IN THE MAZE OF E-COMMERCE. ONLINE TRADE DEFINING VARIABLES IN ROMANIA

Erika KULCSÁR
"Babeş-Bolyai" University of Cluj-Napoca, Romania
Email: erika.kulcsar@ubbcluj.ro
Sándor TÉGLÁS
Email: sandor.teglas@gmail.com

Abstract:
The number of those articles dealing with the issue of online trade is significant both at international and national level. Among the main identified themes addressed in this present article are the following: (a). the characteristics that define the segment of those who purchase via the Internet, (b). the influencing factors which play a crucial role at purchases made online, (c). the identification of those variables through which online consumer behavior can be studied (d). the advantages offered by the Internet, and therefore by online trade.
The purpose of this article is to understand and know the buying habits of online customers. The main variables included in the analysis are the following: (1) type of customer, (2) customers' residency, (3) the day of the online order, (4) time interval/time frame when the order was placed (4) ordered brands, (5) the average value of orders.

Keywords: e-commerce, online costumer behavior, regions, customer type

1. Introduction

The presence of the Internet in our daily lives is undeniable. The Internet has had an impact not only on our daily life, but also on the commercial sphere. Eventually the emergence of e-commerce is due to changes in the technological environment.

The impact of the Internet on marketing and trade is not insignificant; this is supported by the existence of several international and national journals in the field.

International journals dealing with this issue are:

- International Journal of Online Marketing,
- European Journal of Marketing,
- International Journal of Management and Marketing Research,
- Marketing Science,
- Journal of Business Research etc.

In Romania there are several journals that publish scientific articles related to e-commerce:

- Management & Marketing. Challenges for the Knowledge Society,
- Management & Marketing,
- Trade study,

- The Young Economists Journal,
- Theoretical and Applied Economics, etc.

The objectives of the paper consist of investigating the relationship between the time frame of online orders (moment of the day and day of the week) and, respectively, several online customers' behaviors or characteristics such as type of customer, customers' residence, brands chosen and value of orders.

2. Literature Review

The appearance of the social networking, particularly Web 2.0 has changed the strategies of traditional marketing, providing an opportunity to address marketing from a new perspective (Watfa et al., 2013) opening new horizons in business globally without the barriers of time and space (Racolţa-Paina and Luca, 2010).

Electronic commerce as a final product of the marriage between the technical and commercial sphere in the opinion of Şoavă (2006) includes not only all purchases made via the Internet but also represents a remarkable influence over all activities that aim to support the marketing objectives of companies who practice this trade.

In connection with electronic commerce more questions arise, among them are the following:

(1). what are those advantages that influence customers to purchase the desired products via the Internet? According to literature the major advantages of electronic commerce include: speed, efficiency, lower costs, and convenience. However, it should be noted that culture also influences online shopping regarding the advantages. This finding is supported by results obtained by Rohm and Swaminathan (2004). Following their investigations it was found that "time saving" and "recreation and enjoyment" as motivational attributes do not play a primary role in case of South-Eastern American online customers in the United States. Moreover, emotion (Bauer, 2006) respectively the variety of products (Häubl and Trifts, 2000) are identified as attractive aspects of electronic commerce. Regarding the sought advantages those who perform online shopping are the "convenience shoppers, variety seekers, balanced buyers, and store-oriented shoppers" (Rohm and Swaminathan, 2004, p. 755).

(2). According to which demographic variables should online commerce be studied? Stříteský et al. (2015) consider that age and gender are variables with a major influence on online customer behavior. Also, the level of education is another variable which must be dealt with from this point of view. Lian and Yen (2014) believe that both theorists and practitioners have focused on detailed knowledge of the behavior of young shoppers, neglecting the older ones, although people aged 45-54 have performed online shopping with a higher percentage (24 %) than those aged between 35-44 years (23.1 %). Women carry out online orders in a higher percentage (59 %) than men (45.9 %). There are college graduates or graduates of higher education among online customers (Li, 2013 available at: http://www.iacquire.com/blog/study-online-shopping-behavior-in-the- digital-era).

(3). what are those factors that require detailed approach from companies operating online to increase efficiency? Among the perceived variables are convenience, perceived enjoyment, perceived cost and perceived risk, according to which the research of online consumer behavior represents a real need of

continuous investigation (Yousaf, et al., 2012, p. 274). The list of factors that play a decisive role on the behavior of online consumers was completed by Clemes et al. (2014), including: perceived risk, consumer resources, service quality, subjective norms, product variety, convenience and website factors.

On the one hand web stores have to identify those factors that contribute with a considerable extent to attracting and maintaining a profitable customer segment, and on the other hand to determine those factors that undermine this objective. In this context it should be noted that "information searching cost" exerts a significant influence on repurchase intentions (Wu et al. 2014). The relationship between satisfaction and repurchase intent is stronger if the experience is less compared to when the experience is higher (Pappas et al., 2014). Simultaneously, with the increased experience of the online customer this is also becoming increasingly critical, as high quality for them is something normal, their needs and taste acquire a new dimension, becoming more complicated, more varied (Ashraf, et al., 2014). Akbar and James (2014) believe that investigating online customer behavior can be done by using the following factors: search engines, online shopping malls, auction websites, convenience, price, brand, security, promotion and refund. The level of reliability, security and ensuring prompt service also contribute to consolidating sustainable relations between the customer and the firm (Lee and Lin, 2005).

According to a research conducted among urban customers in State of Andhra Pradesh (India) product risk and financial risk (Nitta, 2015) are among the factors that affect the relationship between customers and web stores. Product risk and financial risk affect online shopping experience in a negative way, regardless of product category, however the risk of privacy is associated with "non-digital products online shopping". Hanafizadeh et al. (2012) found that the „lack of electronic guarantee" among Iranian customers represent a negative factor in e-commerce. Also, Dinu and Dinu (2013) believe that uncertainty is a main factor that exerts a negative influence on online trade, thus protecting the rights and interests of online shoppers, in this view, is a real need (Racolţa-Paina and Luca, 2011) because the relationship between "cognitive trust to online retailers" and "emotional trust" has a remarkable influence on repurchase intention (Zhang et al., 2014).

(4). Which are the product categories where online trading can be practiced? According to a research conducted in 2013 most popular products were the following, listed in descending order: books, consumer electronics, athletic apparel, sporting goods, shoes, pet supplies, clothing, jewelry, office supplies, auto parts, home furnishings, home improvement, personal which Groceries (Mahapatra, 2003 available at: http://www.businessinsider.com/what-people-buy-online-2013-1). In the UK in 2015, according to the statistics, the most popular products/services in descending order were the following: clothes or sports goods, household goods, travel Arrangements, holiday accommodation, tickets for events, films/music, books/magazines, newspapers, food or Groceries, electronic equipment etc. (available at: http://www.statista.com/statistics/275973/types-of-goods-purchased-online-in-great-britain/). In case of Boitor software (2012) it was found that online shopping does not represent a real opportunity given the high complexity of this type of product. Here it should be mentioned that the Internet also affects the service sector. For example, the opportunities offered by online tourism is an issue oftn dealt by researchers (Talpos, 2010; Mastorakis et al., 2014; Sahli and

Legohérel, 2014; Constantinescu and Tudor, 2013; Marinescu and Frincu, 2015; Băbăiţă et al., 2010; Bertea and Moisescu, 2011; Cojocea and Coroş 2014; Tutunea and Rus 2011).

3. Research objectives

Among the main objectives of this research include: (1) identification of days, respectively the time frame when online shoppers are most active, (2) identifying development regions where most online orders are made (3) determining important relationships between consumers type (individual and organizational customers) and the day of the online order, time interval when the order was placed, the ordered brands, (4) establishing important relationships between customers' residency and time frame of the online orders, the average value of orders and the ordered brands, respectively, (5) determining important relationships between the brands and the time frame of orders, as well as the day when online orders were placed, (6) identification of important relationships between the days of orders and average value of these.

3.1. Methodology of research

In order to ensure in an efficient manner the processing of those secondary data which represent the basis of the research analysis provided by one of the largest web stores in Romania (no personal information of the web store was used, as it was the prerequisite of data collection and we fully complied with it), a "purge" of data was carried out to avoid distorted results (e.g. failure of attempts to buy several thousand pieces of the same product), as well as any personal data of customers were also deleted.

As secondary data was available in a MySQL database, and for their processing we used SPSS. Due to the large categories of variables these could not be analyzed in their original form, therefore, they were grouped as such that the top 10 brands with highest sales were included in the research.

It should also be noted that bivariate analyses included all orders regardless of their delivery. Depending on their level of delivery the following categories have been identified (1) delivered (carried out 100 %), (2) partially delivered (orders were not fully delivered), (3) cancelled (orders were cancelled, either by the customer or by the bidder). The delivered orders represent 74, 70 % of total orders, 0.80 % of all orders were partially delivered and the percentage of cancelled orders represents 24.50 %. This approach has been chosen to follow the detailed knowledge of the online customer behavior. Therefore, within the present paper the term 'delivered orders" is used only when the orders were fully delivered. The time interval during the research covered the period between November 1, 2012 and October 31, 2013.

3.2. Research hypotheses

The hypotheses tested in this research are the following:

H_1: The day of the week customers place their online orders depends on the type of customers.

H_2: The time of the day customers place their online orders depends on the customers' residence.

H_3: The time frame of orders depends on the chosen brand.

H_4: The day of the week when online orders are placed depends on the brands customer choose.

H_5: The time frame of orders depends on the residence of the customers.
H_6. The ordered brands depend on type of customers.
H_7: The ordered brands depend on the residence of the customers.
H_8. The average value of the order depends on the residence of the customers.
H_9: The average value of the order depends on the working days of the week.

4. Results and Discussion

Before presenting the significant relationships between the variables which define online trade in Romania, we would like to present the following:

- On Friday the maximum level of orders was recorded, 16.59 % of the total orders per week, followed by Monday (16.22 %). It is worth mentioning that at the weekend online shopping enthusiasm decreased representing a percentage of 10.02 % (Sunday) and 11.50 % (Saturday) of the total orders per week. It should also be mentioned that during weekdays, on Wednesday the lowest percentage was recorded (14.25 %) of the orders. (Table. 1 - Appendix)
- The individual customers represented 92.30 % of the total orders, whereas organizational customers only 7.70 %.
- The highest percentage of orders was recorded in Bucharest (25.20 %), followed by the North-West region (13.84 %). Central development region is the third place (12.70 %) according the indicators, and South-West (7.22 %) represented the lowest level of orders. (Table no. 2 - Appendix)
- The vast majority of orders (86.49 %) defined a single product category. Only 1.69 % of orders included more than three product types. (Table no. 3 - Appendix)
- 42.51 % of all orders valued between 100-500 RON. Those orders with a greater value than 5 000 RON represent only 0.60 % of the total orders. (Table no. 4 - Appendix)

Further the results obtained from bivariate analyses are presented. The results obtained with the help of test chi square to accept or refuse H_1, H_2, H_3, H_4, H_5, H_6, H_7 hypotheses are presented in Table no. 5 of the Appendix.

Firstly, the relationship between the type of customer (individual customer, organizational customer) and day of order was presented.

According to the results it was concluded that there is a significant relationship between type of customer and of day of order, therefore H_1 was accepted.   After analyzing secondary data it was found that organizational customers placed orders in larger number from Monday to Thursday than individual customers. On Friday individual customers carried out more orders, but the difference is not significant. Instead, during Saturdays or Sundays individual customers placed more online orders than organizational customers. (Table no. 6 - Appendix). The results can be explained by the fact that online ordering is among a set of common tasks on weekdays for organizational customers, and absolutely necessary to achieve the objectives. According to the literature speed, efficiency, convenience is referred to as motivational factors during online shopping. According to the results individual customers place online orders at the weekends, while enjoying their home environment. According to the results web stores in

Romania should formulate policies and communication strategies which vary according to the type of buyers.

Based on the results a question arose whether there was a relationship between the type of customers and time frame of orders. As there is a significant relationship between these two, therefore H_2 has been accepted. It can be noted that between 8:00 and 11:59 or 19:00 and 7:59 p.m. organizational customers placed orders in larger number than individual customers. Organizational customers carried out their orders in higher percentage before lunch, due to the breakdown of those daily activities that ensure maintaining or increasing the market share. These activities include the purchase of various online products. Web stores should have this in mind when formulating policies and strategies related to promotion.

Secondly, the relationship between the ordered brand and time frame was studied. It should be noted that no account was taken of the ordered quantity of a particular product for the same brand; only a particular brand was taken into consideration. After the data analysis it was concluded that there is a significant relationship between the two variables included in the analysis, i.e. there is a link between the ordered brand and the time frame of the order. According to these H_3 has been accepted. It can be noted that the vast majority of the brand Artic was ordered between 12:00 a.m. and 2:59 p.m., followed by Hansa products ordered between 5:59 p.m. and 3:00 p.m. Samsung shared a continuous interest without any spectacular changes. Between 4:00 p.m. to 4:59 p.m. the interest for the brand Sony was the lowest.

It was also found that there is a significant relationship between the ordered brand and the day of the order, thus H_4 has been accepted. In case of the Sony brand the highest value of orders was made on Thursday. In case of LG, Whirlpool, Beko, Artic, Hansa, Philips and Zanussi Monday was the most attractive. (Table no. 7 (A) and Table no.7 (B) - Appendix). The results are interesting; they can somehow be explained by the popularity of those ten brands which were included in the analysis. Thus web stores in Romania should target promotional activity depending on the time frame and the brands are most sought after.

Furthermore, it was examined whether there was a relationship between customers' residency based on the development regions of customers and the time frame of orders. The results of the analysis support hypothesis H_5, therefore a significant relationship exists between the two variables included in the analysis, thus according to the variables online consumer behavior depends on the customers' residency. The results obtained from secondary data analysis can be explained by the fact that each region has a specific culture that has a remarkable influence on behavior and purchases made online. Culture is an influencing factor mentioned in the literature that should not be missed by web shops in their policy formulation and marketing strategies related to the marketing mix.

After analyzing secondary data the following was found:

- in Bucharest most orders were placed between 11:00 and 11:59,
- in the South-East development region most orders were placed between 12:00 and 12:59,
- in the North-East development region most orders were placed between 13:00 and 1:59,

- in the North-West development region most orders were placed between 15: 00 and 15: 59,
- in the South development region most orders were placed between 16: 00-16.59.

It is worth noted that in the Central development region there was no more efficient time frame compared to the time frame of other regions. It was also observed that in Bucharest the time frame between 18.00 and 18: 59 presented the lowest number of orders. In our opinion this attitude towards online shopping can be explained by the fact that at the mentioned time frame most of the residents of Bucharest are caught up in the traffic or meet any other needs their life requires to.

Online shoppers' attitude towards the ordered brands differs depending on the type of customers, thus H_6 hypothesis is accepted. Organizational customers were more interested in brands like Electrolux, Zanussi Arctic than individual customers, while individual customers showed more interest in Hansa and Beko brands than organizational customers. The obtained results can be explained by the fact that organizational customers take into consideration other aspects as well when choosing the online products compared to individual customers. Web stores would need to identify the aspects that play a primary role in the online purchasing process regarding both the individual and organizational customers.

However, a significant difference was also showed, thus accepting the H_7, between the ordered brands and the residence of the customers (development regions). The interest in a particular brand depending on customers' residence (development regions) is as follows:

- North - East: Whirlpool: 8.98 %,
- South-East: Samsung: 29.45 %,
- South: Beko 7.31 %, Arctic: 9.26 % and Zanussi: 5.17 %,
- West: LG 10.21 %,
- North-West: 18.41 % Philips and Sony: 7.22 %,
- Central Development Region: Hansa 12.38 % and Electrolux 6.63 %.

It is worth mentioning that in the South-West development region, respectively in Bucharest there was no major interest in a particular brand compared to the other regions. According to the obtained results web stores need to identify the favorable and unfavorable aspects of the relationship between the ordered brands and the residence of the customers.

The results delivered by the Kruskal - Wallis test regarding the acceptance or refusal of H_8, H_9 hypotheses are shown in Table no. 8 in the Appendix. The existence of significant differences was tested between 8 groups formed by development regions in Romania regarding the average value of orders. According to the data H_8 hypothesis was accepted as there are significant differences among the eight groups in terms of the average value of the orders.

The mean value in RON of the orders placed in the different development regions is as follows:

- North Development Region - East: 835.68 RON,
- South - East Development Region: 939.72 RON,
- South Development Region: 888.06 RON,
- South - West Development Region: 865.41 RON,
- West Development Region: 951.39 RON,

- North - West Development Region: 865.47 RON,
- Central Development Region: 848.75 RON,
- Bucharest Development Region: 891.67 RON.

It is worth mentioning that although the standard of living in Bucharest is higher than in the West development region the average value of online orders is lower. This in our view can be explained by the fact that residents of the West development region assume a greater risk of online shopping.

Significant differences were also observed between the groups considering the days when the orders were placed and the average value of the orders, therefore this supports the alternative formulated hypothesis (H_9). The average value of the orders in descending order is as follows:

- Sunday: 869.06 RON,
- Thursday: 869.26 RON,
- Monday: 877.40 RON,
- Friday: 882.89 RON,
- Saturday: 899.11 RON,
- Tuesday: 899.51 RON,
- Wednesday: 910.93 RON.

.   Consequently, the orders made on Wednesday, Tuesday, Friday and Saturday have a higher average value than those made on Sunday, Thursday and Monday. Web stores would need to identify those factors that determine the attitude of online customers towards choosing the days of the week in terms of average value of orders.

5. Conclusions

As a conclusion, based on analysis, web stores in Romania should formulate policies and marketing strategies according to the development regions, because each region has certain features, characteristics that define them, which has a direct and noteworthy influence on online customers' behavior. As it was stated there is a significant relationship between the time frame, the ordered brands, respectively the average value of orders and residence of online customers.

It was also observed that the type of customer represents another variable which has to be considered in formulating policies and strategies by firms operating in the field of electronic commerce because buying behavior of individual customers differs from the buying behavior of organizational customers. As highlighted in the researches it was found that the day of order, the time frame of the orders as well as the ordered brands significantly differ according to the type of customer, especially if we consider individual customers versus organizational customers.

It can also be concluded that the ordered brands differ depending on the time frame of the orders, respectively on the day the order was placed. It was further highlighted that the average value of the orders differs significantly depending on the day it was placed. It is considered that the results can be really useful to those who trade online in Romania since analyzing online customer behavior in terms of the analyzed variables has not been the research problem of scientific articles before.

In our opinion entities that are present in e-commerce would need to take seriously into consideration the following:

(1). According to the literature there is a positive link between efficiency and significance, accessibility, accountability and customer loyalty performing online shopping (VUM et al., 2013).

(2). The most valuable customers are those who have a consistent behavior, this represents a competitive advantage in the online business communities (Alavi and Ahuja, 2013).

(3). According to Pulevska-Ivanovski (2007, p. 153) companies that will succeed in the near future are those who "can balance existing enterprise resource planning (ERP) -based Infrastructures and Capabilities with exciting new e-business Innovations."

(4). Electronic commerce is viable only if it is supported by the education, research, the Information and Communication Technologies (Mărunţelu, 2009).

(5). We should not lose sight of the fact that the ongoing investigation through social media is particularly important because it allows us to identify those virtual trends that that will define the target market (Hristache et al., 2014). Besides this positive aspect, it should be mentioned that social networking can improve communication, the exchange of information between companies and shoppers/customers. Social networks are used for various reasons but the most important is that by the help of them users can express their opinion, ideas and beliefs on a particular brand (Acatrinei and Nistor, 2012). Managers of brands should coordinate publicity carried out through the Internet with new objective information about brand in order to improve communication strategies (Micu, 2010), because through social networking a company may have a global audience with low effort in terms of time and the invested financial resources (Logofatu, 2012).

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Appendix

Distribution of number/percentage of orders based on the days of the week

Days of the week	Number of orders	Mean of orders	% per year
Monday	22. 270	428,27	16,22
Tuesday	21. 668	416,69	15,79
Wednesday	19. 560	376,15	14,25
Thursday	21. 457	412,63	15,63
Friday	22. 778	438,04	16,59
Saturday	15. 780	303,46	11,50
Sunday	13. 754	264,50	10,02
Total	137. 267	337,11	100

Source: SPSS – based on secondary data

Distribution of number/percentage of orders based on the customers' residence

Development region	Number of orders	%
North - East	9. 331	9,00
South - East	11. 603	11,20
South	11. 110	10,71
South – West	7. 485	7,22
West	10. 573	10,19
North – West	14. 357	13,84
Central	13. 174	12,70
Bucharest	26. 088	25,20
Total	103. 721	100

Source: SPSS – based on secondary data

Distribution of number/percentage of orders based on the number of products

Number of products in orders	Number of orders	%
1 product	118. 721	86,49
2 products	12. 630	9,20
3 products	3. 601	2,62
> 3 products	2. 315	1,69
Total	137. 267	100

Source: SPSS – based on secondary data

Distribution of number/percentage of orders based on the average value of orders

Orders value	Number of orders	%
<100 RON	11. 671	11,25
100 – 500 RON	44. 090	42,51
501 – 1. 000 RON	16. 242	15,66
1. 001 – 5. 000 RON	31. 097	29,98
> 5. 000 RON	621	0,60
Total	103. 721	100

Source: SPSS – based on secondary data

Table no. 5

Chi-Square Tests

Hypothesis	Pearson Chi-Square Value	df	Asymp. Sig. (2-sided)
H₁	348.715a	6	.000
H₂	377.964a	23	.000
H₃	651.883a	207	.000
H₄	390.529a	54	.000
H₅	690.630a	161	.000
H₆	156.380a	9	.000
H₇	626.881a	63	.000

Source: SPSS – based on secondary data

Table no. 6

Distribution of number/percentage of orders on days of the week based on the type of the customer

Days of the week	Individual customer		Organizational customer	
	%	Number	%	Number
Monday	16,15	20. 454	17,10	1. 816
Tuesday	15,56	19. 708	18,46	1. 960
Wednesday	14,10	17. 861	16,00	1. 699
Thursday	15,49	19. 607	17,42	1. 850
Friday	16,63	21. 056	16,22	1. 722
Saturday	11,80	14. 950	7,82	830
Sunday	10,27	13. 013	6,98	741

Source: SPSS – based on secondary data

Table no. 7 (A)

Distribution in percentages of brands based on the day of order

Days of the week	%				
	Samsung	LG	Whirlpool	Beko	Arctic
Monday	15,08	15,81	17,13	17,64	17,39
Tuesday	15,34	15,64	16,96	16,70	16,92
Wednesday	13,23	13,76	15,83	14,41	14,45
Thursday	14,89	15,05	14,39	14,48	14,93
Friday	17,69	19,19	14,73	15,03	15,63
Saturday	13,03	10,84	11,64	11,45	11,23
Sunday	10,73	9,72	9,33	10,28	9,44

Source: SPSS – based on secondary data

Table no. 7

(B) Distribution in percentages of brands based on the day of order

Days of the week	%				
	Hansa	Philips	Electrolux	Zanussi	Sony
Monday	17,63	16,07	17,49	17,91	15,04
Tuesday	16,82	15,96	17,63	17,18	15,36
Wednesday	13,93	14,13	14,11	13,92	15,16
Thursday	13,92	15,37	14,52	14,20	19,38
Friday	14,22	17,36	14,80	14,58	16,11
Saturday	11,94	11,19	11,41	10,62	10,08
Sunday	11,54	9,92	10,04	11,57	8,87

Source: SPSS – based on secondary data

<div align="right">**Table no. 8**</div>

Calculated values in the Kruskal-Wallis test

	Value of orders (H_8)	Value of orders (H_9)
Chi-Square	164.307	490.816
df	7	7
Asymp. Sig.	.000	.000

Source: SPSS – based on secondary data