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Online Shopping and Consumer Behaviour

Cezara-Georgiana RADU¹

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Abstract

Online shopping has developed a lot over time. Technology has become an indispensable resource in people's everyday lives. Consumers have come to use various websites or applications to buy the products they want for many reasons, such as saving time or avoiding crowded stores. This paper aims to study how the consumer's behaviour works when he chooses to shop online. The consumer's preferences in terms of online purchases will be analysed and the factors that lead to those choices. Furthermore, the literature review will be studied and correlations will be made based on the data obtained to better understand consumer behaviour when buying products online.

Keywords: consumer behavior, online shopping, technology, apps, digitalization.

JEL Classification: E20, M20, O1.

1. Introduction

Online shopping has developed a lot, and the COVID-19 pandemic, through its restrictions, has contributed even more in this sense (Huterska, Huterski, 2022). Technology has become an increasingly used tool in society, of high importance because it has a significant impact both on the business area, but also on consumers, increasing their number in the online environment (Davidaviciene et al., 2021).

Traditionally, online shopping was considered as an independent activity, but with the development of technology and new discoveries in the field of digitalization, people have changed the way they choose to make certain purchases, compare products or give feedback (Xu, Lee, 2020).

The digital environment competes with the traditional one, in the case of online shopping, physical stores are an alternative (Venkatesh et al., 2021). Thus, this paper will study what are the motivations behind consumer choices related to preferences for the online environment.

¹ Bucharest University of Economic Studies, Bucharest, Romania, radu.cezara.georgiana@gmail.com.

2. Problem Statement

With the development of the Internet and its increasing use, but also of social networks, online shopping has gained in popularity (Nasidi et al., 2022). In the case of consumers, there are certain behavioural patterns. These represent the processes and ways of making decisions. Also, consumer behaviour when making online purchases is based on the action of buying goods or services through technology, such as websites, mobile applications, and so on. The decision-making process is a difficult one for people because they have to choose from several types of goods and services, and in the end they have to decide which is the best choice for them (Helmi et al., 2023).

Many young consumers prefer to shop online, because it is a good way to save money and time, but also because it can be done from anywhere there is an Internet connection (Helmi et al., 2023).

There are three approaches to better characterise consumer buying styles, starting from the perspective of consumer typology, the psychological side, and consumer characteristics. When consumers make choices regarding purchases, they use the mental and psychological side. This can influence what product to buy, in what quantity, from where and for whom (Helmi et al., 2023).

Also, there are several types of buyers, based on their shopping orientation, such as the economical buyer, the personalised buyer, the ethical buyer and finally the apathetic buyer. Consumers who make purchases by letting themselves be guided by impulsivity and carelessness generally do not plan their purchases but make them spontaneously. They do not take into account the number of products bought and spend much more money (Helmi et al., 2023).

On the other hand, in the online environment there are many changes, and things evolve quickly, so many companies are faced with a diverse supply of products and with the decision of customers to choose or not a certain product. Thus, in the end, when a company carries out its activity in the online environment, in addition to the price and quality of the products, it must take into account consumer behaviour, which significantly influences the supply of stores (Davidaviciene et al., 2021).

When the perception of value appears, expectations are created. When the consumer expects a certain product to be of high quality, he will shape an attitude during consumption. If his high expectations materialise, his attitude in the future will become more and more positive and consumption will increase. Thus, after purchasing the good, if it meets the customer's expectations, he will be happy and his needs will be satisfied (Riorini et al., 2019).

Moreover, trust plays an important role in the choices made by the consumer in connection with the purchase of products online. Studies have shown that when there is a relationship of trust between a seller and a customer, the consumer will buy products more easily and will be much more willing to use online payment methods or give their personal data (Ngan, Khoi, 2022).

3. Research Questions / Aims of the Research

This paper aims to study the consumer behaviour when he chooses to shop online. The questions to which this study will try to find answers are:

Q1: When the consumer is in crisis situations, does he show rationality in the purchases made?

Q2: Can the impulse of the moment make the consumer spend more money?

Q3: Can the impulse of the moment lead to shopping with a therapeutic effect?

The COVID-19 pandemic represented that crisis situation in which the consumer was faced with moments of uncertainty and anxiety. Thus, the previously stated questions will be researched, to establish if there is a link between crisis situations, limited rationality, impulse purchases and implicitly if there is a therapeutic effect when consumers choose to shop online.

Also, this study has certain limitations due to the small number of respondents, so that the results can be applied on a small scale.

4. Research Methods

In order to understand what influences the Romanian consumer to make online purchases, but at the same time to observe the preferences related to these purchases, between 12.04.2023 - 5.05.2023 an online questionnaire was created, using the Google Forms website. A number of 151 respondents were registered, 87.4 % coming from the urban environment, and the predominant gender being female with a weight of 72.2 %.

The factors that led to the behavioural patterns during the COVID-19 pandemic were identified and analysed. This was achieved by studying specialized scientific articles.

Also, this study has certain limitations due to the small number of respondents, so that the results can be applied on a small scale.

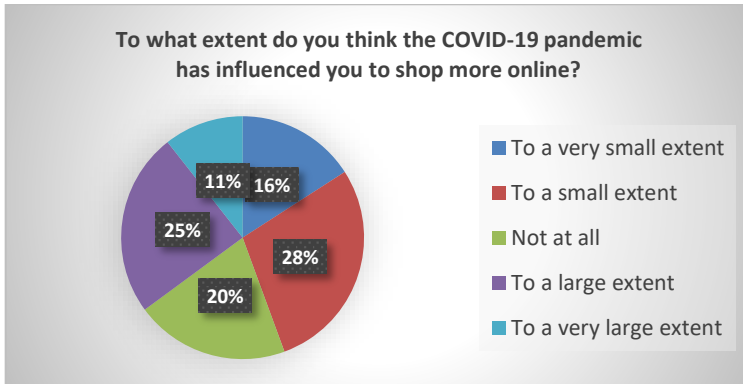
5. Findings

Based on the completed questionnaire, it was observed that the main reason why the consumer chooses to shop online is saving time, with 46.4 %. The second reason in the respondents' preferences is the easier way to make those purchases, compared to physical stores, where they can stand in line and waste time, but online they also have the opportunity to choose based on reviews, which 5.3 % actually do. In addition to all this, 19.9 % of the people buy online for convenience, but there are also people who prefer to avoid crowded places for obvious reasons, with a percentage of 7.3 %, but others do so for medical reasons, especially after the COVID pandemic -19.

When it comes to what the respondents preferred to buy most often, in the top of preferences were the products from the fashion range with 48.3 %. This is explainable especially after the last years of the pandemic, where most people worked from home and felt the need for a change in wardrobe, more precisely from office clothes to comfortable ones. Also, in second place were the products from the

electrical and household appliances range, and in third place were smart devices, such as PCs, laptops, tablets, and smartphones.

Figure 1. The influence of the pandemic on online purchases

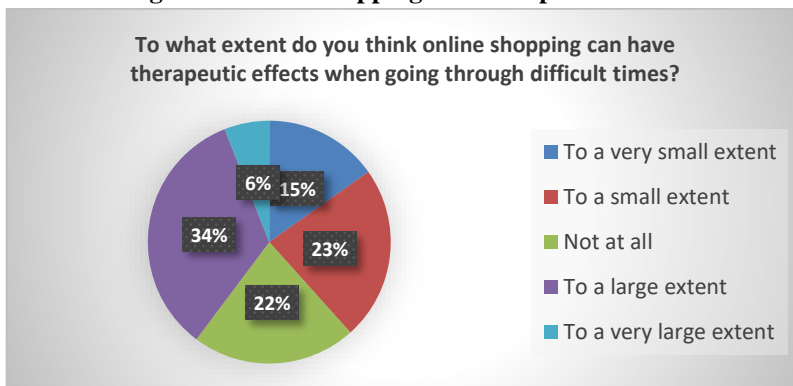


Source: Personal processing of the data obtained as a result of the research carried out during the period 12.04.2023 - 5.05.2023.

In the graph in figure 1, it can be seen that the respondents do not consider that the COVID-19 pandemic made them purchase more products, 28%. While 24.5% believe that the pandemic has influenced them to a great extent. At the same time, there is also the category of those who believe that they were not influenced at all in this situation, with 20.5%.

All these things denote the fact that the respondents were not perfectly aware of their actions during the pandemic. At least during the beginning of the pandemic, most of the population stockpiled products. Action that occurred due to the uncertainty created by the COVID-19 virus, but also due to considerations related to survival. In those moments, man's instinct to survive and try to cope with the situation was not based on rationality but simply on that instinct of conservation, of survival, found many times also in the case of animals.

Figure 2. Online shopping and therapeutic effects

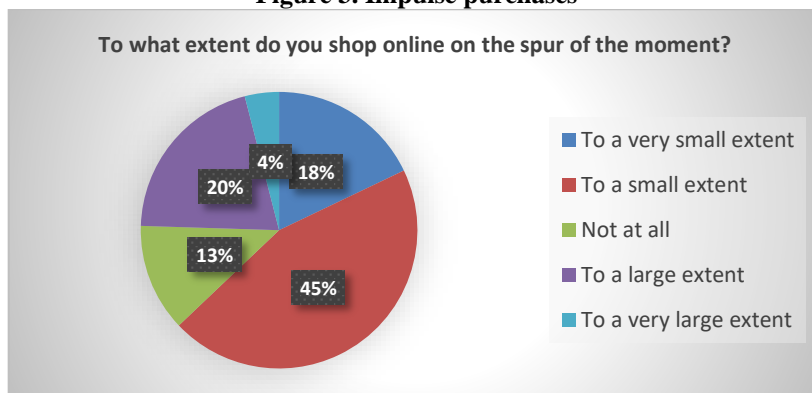


Source: Personal processing of the data obtained as a result of the research carried out during the period 12.04.2023 - 5.05.2023.

Even if in the previous graph it was found that the respondents did not consider that the COVID-19 pandemic caused them to buy more products, they consider that online purchases can have a therapeutic effect. Which in a crisis situation, such as COVID-19, has certainly been put into practice.

In addition to epidemiological challenges, the pandemic had negative effects both from an economic point of view and also from a social and psychological one. Many people who lived alone during that time ended up very emotionally damaged due to lack of physical human interaction. Thus, many of these people looked for ways to combat these conditions and found them through online shopping.

Figure 3. Impulse purchases



Source: Personal processing of the data obtained as a result of the research carried out during the period 12.04.2023 - 5.05.2023.

Also, 45 % consider that only to a small extent the impulse of the moment can make them buy more. But, precisely this in many critical situations will make people want to find a way to calm down, thus they will end up buying products, in the hope that they will get that therapeutic effect. Thus, by buying more, he will end up spending even more money.

6. Conclusions

When the consumer chooses to shop online, he thinks first of all to save time and money. Also, the state of health is not to be neglected, thus having a good way to avoid crowded places.

Secondly, in order for a consumer to continue making online purchases, they must be of good quality, to meet their expectations. From this point of view, a relationship of trust must be created between the seller and the consumer, based on quality products and mutual ethics.

In addition, the respondents considered that they do not make online purchases based on impulse, but on the other hand they consider that they can have therapeutic effects. For this reason, there is the possibility that many times precisely the impulse of the moment leads to that therapeutic effect from the perspective of the limited rationality that the consumer shows in crisis situations.

Finally, the consumer can use online shopping to make his life easier, but at the same time he must be careful about the extent to which he makes online purchases.

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