured them of anonymity. In addition, the order of the

questions was randomized to avoid respondents being able to identify possible links between the constructs. As a statistical remedy, we first used Harman's single factor test, which showed that a single factor explains almost 49% of the variance. However, this test is insensitive (Chang et al., 2010), and researchers are encouraged to use this only as their last resort (Malhotra et al., 2017). In addition, in our case, the obtained percentage is rather difficult to interpret. Therefore, we used a more sensitive test and employed the marker variable technique (Lindell & Whitney, 2001), using a theoretically unrelated variable (in our case: the management of money). We interpreted the smallest positive correlation as a proxy for common method variance ( $r_s = 0.01$ ), in line with established procedures (Lindell & Whitney, 2001). Following the calculation of a method variance-adjusted correlation matrix, we found that all coefficients remained significant after the adjustment (adjusted correlations varied from 0.12–0.64, all significant at  $p < 0.05$ ). Consequently, our results cannot be accounted for by common method variance.

## 4.2 | Results

We used Structural Equation Modeling (SEM) in AMOS version 19 to analyse our data. We used SEM for testing our research model, since it permits the assessment of the causal positioning of a number of variables simultaneously, allowing for measurement errors (Kline, 2005). Consistent with existing literature (e.g., Anderson & Gerbing, 1988), we first tested the measurement model, followed by the structural model. CFA was used in both occasions.

The measurement model consisted of five latent variables along with their indicators. CFA was performed using maximum likelihood estimation. Based on existing recommended thresholds (e.g., Hu & Bentler, 1999) the model performed well ( $\chi^2(143) = 430.311$ , Comparative Fit Index [CFI] = 0.96, Normed Fit Index [NFI] = 0.94, Root Mean Square Error of Approximation [RMSEA] = 0.07). Internal consistency and composite reliabilities, as well as AVEs, were computed and found to be within acceptable levels (see Table 3). Discriminant validity was also supported based on Fornell and Larcker (1981). As this test is limited in sensitivity regarding showing a lack of

	1	2	3	4	5
1. Organizational privacy ethical care	<b>0.71</b>	0.403	0.361	0.186	0.110
2. Perceived information control	0.635**	<b>0.71</b>	0.178	0.203	0.086
3. Trust towards the focal firm	0.601**	0.424**	<b>0.83</b>	0.228	0.038
4. The accuracy of information willing to share	0.431**	0.450**	0.477**	<b>0.66</b>	0.127
5. The amount of information willing to share	0.332**	0.294**	0.196**	0.356**	<b>0.60</b>
M	3.54	3.68	3.87	4.00	3.18
SD	0.80	0.83	0.82	0.84	0.99

**TABLE 4** Means, standard deviations, and correlations among constructs

Note: Correlations among constructs are below the diagonal, squared multiple correlations are above the diagonal and AVEs are on the main diagonal (in bold).

\*\*Significant at  $p < 0.01$ .

discriminant validity (Henseler et al., 2015), we also performed a comparison of the heterotrait–heteromethod correlations and the monotrait–heteromethod correlations (HTMT criterion). The results also support discriminant validity, with correlations ranging from 0.23 to 0.68, which are well below the 0.85 threshold (Henseler et al., 2015).

Following the testing of the measurement model, the next step involved the estimation of the structural model. Gender, age, education, and the industry the organizations belonged to, were inserted as control variables. The model fit was again within acceptable levels ( $\chi^2(208) = 526.431$ , CFI = 0.95, NFI = 0.92, RMSEA = 0.06).

First, we examined the hypothesized relationships. In line with H1 and H2, perceived privacy ethical care was found to positively affect perceived information control ( $\beta = 0.67$ ,  $p < 0.01$ ) and trust towards the focal firm ( $\beta = 0.65$ ,  $p < 0.01$ ). To test for mediating effects, we used the bootstrapping bias-corrected confidence interval procedure to our mediation model (e.g., Kumar Roy et al., 2014; Zhao et al., 2010). A new syntax was created to estimate the specific indirect effects for all mediators in our model as AMOS by default produces only the total indirect effects. Results indicate that consistent with our hypothesis H3a, perceived information control was found to mediate the relationship between ethical care and the accuracy of information consumers ( $\beta = 0.11$ ,  $p < 0.05$ ) but not the relationship with the amount of information consumers are willing to share ( $\beta = 0.07$ ,  $p > 0.05$ ), thus rejecting H3b.

Similarly, with regard to trust towards the focal firm, results suggest that trust mediates the relationship between privacy ethical care and willingness to share accurate information ( $\beta = 0.22$ ,  $p < 0.01$ ), but not the relationship with the amount of information consumers are willing to share ( $\beta = 0.02$ ,  $p > 0.05$ ), thus confirming H4a and rejecting H4b. We checked the non-hypothesized direct effects between our independent measure and our two dependent measures. The results showed a significant direct effect between perceived privacy ethical care and the amount of information consumers are willing to share ( $\beta = 0.28$ ,  $p < 0.01$ ). There was, however, no significant direct effect between perceived privacy ethical care and the accuracy of information consumers are willing to share ( $\beta = 0.11$ ,  $p > 0.05$ ). Thus, the results indicate full mediation of perceived ethical care via perceived information control and trust on the accuracy of information consumers are willing to provide. When it comes to the amount of information consumers are willing to share, only a direct effect of the perceived ethical care is supported.

Concerning the control variables, which we included on our model: men are significantly less willing to share large amounts of information ( $\beta = -0.11$ ,  $p < 0.05$ ), but no effect was found on the willingness to share accurate information ( $\beta = 0.02$ ,  $p > 0.05$ ). Age positively affects the willingness to share accurate information ( $\beta = 0.10$ ,  $p < 0.05$ ), but not the amount of information consumers are willing to share ( $\beta = -0.01$ ,  $p > 0.05$ ). Education seems to affect both accuracy ( $\beta = 0.09$ ,  $p < 0.05$ ) or amount of data ( $\beta = 0.11$ ,  $p < 0.05$ ). Finally, industry does not seem to affect either the provision of accurate information ( $\beta = 0.02$ ,  $p > 0.05$ ) or the amount of information provided ( $\beta = 0.002$ ,  $p > 0.05$ ). We performed an ad hoc analysis to

examine the impact of organization size on the outcome variables. Due to the lack of comparable data regarding the size of all companies in our sample, we used the Forbes 2000 (2020) list and the market value as a proxy to operationalize this variable. The list contained most of the companies identified by the respondents. In 87 cases reference was made to companies for which market size data were not available. We used SPSS as we could not include this variable in SEM due to missing data. The results show a significant effect of organization size on the amount of information shared ( $\beta = -0.14$ ,  $p < 0.05$ ), but not on accuracy ( $\beta = -0.09$ ,  $p > 0.05$ ). Overall, the model explains 18.1% of the variance of the amount of information consumers are willing to share, and 37.6% of the willingness to share accurate information, thus providing adequate explanation of the drivers of sharing behavior.

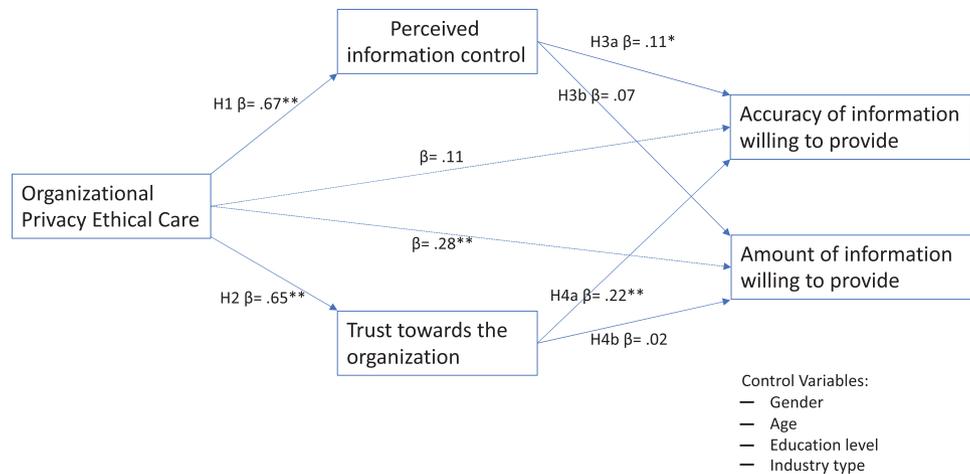
Lastly, to test the explanatory power of our new antecedent “perceived privacy ethical care,” we compared two alternative models: one that includes ethical care as an antecedent (Model A), as tested before, and one that includes “regulation” as an antecedent (Model B). Regulation refers to consumers' perceptions of regulatory policy of privacy regulation based on a 3-item scale by Lwin et al. (2007) ( $\alpha = 0.86$ ; see Table 3). Model A outperformed Model B in fit (A:  $\chi^2/df = 2.531$ ; B:  $\chi^2/df = 3.963$ ). Explanatory power of Model A is also improved (amount of information willing to share: 18.1% in Model A vs. 14.3% in Model B; accuracy of information willing to share: 37.6% in Model A vs. 31.4% in Model B). Thus, Model A presented in this study improves the explanatory power of the perceived privacy ethical care toward consumer information sharing. Figure 1 and Table 5 summarize our hypothesized model and the results.

## 5 | STUDY 2

Study 2 tests the main effect of organizational privacy ethical care on the amount and the accuracy of information consumers are willing to share. We used an experimental design to establish causality between IV and DVs (contrary to Study 1 where we present correlational data). Study 2 involved the manipulation of organizational privacy ethical care in a two-group between-subjects design. One hundred and forty-two US prolific users participated in the study (38% males, 59% females, and 3% other; 57% 18–29 years old, 23% 30–39 years old, 10% 40–49 years old, 7% 50–59 years old, and 3% 60–69 years old). Seventy-four participants were exposed to the organizational privacy ethical care and 68 to the nonorganizational privacy ethical care condition.

### 5.1 | Procedure

As per our pre-test (see Web Appendix), participants read that they would be exposed to a scenario, after which they would be asked questions about this. Participants were randomly assigned to either the treatment (organizational privacy ethical care) or control (no



**FIGURE 1** Theoretical model and results linking organizational privacy ethical care to consumer sharing behavior via perceived information control and trust towards the organization. Notes: \*Significant at  $p < 0.05$ ; \*\*Significant at  $p < 0.01$ ; Dotted lines depict nonhypothesized paths

**TABLE 5** Results of our hypotheses testing Study 1

Hypothesized paths	Standardized path coefficients	95% CI lower and upper	Hypotheses
<b>Direct effects</b>			
Ethical Care → Accuracy of information willing to share	0.11	-0.074; 0.284	Not significant
Ethical Care → Amount of information willing to share	0.28**	0.094; 0.459	Significant
Ethical Care → Perceived Information Control	0.67**	0.590; 0.726	H1 accepted
Ethical Care → Trust towards the focal firm	0.65**	0.562; 0.718	H2 accepted
<b>Indirect effects</b>			
Ethical Care mediated through perceived information control			
Ethical Care → Accuracy of information willing to share	0.11*	0.021; 0.226	H3a accepted
Ethical Care → Amount of information willing to share	0.07	0.006; 0.152	H3b rejected
Ethical Care mediated through trust			
Ethical Care → Accuracy of information willing to share	0.22**	0.127; 0.313	H4a accepted
Ethical Care → Amount of information willing to share	0.02	-0.068; 0.085	H4b rejected
<b>Control variables</b>			
Gender → Accuracy of information willing to share	0.02	-0.052; 0.101	
Gender → Amount of information willing to share	-0.106*	-0.199; -0.019	
Age → Accuracy of information willing to share	0.01**	0.021; 0.167	
Age → Amount of information willing to share	-0.01	-0.100; 0.069	
Education → Accuracy of information willing to share	0.09*	0.017; 0.159	
Education → Amount of information willing to share	0.11*	0.034; 0.181	
Industry Type → Accuracy of information willing to share	0.00	-0.072; 0.095	
Industry Type → Amount of information willing to share	0.02	-0.076; 0.088	

Abbreviation: CI, confidence interval.

\*Significant at  $p < 0.05$ .

\*\*Significant at  $p < 0.01$

organizational privacy ethical care) scenario (see the Web-Appendix for scenario details, p. 2). In addition, we measured our IV and DVs (see the Web-Appendix for details, p. 3).

## 5.2 | Results

An analysis of the manipulation check revealed a significant difference in the perceived ethical care between the two groups ( $F(1, 140) = 37.430, p < 0.01, M_{EC} = 4.84, SD_{EC} = 1.152; M_{NEC} = 3.53, SD_{NEC} = 1.398$ ). We then checked for the direct effect of organizational privacy ethical care on the amount and the accuracy of the data consumer are willing to provide to the company. A preliminary analysis illustrated a significant effect of organizational privacy ethical care on both the amount ( $\beta = 0.60, p < 0.01$ ) and the accuracy ( $\beta = 0.55, p < 0.01$ ) of information consumers are willing to share. We then examined the difference in the amount and accuracy of the information consumers are willing to share between the two groups (those in treatment condition vs. those in the control condition). A one-way analysis of variance with the manipulated organizational privacy ethical care as the independent variable and the amount and the accuracy of information willing to share as the dependent variables showed a significant impact of the manipulated factor in both the amount ( $F(1, 140) = 9.706, p < 0.01$ ) and the accuracy of the data consumers are willing to provide ( $F(1, 140) = 4.208, p < 0.05$ ). These results lend support to the argument that consumers are more willing to share accurate and more information when they perceive higher levels of organizational ethical care. These results provide strong support for the role of organizational privacy ethical care in determining online information-sharing behavior.

## 6 | STUDY 3

Study 3 builds on Study 2 in three ways. In addition to the direct effects of organizational privacy ethical care on the amount and the accuracy of the information consumers are willing to share, this study investigates the impact of the mediators addressed in the survey (Study 1), namely perceived information control and organizational trust. In this way, we aim to triangulate our previous results and provide causal effects of the mediators. Second, we investigate the impact of interaction type as a potential moderator. This would allow us to provide some preliminary evidence regarding boundary conditions that could affect the relationships between our focal construct and the mediators. Finally, Study 3 focuses on a real brand.

### 6.1 | Procedure

We pretested the manipulation of interaction type on a sample of 100 US prolific users. The results confirmed the successful manipulation of our moderator (see Web Appendix). Two hundred and one prolific users, all US citizens, participated in Study 3 (40% males, 59%

females, 1% other; 55% 18–29 years old, 25% 30–39 years old, 10% 40–49 years old, 5% 50–59 years old, 4% 60–69 years old, and 1% 70 and above). We used a  $2 \times 2$  between-subjects experimental design, where we manipulated organizational privacy ethical care (as per Study 2 and the pre-test) and interaction type (personal vs. impersonal). For a detailed overview of the procedure and measures used, please refer to the Web-Appendix (p. 4).

### 6.2 | Results

With regard to the manipulation checks, we found a significant difference between the two organizational privacy ethical care conditions ( $F(1, 199) = 13.766, p < 0.01, M_{EC} = 4.42, SD_{EC} = 1.121; M_{NEC} = 3.79, SD_{NEC} = 1.180$ ). Interaction type was also significantly different between the two conditions ( $F(1, 199) = 14.777, p < 0.01, M_{Per} = 3.33, SD_{Per} = 1.082, M_{Imp} = 2.74, SD_{Imp} = 1.093$ ). The results did not support a direct effect of organizational privacy ethical care on either the accuracy (direct effect = 0.14 confidence interval [CI] =  $-0.052$  to  $0.333$ ) or the amount (direct effect =  $-0.20$  CI =  $-0.413$  to  $0.022$ ) of information consumers are willing to share.

To test the indirect effects of organizational privacy ethical care on the amount and the accuracy of information consumers are willing to share via organizational trust and perceived information control, as well as the moderating effect of interaction type, we ran two moderated mediation models (one for each outcome) using Model 7 of Hayes' PROCESS macro for SPSS (Hayes, 2013), with bias-corrected bootstrap 95% CI based on 5000 bootstrap samples. Our manipulated organizational privacy ethical care factor was inserted as the IV (1 = Control, 2 = Ethical Care), perceived information control and organization trust as the mediators, interaction type as the moderator (1 = personal, 2 = impersonal), and amount and accuracy of the information willing to share as our DVs. Finally, we included familiarity with the company and perceptions of privacy consciousness as covariates as we used a real brand, and these could have been confounding factors.

Our results support a significant impact of the manipulated organizational privacy ethical care factor on control ( $\beta = 0.30, p < 0.01$ ). The impact of ethical care on trust is found to be marginally significant ( $\beta = 0.15, p = 0.05$ ). These results corroborate Study 1 findings. Also, we found that the relationship between organizational privacy ethical care and the amount of information consumers are willing to share is mediated via control in the case of personal interaction (indirect effect = 0.06, CI = 0.000–0.15), providing partial support to Study 1 results. Study 3 findings fail to support a mediating effect in the same relationship via organizational trust. This might be due to the marginal significance of organizational privacy ethical care on perceived trust. Regarding the accuracy of the information consumer are willing to share, we found a significant mediation in the relationship between the manipulated organizational privacy ethical care measure and the accuracy of data consumers are willing to share, via perceived information control (indirect effect (personal interaction) = 0.10, CI = 0.07–0.20),

indirect effect (impersonal interaction) = 0.13, CI = 0.03–0.26). The mediating effect of organizational trust is not supported in the relationship between organizational privacy ethical care and willingness to provide accurate information. Again, this could be due to the only marginal significance of organizational privacy ethical care on perceived trust. In addition, we found significant effects of organizational trust and perceived information control on both accuracy ( $\beta = 0.43$ ,  $p < 0.01$  for perceived information control and  $\beta = 0.28$ ,  $p < 0.01$  for organizational trust) and amount of information consumers are willing to share ( $\beta = 0.20$ ,  $p < 0.05$  for perceived information control and  $\beta = 0.24$ ,  $p < 0.05$  for organizational trust). When examining the indices of moderated mediation, there is no support for the moderating effect of interaction type on either the relationship between organizational privacy ethical care and organizational trust and organizational privacy ethical care and perceived information control, thus rejecting H5a/b (index mod med =  $-0.02$  CI =  $-0.108$  to  $0.058$  for organizational trust and index mod med =  $0.03$  CI =  $-0.100$  to  $0.199$  for perceived information control).

## 7 | DISCUSSION

Firms collect and use consumer data to improve their strategic decisions. Prior studies show that antecedents of consumer privacy concerns (such as perceived lack of information control and a lack of firm trust), impact on consumers' willingness to share their personal information. By controlling and manipulating antecedents of consumer privacy concerns, organizations are able to reduce consumer privacy concern and increase consumer data sharing (e.g., Aguirre et al., 2015; Foxman & Kilcoyne, 1993; Hong et al., 2019; Martin & Murphy, 2017; Nill & Aalberts, 2014). Yet, despite these attempts to reduce privacy concerns and increase consumer information sharing, and trying to achieve mutual benefits for both the organization and customers, extant research finds that consumers continue to engage in subversion behaviors, such as withholding information or providing false information to firms collecting data to protect their privacy (e.g., Brandimarte et al., 2012; Martin & Murphy, 2017; Norberg & Horne, 2014; Plangger & Montecchi, 2020; Plangger & Watson, 2015; Xu et al., 2012). In our study, we theorize and find that an organizational privacy ethical care perspective (an organizational driver which goes beyond established justice-based perspectives or moral reasoning) leads to an improvement in consumer information sharing. Across three studies, we are able to provide support for the theory that perceived organizational privacy ethical care is a positive driver of the amount of information consumers are willing to share with firms. We also provide correlational and partial causal support for the theory that perceived organizational privacy ethical care, mediated through perceived information control and trust towards the organization, has a significant positive effect on the accuracy of information consumers are willing to share with firms.

## 7.1 | Theoretical implications

Understanding how organizational privacy ethical care affects consumer privacy concerns and consumer data sharing behavior is important, particularly in light of persisting consumer privacy concerns, as it allows for a way in which to reduce these concerns and increase consumers' willingness to share more of their personal data, as well as increase consumers' willingness to provide accurate data to firms. Hence, we make several important contributions to the literature.

First, we contribute to the literature on consumer privacy. Previous literature on consumer privacy has focused mainly on how privacy-enhancing factors such as consumer control over the information shared (Foxman & Kilcoyne, 1993; Nill & Aalberts, 2014), and trust towards the firm collecting the data (Aguirre et al., 2015; Martin & Murphy, 2017), can reduce consumer privacy fears and thus increase consumer information sharing. While providing valuable insights, these studies do not look at organizational drivers beyond justice-based perspectives, or rational motives for moral reasoning to encourage consumer information sharing. By adding a new antecedent, that is, an organization privacy ethical care perspective, we show a significant positive effect on consumer information sharing, and the accuracy of the information they are willing to share, beyond what can be done with existing measures. We compare our model to one driven by a justice-based antecedent and show that our model, driven by ethical care, outperforms the justice-based one. In addition, we conduct two experimental studies to provide clear support for the causal effect of organizational privacy ethical care on consumers' willingness to share accurate information and the amount of information consumers are willing to share. Results from these two studies support our initial correlational findings. Hence, we advance our understanding of consumer privacy concerns by showing that perceived organizations ethical care plays an important role in the consumer privacy literature.

Second, we contribute to the literature on consumer subversion. This literature has primarily looked at identifying reasons for why consumers engage in subversion behavior with regard to information sharing and how this is manifested (Glenn & Monteith, 2014; Goldfarb & Tucker, 2012; Norberg & Horne, 2014; Plangger & Montecchi, 2020; Plangger & Watson, 2015; White et al., 2008; Xu et al., 2012). Across three studies, we extend knowledge by providing evidence that organizational privacy ethical care, as mutually beneficial strategy or mechanism, increases consumer willingness to share information and the accuracy of information being shared. We thus provide support that organizational privacy ethical care can counteract consumers' reluctance to engage in information sharing with firms and at the same time may decrease consumer privacy concerns.

Third, our study contributes to the literature on organizational ethical care (e.g., Carmeli et al., 2017; Lawrence & Maitlis, 2012) by theorizing and showing that organizational privacy ethical care can positively impact consumer data sharing behavior, specifically the amount and the accuracy of information consumer are willing to share with organizations. Extant organizational research (e.g., Atkins & Parker, 2012; Bammens, 2016; Lilius et al., 2012; Worline &

Dutton, 2017) has, thus far, only focused the impact of organizational care on employee commitment (Lilius et al., 2012), work-based anxiety (Kahn, 2001), satisfaction, and employee willingness to participate in organizational innovations (Carmeli et al., 2017; Lawrence & Maitlis, 2012). We are the first to successfully expand the applicability of organizational ethical care from organizational research to a consumer context by relating it to the consumer privacy literature. We extend existing knowledge of organizational ethical care and show that it can also affect consumer data sharing. This is important for firms, if they want to refine firm strategy and increase firm effectiveness. Adding to this contribution, we also develop and validate an eight-item measurement scale of perceived organizational ethical care, further contributing to the literature on organizational ethical care. Although previous research has developed a scale in organizational research (e.g., Carmeli et al., 2017) their work focuses on firm–employee interaction only and thus falls short in applicability in the consumer behavior literature. Our scale allows application of perceived privacy ethical care in the context of online consumer privacy. This is important as such a measurement tool has hitherto been lacking in the consumer literature.

## 7.2 | Managerial implications

Our findings indicate that perceived organizational privacy ethical care leads to higher levels of accurate information sharing, and higher levels of information sharing in general. Currently however, most organizations only adhere to justice-based drivers, or moral reasoning when considering data collection and privacy efforts (Hong et al., 2019; Lwin et al., 2007), which leads to ongoing consumer privacy fears (Culnan & Bies, 2003; Etzioni, 2019; Limbu et al., 2012). To correct this problem firms must become more aware of the shortcomings of their current information collection and privacy policy and adapt a more care-based approach since this increases consumers' willingness of information sharing, and reduce consumer subversion behavior. Internally, this would involve changing their policy and process of consumer information collection and privacy, to ones that show genuine consideration for consumers' privacy and pay active attention on the reduction of customers' information collection concerns. Firms must generate and foster an internal work philosophy that supports principles centered on fulfilling consumers' privacy needs, promoting consumers' best privacy interests, and valuing consumers' privacy concerns, thus reducing their perceived information privacy threats.

Externally, this organizational privacy ethic of care approach to consumer information collection should be actively communicated to consumers, as it is their perceptions of a firm's privacy ethic of care that drives their willingness to share (accurate) information. The organization's strategic decisions and the consequential privacy ethic of care behavior can be communicated to consumers via personal email communication, information on the organizations' websites, on official social media pages, advertising, as well as through press releases. By doing so firms increase the reliability and effectiveness of their

databases, which is of strategic importance. The more information a firm can gather on its customers, the more accurately they can target these (e.g., Amazon and Facebook) (King & Jessen, 2010; King & Raja, 2012). Similarly, the more accurate the data used to analyze consumer behavior, the less resources are wasted on targeting consumers with inaccurate marketing, which may lead to increased privacy concerns, due to a perceived lack of control over personal information (Xu et al., 2012). Thus, by engaging in an ethic of care towards consumer privacy, firms can get valuable information needed to target their consumers, and reduce inaccurate relationship marketing or target marketing communications, leading to more mutually beneficial and lasting buyer–seller relationships (King & Raja, 2012), thus increasing firm profitability without raising consumer privacy concerns.

## 7.3 | Limitations and directions for future research

As with all empirical work our study is subject to a number of limitations. First, we tested our ideas on a sample of US consumers. Although an appropriate sample for this study, to be able to generalize our findings to other geographic areas with a different cultural makeup, additional research is required. Future research may want to explore the differences between culturally distant countries, as culture might be a significant factor that affects consumers' sharing behavior.

Second, drawing on findings of previous research (e.g., Carmeli et al., 2017; Houghton et al., 2015; Lawrence & Maitlis, 2012), we develop and validate a measurement scale that allows us to measure perceived organizational privacy ethical care. We do not, however, consider the sources of consumers' perceptions of ethical care (e.g., direct communication from the company, relationship building efforts, or privacy related information on the company's website). These could provide additional explanations with regard to organizational ethical care efforts and their impact on consumers' sharing behavior. Thus, future research should explore the proposed sources of the ethical care perceptions to better understand how perceptions of ethical care can be managed to achieve better targeting and design more appropriate marketing programs. Whilst we successfully manipulate organizational privacy ethical care in Study 2, future efforts could explore other avenues of doing so.

Third, we define organizational privacy ethical care as a universal construct that drives both offline and online consumer behavior. In our studies, however, we only test our theory regarding organizational privacy ethical care as driver of consumer data sharing behavior in an online context. We do not predict a difference in consumer behavior between online and offline data sharing, since organizational privacy ethical care is built and maintained in all aspects of the firm, but future research may wish to validate this assumption in an offline context.

Fourth, we included and tested a boundary condition in Study 3. We proposed that the interaction type (i.e., personal vs. impersonal) has a moderating effect on the relationship between organizational

privacy ethical care and perceived control, as well as trust towards the organization. Whilst the manipulation is successful, our results do not confirm the moderation effect. This could be due to consumers being ever more accepting of self-service technology, or interaction type not being perceived as playing a large role in information sharing decisions. Future research may want to test our theory by manipulating interaction type differently or may wish to include a different boundary condition in our model.

Fifth, though we include industry type as a control measure in an effort to provide company-level factors to help provide strong evidence in the desired effect and make our conclusions more convincing, we were unable to operationalize other measures such as the number of substitutions and the dependence on the service/product for example. An experimental design, which allows for the number of substitutions to be manipulated may be a solution. Alternatively, a self-reported measure recording perceived number of substitutions and dependence on the service/product would be helpful in future.

Finally, more work is needed to substantiate the importance of an organizational ethic of care behavior to encourage better firm–consumer relationships. We are the first to apply the concept of organizational ethical care to a firm–consumer setting. Prior research has only focused on firm–employee relationships (Carmeli et al., 2017; Lawrence & Maitlis, 2012). Whilst our results find a strong effect of perceived ethical care behavior on consumer personal information sharing, an ethic of care by organizations may also impact on consumer loyalty behavior and thus consumer lifetime value. Thus, future research might want to expand the context of an ethic of care in a consumer setting to other areas beyond consumer privacy.

## 8 | CONCLUSIONS

In sum, our work provides theoretical and empirical support for the notion that perceived privacy ethical care behavior of firms significantly impacts the amount and the accuracy of information consumers are willing to share with firms. We also provide correlational and partial causal support that this relationship is mediated through perceived information control and trust towards the organization. Since personal consumer information is vital for firm performance (Gabisch & Milne, 2014), yet its acquisition is largely dependent on the consumer's willingness to volunteer their personal information (Plangger & Montecchi, 2020; Rainie & Duggan, 2016), understanding the impact of organizational privacy ethical care on consumer privacy concerns is of strategic importance for firms. Building a perceived ethic of care, which goes beyond standard moral ethics, enhances the amount of information consumers are willing to share with a company, and through increased control and trust towards the organization affects the accuracy of information consumers are willing to provide; as a result, reduces consumer subversion behavior and increases the successful identification, profiling and targeting of consumers.

## DATA AVAILABILITY STATEMENT

The data that support the findings of this study are available from the corresponding author upon reasonable request.

## ORCID

Frauke Mattison Thompson  <https://orcid.org/0000-0001-7427-0300>

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### SUPPORTING INFORMATION

Additional Supporting Information may be found online in the supporting information tab for this article.

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