

## Features of Consumer Behavior on the Internet

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**Abstract:** The objective of this article is to uncover the characteristics that influence customer behavior in the virtual environment, from the selection process through the purchase decision. The article's scientific uniqueness comes in identifying the characteristics of consumers' economic behavior in a virtual world in relation to motivational, value, social, and communication variables. Consumer behavior is changing on the Internet, and its multifunctionality is manifesting itself, including the expansion of value and institutional roles. The socializing of the customer and the increase in the value function are strengthened in the virtual realm. Consumer socialization occurs through interpersonal communications, in which the role of content expands and virtual communities emerge, which impact the consumer's choice and economic behavior.

**Keywords:** consumer behavior, Internet, e-commerce, social networks.

Over the past two decades, consumers have increasingly used the Internet as a means to inform about products or services, or to obtain other information. The development of information and communication technologies in recent years has also created an environment that, on the one hand, allows a company to promote, sell and distribute its products or services, and at the same time has given consumers (individuals or legal entities) the opportunity to buy goods or services that they need.

Consumer behavior has the following characteristics:

- refers to both individuals and groups or organizations;
- always contains the concept of satisfying a certain need or desire, personal or organization;
- always involves a certain process that leads to a solution.

A group of Romanian researchers conducted a survey of consumers on the Internet, which gave the following results [12]:

- 64% of respondents have been Internet users for more than 9 years;
- 96% of Internet users use the online environment daily;
- the main devices for connecting to the Internet are smartphones and laptops;
- the main web pages visited by Internet users: web mail and social networking sites;
- the majority of respondents (53%) would start their own online business.

The main areas of online business will be: an online clothing store; online shoe store; Interior Design; online flower shop; career guidance, cosmetics and related accessories, IT and electronics online store; management and marketing consulting; online bookstore;

- the main stages of the decision-making process, which are considered the most important by respondents in relation to the Internet, are: information search and evaluation of options;
- 65% of respondents bought a product / service through an Internet source;
- 70% of respondents buy from Internet sources several times a year;
- preferred method of payment: payment on delivery;
- respondents spend from 50 to 100 lei within 3 months on purchases from online sources (1 US dollar = 4.2 lei, the minimum wage in Bucharest is 1450 lei);
- the main sources of information for the decision-making process are: the company's website and online mailing list.

The above results show the main features of Internet consumers, their consumer preferences for organizing online consumption.

Consumer behavior in a virtual environment is characterized by E.Y. Deputatov [4], A.A. Bobrov [2], S.M. Ospanova [7], O.V. Vasilenko [3], P.P. Tompscha [10], V.O. Pokul [8], M.V. Starovoit [9], Aleshina I.V. [1], Zelinsky S.A. [5], Churaeva N.S. [11] and many foreign authors, among which F. Kotler [6], N.F. Isa, N.A.M. Saleh, A.A. Azis [13].

As E.Y. Deputatova, "The modern consumer demonstrates a high level of exactingness, competence and exactingness... The modern buyer is also subject to such a factor as conspicuous consumption" [4, p. 54]. It highlights the following three features of the modern Internet consumer:

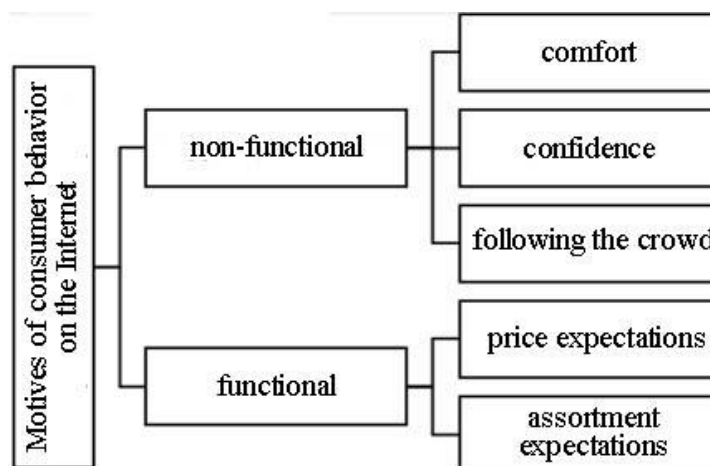
- "consumer who is always in touch" ("connected consumer") - an Internet user connected via a desktop computer, laptop or mobile device, can be in a virtual store at any time of the day, having both seller information and customer reviews. which allows him to make a purchasing decision;
- many large stores use the Internet to organize their showcase, which allows the buyer to initially study the quality and range of goods on the Internet, and then look in a real store, especially for bulky and expensive durable goods, such as furniture and household appliances; the purchase decision is made after comparison and often in favor of an online purchase. since online goods are usually cheaper than in a real store;
- a huge number of goods in a real store makes it difficult for a buyer to choose, wastes his time, on the Internet he can get acquainted with the goods, compare brands, study characteristics at any time, compare goods from different stores; visiting shopping centers is often considered as leisure, because there you can not only choose and buy goods, but also spend time in a cafe, restaurant, get acquainted with recipes, etc. [4].

The portrait of the consumer on the Internet is complemented by A.A. Bobrov, he writes: "A person is so accustomed to the availability, diversity, and prevalence of information that if it were suddenly limited or access to it was closed, he would feel deprived and insecure. information is now both the goal, the means, and the method of communication and manifestation of the various needs of the individual" [2, p. 120-121].

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Consumers on the Internet can be classified based on various characteristics. So, they can be conditionally divided into three groups: experienced users (experts), intermediate users and beginners [7]. Such a classification can tell the creator of an online store how to build navigation on their site, providing for different levels of training of potential consumers. This will also allow you to properly organize feedback, including assistance in the purchase sequence.

Consumer behavior motives can be divided into functional and non-functional (Fig. 1)



**Figure 1. Motives of consumer behavior on the Internet**

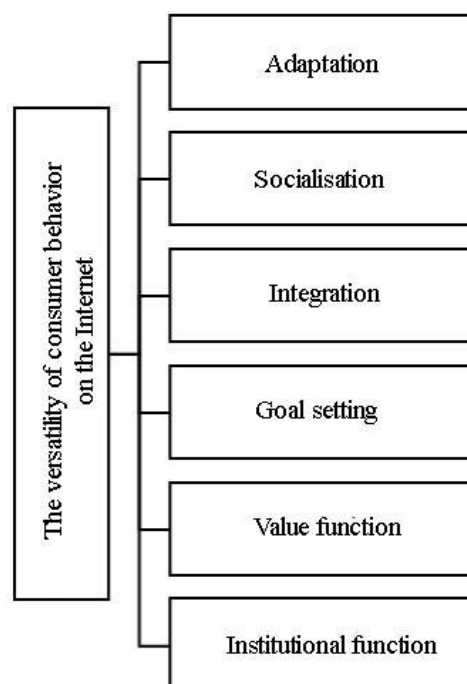
The non-functional ones are:

- comfort of shopping on the Internet (convenient time of contact, absence of physical queues in the store and waiting for service, saving money due to lower prices in online stores, feeling of comfort at home);
- trust, which, as a rule, is built on the impression of the store's website, customer reviews, information about the seller in the form of his address, contact numbers and e-mail, the expected guarantee of confidentiality and security of personal data);
- the desire to follow the fashion for the product, copy the behavior in a social real or virtual group, the "crowd effect", in which information cascades are formed - increasing flows of the same type of information that affect the consumer's decision.

Functional motives include price and assortment expectations of the buyer, which differ from the expectations in traditional trade.

Personal characteristics of the consumer determine his motives. These characteristics include: gender, age, current stage of the life cycle, education, occupation and economic status, lifestyle, character traits and self-esteem. As O.V. Vasilenko, the problem of rational and irrational choice and corresponding consumption should be attributed to the group of personal factors [3].

Motives lead to actions, therefore, the functional features of consumers on the Internet should also be noted, which should include: adaptation, socialization, integration, target, value and institutional functions (Fig. 2).



**Figure 2. The multifunctionality of consumer behavior on the Internet**

The adaptation of the consumer in the Internet environment occurs through the assimilation and application of knowledge and skills in the field of information technology, innovative business methods and the use of mobile applications. Thus, adaptation occurs through the consumption of various resources, mainly information, familiarization with the new realities of society and the market.

Socialization is carried out through social networks, attending Internet trainings (webinars), distance learning, reading news feeds, self-education by using information received via the Internet. As O.V. Vasilenko, the socializing function is also carried out as follows: “through consumption, the actor is “included” in various social groups, joins the social world” [3, p. 3].

Integration occurs through participation in the life and functioning of the information society and the digital economy, integrative consumer behavior occurs through following fashion trends, reading popular fiction, scientific and popular science publications. Integration is also facilitated by public opinion, focusing it on certain aspects of political and economic life.

The goal-setting function is manifested in the need to set new goals, study the market for goods and services, achieve these goals and move forward, expanding their horizons along the way, and for creative individuals, consumption can become an incentive for the development of innovative and entrepreneurial activities.

The value function reflects the trends of modern consumption, its transition from purely material consumption to value consumption, which improves the quality of life in general. This function includes numerous purchases of travel tickets on the Internet, booking tours and hotels, preparing for travel in the form of studying the culture and features of places to visit.

The institutional function is manifested in the fact that consumption reflects the cultural characteristics of the consumer, his commitment to the norms and traditions accepted in society as a whole and his national-territorial community. This function is also considered value-supporting.

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P.P. Tomsha considers consumer choice on the Internet as a phenomenon. He notes an increase in the irrational behavior of consumers on the Internet compared to traditional stores, in which the ratio of rational / irrational choice is also tilted in favor of the irrational one. "On the one hand, the consumer cannot get all the information necessary for a rational choice, and on the other hand, even the available data is often too much for him," writes P.P. Tomsha [10, p. 37]. Therefore, on the Internet, by setting the range of desired prices and the name of the product, the consumer is content with several answers, without bothering to go to real stores and compare prices and quality of goods in them. Following the path of least resistance, the consumer, thereby, behaves irrationally from the point of view of choosing the optimal product in terms of price and quality. Also, the choice is simplified by aggregator sites dedicated to the same type of goods. The use of various filters on such sites or when a consumer asks for a specific product brings the consumer's behavior model closer to a rational choice. This is also facilitated by the reviews of users who have already bought this product, they help to make the final decision on the purchase.

The combination of applying the methods of Internet marketing, psychology, economics and information technology makes the scientific direction that studies consumer behavior in a virtual environment interdisciplinary and, as V.O. Pokul, actualizes it as an object of research and scientific analysis in economic, social and humanitarian studies [8]. We add that digital economy technologies should also be included here.

Three aspects can be distinguished in the behavior of consumers: cognitive, emotional and activity. The latter is associated with the acquisition of a product or service (including the previous activities of seeking information, making a purchase decision, ordering or purchasing directly), consumption and disposal of the product or its residues.

The marketing classic F. Kotler developed a general model of consumer behavior, in which the stages of exposure to stimuli, considering the psychology and characteristics of the consumer, the process of choosing and making a purchase decision were identified. At the first stage, there are marketing stimuli, to which F. Kotler refers goods and services, prices, distribution and communications, and other stimuli (economic, technological, political and cultural), The second stage, associated with consumer psychology, includes motivation, perception, learning and memory, as well as cultural, social and personal characteristics. The selection process consists of recognizing a problem, seeking information, evaluating alternatives, making a purchasing decision, and consumer behavior after a purchase. The purchase decision is the choice of product, the choice of brand, the choice of seller, the volume of purchase, the time of purchase and the method of payment [6].

Highlighting the characteristics of the consumer in the framework of the F. Kotler model, V.O. Pokul writes: "The consumer today is not just a person who is the object of advertising influence on the part of companies, which stimulates him to purchase a particular product. These are hyper-informed skeptics about any proposals. Thanks to the development of Web 2.0 technologies and social media, in particular, consumers are integrating their real life into the online environment, while distorting the classic models of consumer behavior. ... some aspects of behavior on the Internet are identical to the behavior of consumers in real life, some are diametrically opposed, and some have no connection with the behavior considered in the theory of classical marketing" [8, p. 123].

At the heart of consumer behavior on the Internet are interpersonal communications, which also extend to communications between the buyer and the seller. Based on the research of M.G. Shilina, M.V. Starovoi notes the following characteristics and aspects of them: "The Internet expands the prospects for interpersonal communication, allows you to communicate with geographically distant interlocutors in real

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time, maintain an unusually wide range of social contacts and easily build new ones, create your own agenda, satisfy the need for self-expression, spontaneously construct their identity, instantly and mutually beneficially exchange operational textual, visual, audio information with a large number of users, take a direct part in the construction of the media space" [9, p. 65].

Compared to traditional communication in the real world, Internet communication is characterized by a relatively poor emotional impact, so here the main value for arousing positive emotions in the consumer is content - text, video, audio and photo. It is the first screen shots that the consumer sees when he gets to the seller's website or enters social networks and studies the news feed that allows him to attract his attention, arouse interest and stimulate further viewing. The emotional component removes the protective filters of information perception, involves the consumer in the benefits of the brand and forces him to make a purchase from this seller in the future. Not only the first purchase of the consumer depends on marketing skills and knowledge, but also the further commitment to this brand, to become its propagandist among other consumers.

Three main factors are used to attract attention: the physical characteristics of the stimulus, the characteristics of the consumer, and the environment. Physical stimuli can be the size of the presented object (preferably large), its color (attractive, bright), position on the screen (preferably in the center), animation (small movement), attractiveness of the speaker. For the consumer, the presence of his unmet need, interest in the seller's object, readiness to make a purchase (including financial capabilities) is important. The external environment is represented by the properties of the Internet and its presentation for a particular user on his computer, as well as the capabilities of the computer (the image on the screen, the speed of the computer, on which the consumer's movement on the seller's website depends, the quality of the Internet connection, etc.). I.V. Aleshina notes that the perception of stimuli occurs at two levels: cognitive and affective [1]. Cognitive level - the level of reason, knowledge of the individual, binding new information to the person already available. The affective level is an instantaneous emotional reaction to a stimulus, in our case, the seller's information. It is the emotional reaction that, as a rule, determines the final decision to purchase, since a vivid emotion "turns off" logical thinking at the first moment and the seller's task is to maintain this state of the consumer and bring him to the purchase.

S.A. Zelinsky, the author of the monograph "Information and psychological impact on mass consciousness", writes that emotional perception is an important prerequisite for manipulative influence, "The deepest suggestion is when a person does not think at all. That is why it is so important to bring a person into a state of emotion. While he sits with his eyes wide open, he does not understand anything. He's all there, in virtual reality. Logical verification of information in this state is impossible. ... The person at this moment is absolutely defenseless. He can record any thought, any attitude in his subcortex" [5, p. 55].

The socio-psychological mechanisms of the formation of virtual communities are described in his dissertation by N.S. Churaev. She gives the following definition of a virtual community: "a virtual community is a certain set of individuals united by similar interests, goals and customs, whose long-term interaction is wholly or at least partially carried out via the Internet and is regulated by protocols and norms specific to this means of communication" [ 11, p. 7]. Communities differ in thematic orientation (common interests, hobbies, clubs, commercial communities, groups of protest moods, groups promoting a certain lifestyle, personal characteristics, commitment to cultural subjects - fans), socio-demographic orientation (student and youth organizations, professional associations, associations on a territorial and geographical basis, religious and national associations, on a gender basis). N.S. Churaeva notes that with

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the growth of the community, the effectiveness of social interaction between participants weakens or is completely absent.

The main mechanisms for the formation of virtual communities are social identification, social perception, the mechanism of influence, the mechanisms of infection and imitation, the mechanism of motivation. These mechanisms form the features and behavior patterns of an individual in a virtual community. Social identification on the Internet is manifested in the search by an individual for important groups; perception - in the emotional impact of the design of the community, the anonymity of participation, popularity; the mechanism of influence includes suggestion, persuasion at the stage of attracting new members to the community; the mechanism of infection and imitation is viral, it is associated with the transfer of a psycho-emotional state (for example, a quick gathering of participants in a protest action by disseminating information that causes aggression); the mechanism of motivation is central in the formation of a community and is not always recognized by the individual.

Social networks have a huge potential for transforming e-commerce into a new, more organized business based on knowledge management [12, 13]. The modern Internet is an open structure capable of creating and modifying user-generated content, as a result of which the content is not passively consumed by people. instead, it is created, distributed, and consumed by users who actively generate content. This gives consumers additional incentives, using e-commerce mechanisms, to create multiple communications with a large number of users and. thereby participate in the exchange of this information and the transformation of other consumers in the processes of information search and their market behavior. These communications also help create new virtual communities through which e-commerce merchants are able to regulate consumer behavior, create awareness of the need to purchase certain products, and, at the same time, use their experience in the development of new products. Thus, the e-commerce environment implemented on the Internet shifts the "power of the market" from companies to consumers. As their needs change with the growing demand for online services and applications, consumers are looking for more social and interactive ways to drive engagement. By integrating social media and e-commerce, a model appears with new approaches for the interaction of the consumer and the market in a virtual environment. Moreover, social media poses challenges for the consumer product information market because it influences purchasing decisions that are based on the opinions and experiences of other consumers.

Having studied the main aspects of changing consumer behavior on the Internet compared to the traditional market environment, we can conclude that, firstly, all the main groups of behavioral factors, including motivational ones, are changing. value, social and communication; secondly, there is active socialization, which is manifested in the unification of consumers in informal groups and the exchange of opinions about goods and services, which influences the choice of consumers and forms an offer on their part; thirdly, the direction of the market changes, the vector changes from the seller-consumer to the consumer-seller; fourthly, the multifunctionality of the consumer is manifested, requiring skills in the field of information and communication technologies.

The spread of many types of economic activity on the Internet and the expansion of opportunities for consumers leads to a change in consumer behavior, which requires the construction of new models and subsequent research to correct the actions of not only marketers, but also those employed in the financial, educational, and industrial sectors.

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