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Shopping Decisions of Selected Slovak Consumers When Shopping on the Internet

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Abstract

Nowadays, marketing communication is an integral part of marketing, as it is extremely important that businesses not only produce products but also make them available to their customers. It is therefore important that businesses inform consumers about the characteristics of the products, ways of use, etc. Marketing communication is probably one of the most visible elements of the marketing mix. The aim of the paper is to summarize the issues of consumer behavior when shopping on the internet, as well as to find out differences among selected categories of surveyed Slovak consumers.

Keywords: shopping behavior, internet commerce, marketing, consumer, advertising.

Introduction

The main goal of marketing communication is to acquaint the market with the offer of goods and services and to start the relationship between the manufacturer and the customer. Even though marketing communication does not change the product or its features, it might change the attitude of buyers and their perception of the product. Sales promotion is a very successful tool of marketing communication. Its core mission is to increase sales in the short term or to help increase market share. The aim may also be to motivate consumers to try a new product, to lure them away from competing products, or to retain interest or reward loyalty. The term sales promotion includes a wide range of tools - coupons, contests, bonuses, discounts and more. These tools attract attention and provide information that can persuade the consumer to buy the product. Moreover, they also encourage the purchase by highlighting a certain advantage, added value to the customer. Unlike other marketing tools, sales promotion stimulates immediate purchase and a visible response, helps efficiently empty warehouses and counterbalances demand fluctuations. It strengthens the brand and improves long-term relationship with customers. The importance of sales promotion increases as the market is flooded with identical or similar products, and greater customer demands are driving traders to greater agility.

As the society and the environment have changed over the years, so has the form of advertising. Technological advances have brought us to another world where everything is bigger, more pronounced, more expensive, and so advertising has taken on new forms to reach modern customers. Nowadays we can talk about the peak of social importance of mass media, and at the same time about the interconnection of mass and network communication. Computer networks, network communication and electronic media take over the traditional media strategies (Štefko et al., 2012).

Literature Review

Consumers have a very strong position as they decide what they want to buy and where they want to buy it. In today's economy and as a result of global markets, the lack of retail supply is not a barrier, but rather on the contrary. Today, consumers are being overwhelmed by the range of products and services, and sometimes it is difficult for them to navigate through them and choose from the huge amount of goods on offer (Gburová, Matušíková, Adamko, 2015). It is therefore clear that consumers benefit from their position as the dominant player determining the rules of the game (Weberová et al., 2016). On the other hand, the sophisticated marketing practices of businesses and manufacturers need not be underestimated. By using these strategies and specific tools, they can also effectively stimulate, guide and modify the demand. It is paradoxical that consumers basically dictate what is to be produced, but at first their desires are suggested by the market (Mulačová et al., 2013).

We all find ourselves in the role of consumer in the real life almost every day. A "consumer" is a very general term and includes everything that we have consumed, even though we have not bought it ourselves. A consumer is simply a person who chooses, purchases and pays for the goods (Vysekalová, 2004). We agree with Jakubíková (2013, p. 52), who states that "a customer is a person, household, company, state or foreign person, i.e. a person who pays for a product or service in some form in order to obtain a certain expected experience." Consumer behavior and consumer purchasing choices are influenced by a whole set of factors that marketing cannot influence (cultural, social and personal factors) and psychological factors that are only partially influenced (Richterová 2008).

Wright (2006) claims that the main part of the marketing process is to understand why the customer is making a purchase. Without such an understanding, businesses can hardly respond to customer needs. The need to understand the customer behavior and the reasons for buying products are central to the concept of marketing. Only in this way the business can influence and predict the reasons for the purchase. If the management can better understand their customers than competitors, then such information becomes a significant source of competitive advantage (Horváth, Oleárová, 2018). It is true that some businesses still produce without actually knowing who the target customer might be or what the reasons for the purchase might be. But there are very few of these, and days when a business could only produce products in the hope of selling them are disappearing quickly. It is increasingly important for businesses to clearly understand the benefits customers expect as well as the reasons why they make a purchase.

Consumer behavior includes the process of mental decision-making as well as the physical activity of purchasing. The purchase itself is only one stage (Fedorko, Kakalejčík, 2015; Lizbetinová et al., 2019). A proper understanding of consumer behavior is essential for a long-term marketing program. When analyzing market opportunities, it is very important to identify the target market marketing mix that includes the product, price, location and form of promotion. The questions of why, how, when, what and where cannot be answered in relation to these elements unless the consumer's behavior is known. Consumer behavior also plays an essential role in non-profit and social marketing (Nastišin, 2018). There is a relationship between consumer behavior, communication with consumers and motivation. The social and cultural dimensions of consumer behavior play an important role in the group dynamics. Today, the consumer is in a better position than in the past. This is to protect consumers from abuse by sellers and unfair commercial practices. As consumer safety is needed, laws have been adopted in different countries to protect consumer rights. Under these laws, the consumer is not only the one who buys any product, but also any recipient of those products (Tyagi, Kumar, 2004).

The consumer behavior is also influenced by the nature of the consumer himself. It is also necessary to know the sequence of steps of consumer behavior and the factors that influence the consumer in the individual steps of the decision-making process. The goal of marketing managers is not just to make a

one-off purchase, but to satisfy the consumer at every level of the consumer behavior, which leads to repeated purchases and the possibility to establish long-term relationships with consumers (Ferencová, Jurková, 2011).

With the advent of the internet, trading moved to the online space. Companies invest in information technology and e-commerce in order to increase the efficiency of performed operations and improve customer service (Blažková, 2005; Lorincová, 2018). To put it simply, e-business is basically just an electronic form of the already-existing activities. As has been the case so far, consumers have received brochures on goods in paper form; with the advent of online shopping consumers receive news via websites, e-mail, etc. Similarly, cash transactions begin to be executed electronically, e.g. paying by credit card, using electronic checks, or by direct payments from a bank account on the internet (e.g. e-pay). By definition, a business organization includes both profitable and nonprofit entities. Their processes include production, customer, internal or manager-oriented business processes (Delina, Vajda, 2006).

E-commerce allows customers to buy products and services without having to go shopping in person. Doing business without the physical movement of stakeholders is also present when ordering food over the phone. However, e-commerce is changing also this form of trading. In the concept of e-commerce, an order is made by clicking on the "order" icon, for example, on the internet (Dorčák, Pollák, 2010).

Methods and Methodology

The aim of the research was to find out the difference in internet shopping habits among selected categories of surveyed Slovak consumers. The research focused on consumers living in the area of eastern Slovakia. The survey sample was selected by random sampling. The obtained primary data were subsequently processed in the Statistical program Statistica.

In order to determine the objective of the research we have set the following hypotheses:

H1: We assume that younger (up to 40 years) than older (over 40 years) consumers make their purchases on the internet more often.

H2: We assume that higher-income consumers make their purchases online.

H3: We assume that online advertising affects more younger (up to 40 years) than older (over 40 years) consumers.

Survey Results

The research sample consisted of 162 respondents, of which 52% were women and 48% were men. Of the respondents addressed, 61% were employed, 16% were retired, 13% were self-employed, 5% unemployed and students (5 %). Internet advertising, otherwise called online advertising, is a form of advertising that uses the internet to provide promotional marketing messages to consumers. This includes, but is not limited to, e-mail marketing, social network marketing, many types of advertising (including banners), and mobile advertising. Like other advertising media, internet advertising includes a publisher who integrates ads into his online content and an advertiser who provides ads to be displayed in the publisher's content (Schumann, 2016). The internet, the fastest growing medium, has several advantages, namely the ability to reach the desired group of consumers, low costs and the relatively short time needed to create ads. On the other hand, it also has several disadvantages, like the difficulty with measuring the overall effectiveness of ads and return on investment. Also, not everyone is able to connect to the internet (Lamb et al., 2010).

Based on the results of the research, we found that internet shopping is not dominant form of purchasing, however, its importance is gradually growing. 70% of respondents have personal experience with online shopping, 17% buy online regularly, 15% once a month and 38% at least several times a year. There are

respondents who choose the product via the internet and buy it in the store (7%) and also those who do not exclude the purchase over the internet in the future (8%). 14% of respondents do not buy over the internet and neither they plan to do so in future.

The aim of the first research hypothesis was to find out whether younger (up to 40 years) consumers make their purchases on the Internet more often than older (over 40 years). The results show that 23% of younger and 6% of older respondents make purchases over the internet, the difference is statistically significant (Chi-square test of independence, $p = 0.003$, Table 1). Since the difference is statistically significant, we accept the hypothesis that there is a statistically significant relationship between the internet shopping and the age of consumers.

Table 1: Place of purchase depending on the age of consumers surveyed

n_{ij}/e_{ij}	up to 40	above 40	$\chi^2 = 8,943$ $p = 0,003$
makes purchases over the Internet	18/11,4	5/11,6	
does not make purchases over the Internet	62/68,6	77/70,4	

Source: own processing

76% of younger and 94% of older respondents make their purchases in brick-and-mortar stores, even here the difference is statistically significant (Chi-square test of independence, $p = 0.002$, Table 2). Since the difference is statistically significant, we accept the hypothesis related to the age of consumers.

Table 2: Purchase in brick-and-mortar stores depending on the age of the consumers surveyed

n_{ij}/e_{ij}	up to 40	above 40	$\chi^2 = 9,999$ $p = 0,002$
Shops in brick-and-mortar stores	61/68,1	77/69,9	
Does not shop in brick-and-mortar stores	19/11,9	5/12,1	

Source: own processing

Based on the second research hypothesis, we wanted to find out whether consumers with higher incomes make their purchases more often on the internet. Since the difference is statistically significant (because $p = 0.049$, i.e. $p < 0.05$), we reject the hypothesis on the independence of online shopping from consumer's income. The results are shown in Table 3.

Table 3: Internet purchases based on the income of the consumers surveyed

n_{ij}/e_{ij}	do 500 €	500 – 1 000€	above 1 000€	$\chi^2 = 6,031$ $p = 0,049$
Shops on the internet	8/11,1	8/8,7	7/3,3	
Does not shop on the internet	70/66,9	53/52,3	16/19,7	

Source: own processing

We assume that online advertising affects more younger (under 40) than older (over 40) consumers. Online advertising affects 23% of men and 14% of women (no statistically significant difference, Chi-square independence test, $p = 0.150$, Table 4), 26% of younger and 11% of older respondents surveyed (difference statistically significant, Chi-square independence test, $p = 0.012$, Table 5). Since the difference between the genders is not statistically significant, we do not reject the hypothesis on the independence of the online advertising from the consumer's gender. Since the difference between the age of consumers is statistically significant (because the calculated p-value is < 0.05), the hypothesis on the independence (zero hypothesis Chi-square independence test) of the age of consumers from the impact of online advertising is rejected, which means we accept our hypothesis on the dependence of the two.

Table 4: The impact of online advertising depending on the gender of respondents

n_{ij}/e_{ij}	men	women	$\chi^2 = 2,072$ $p = 0,150$
influenced by internet advertising	18/14,4	12/15,6	
not influenced by internet advertising	60/63,6	72/68,4	

Source: own processing

Table 5: The impact of online advertising depending on the age of respondents

n_{ij}/e_{ij}	up to 40	above 40	$\chi^2 = 6,261$ $p = 0,012$
influenced by internet advertising	21/14,8	9/15,2	
not influenced by internet advertising	59/65,2	73/66,8	

Source: own processing

Advertising experts claim that the internet is now the primary source of entertainment and information. That is why businesses try to reach their customers over the internet, too. In recent years, online advertising has seen an enormous increase over other advertising channels which recorded a decline in their numbers or complete stagnation. Given the fact that it took radio more than eighty years to reach wider audiences, for TV it was about thirteen years and in case of the internet it was only four years, the current situation is just a normal development.

It is almost breathtaking how social networks such as Facebook and Instagram have penetrated lives of people in recent years. Over time, people became immune to classic forms of advertising, whether on television, radio or other media. Therefore, businesses began to look for other forms of advertising to attract the attention of their target audience. Such forms include guerilla marketing, buzz marketing, viral marketing and product placement (Přikrylová, Jahodová, 2010).

Conclusion

Shopping is a part of everyday routine. Nowadays, consumers can choose from a wide range of shopping venues with a variety of goods and services. Every day we encounter various product information and news which we later compare and based on the comparison we choose the best product we eventually buy. This whole process is related to consumer purchasing decisions. There is a great battle for every consumer going on the Slovak market. If we do not win the consumer, then our competitor will for sure. Businesses use different strategies to promote themselves, and one of them is advertising. This is an integral mechanism of the consumer market. It significantly affects the whole society regardless of age, gender or education.

A large number of factors plays a role in making a purchasing decision - personality, mental qualities, personal disposition or type of purchase (habitual, impulsive, etc.). In addition to the above-mentioned factors, it is also important to pay attention to the design, color and layout of the sales area. The survey focused on how people search for product information from external sources and shown that as the amount of information sought increases, consumers' attitudes towards shopping are more positive and the decision-making process itself takes more time. Searching through external sources of information is more frequent for consumers who do not have much knowledge of some products in that category. As a result, the less a consumer knows about a product category, the more time they spend looking for information (Schiffman, Kanuk 2004).

The internet is an important source of information for consumers when making purchases and is also a place where purchases are made. Online advertising is an integral part of the communication mix for every major business. At a relatively low cost it allows businesses to reach a large mass of people. A big advantage of online advertising is the measurability of its effect. The number of clicks on a given link or the number of page views make it very easy to see how many consumers have been affected by the ad.

Consumers frequently use different price comparators and read newsletters. A suitably set offer will appeal to the consumer who reads e-mails every day. People often read blogs, follow social networks. People have become accustomed to ads and perceive them as a part of the website. A positive thing is that people have not learned how to ignore ads just yet.

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