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Office for Harmonization in the Internal Market (OHIM), launched, by means of the European Observatory on Infringements of Intellectual Property Rights, the second comprehensive study on intellectual property in the European Union, focusing, this time, on the perception of intellectual property by the citizens of the European Union (EU).

The report, entitled "European citizens and intellectual property: perception, awareness and behavior" found that while 86% of EU citizens agree that protecting intellectual property (IP) is important, only 11% acknowledged that consumers benefit from IP.

Methodology report involved three steps: (1) a review of 50 studies on the perception of IP, (2) a qualitative investigation that has trained a total of 250 European citizens in nine countries in 100 hours of conversations and debates, and (3) a quantitative study conducted in 28 EU countries from 21 to 27 May 2013.

Study results show that EU citizens are aware that IP is essential for economic growth and the majority of those surveyed strongly condemned the counterfeiting and IP infringement. However, on dividing the respondents by age, the situation is different from one category to another. Thus, 26% of citizens between 15 and 24 years old admitted that they have downloaded illegal content over the last 12 months, while among persons between 35 to 44 years of age only 9 percent have confirmed such actions. The same study further shows that men often seem to violate IP rights by purchasing counterfeit products or by illegal access to IP right-protected content.

Age is presented also to be the determining factor when examining respondents' tolerance for counterfeiting. 34% of Europeans between 15 and 24 years of age think that purchasing counterfeits is acceptable when the price for the original product is too high.

However, it should be mentioned the fact that according to this study, the number of Europeans who believe it is acceptable to purchase counterfeit products significantly decreased compared with 2011, when the European Commission conducted the Eurobarometer "Internal Market: Awareness, Perception and Impact". Thus, according to current report, the absolute majority of the respondents believe that there is no condition that would justify the purchase of counterfeit goods, a situation different from that at the time of conduct of the 2011 Eurobarometer.

Ambiguous is also the perception of Europeans towards the benefits the IP protection produces, most of them believing that IP is the primary advantage of the business environment. Thus, survey data show that only 11% of respondents declared the "consumer" as the principal beneficiary of IP, and about 20% have mentioned that from IP benefit primarily the SMEs. According to OHIM President, António Campinos, that perception can be explained partly by the lack of understanding of PI values and the fact that a large majority of Europeans consider IP protection as an advantage rather of the business and artistic elites than a benefit of the ordinary consumer and citizen.

"European citizens do not feel that it is their responsibility to protect IP, especially when not all share the same values, when enforcement of rules or their adaption to people's expectations is not ensured". However, Mr. Campinos declared his confidence that study results will support collective efforts in the fight against intellectual property infringements, in which everyone has a role to play.

The current study has also taken in the viewfinder the existence of a gap between the level of understanding of IP declared by respondents and the objective understanding of the subject matter at issue. 73% of EU citizens surveyed declared they have a good understanding of the term "intellectual property", contrary to these statements, the study results showed that only 13% of respondents have really a good knowledge of the matter, while the vast majority displayed moderate (51%) and poor (37%) knowledge.
The report is accessible at the following address:
http://oami.europa.eu/ows/rw/pages/OBS/perception_awareness_behavior.en.do [1]

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