

Current Consumer Behaviour

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Abstract

The consumer, by definition the natural or legal person, who is predisposed to different purchases of material products or services, has a new connotation in the paradigm of global marketing nowadays, easily moving from the offline to the online consumer stage.

Consumerism, this phenomenon received with the open arms by the large mass of the population, has brought many benefits to the producers of material goods and services, but also to the consumers, who have assimilated consumerism as an idea of spending their free time to which the classical purchase may be added.

This paper's purpose is to evidenciate the role and action of consumerism regarding the usual shopping behaviour, but also certain changes regarding the growth of e-commerce against traditional types of shopping.

Key words: consumer, consumerism, global marketing

J.E.L. classification: A1

1. Introduction

In this paper, we have chosen to investigate aspects of current consumer behaviour, from the perspective of a large-scale phenomenon, such as consumerism. Consumerism could not exist without marketing, as the actions achieved by means of the marketing strategies lead to the increase of this phenomenon in what we call the private capitalist society, characteristic of countries with a developed or developing economy. Consumerism also appeared in the context of market supersaturation, the companies taking the decision to produce even more, transforming the wishes of potential consumers into tangible needs.

Marketing aims to meet the needs and desires of consumers, accomplishing them. But, knowing consumers is not a simple thing. It is possible for them to express their needs and desires in a certain way and to act in a completely opposite way; sometimes it is possible even not to know the true motivations that cause them to buy, or to react to the factors that change their purchasing decision at the last moment.

Marketers have the duty of analysing the desires, the manner of perception, the preferences and buying behaviour of the targeted consumers. This analysis will allow the creation of products with new features, the establishment of prices, the choice of distribution channels, the elaboration of advertising messages and other elements of the marketing mix.

All these efforts to influence the consumer are part of the marketer's arsenal, as the latter will always be inclined to research the characteristics of the buying behaviour, before launching the action of selling itself. Consumerism is also interdependent with the phenomenon of globalization, the two leading to the unprecedented modification of the current buying behaviour, this aspect leading to the emergence of overconsumption, that is, the consumption higher than usual consumption needs.

2. Literature review

Because consumer behaviour is a complex and multidimensional notion, being influenced by a variety of factors (social, psychological, economic, demographic, cultural), an interdisciplinary research is required.

"The field of consumer behaviour studies deals with how individuals, groups and organizations select, buy, use and dispose of goods, services, ideas or experiences that meet their needs and desires." (Kotler, 2003, p. 233)

One of the most well-known definitions of consumer behaviour is given by the American Marketing Association: "a dynamic interaction regarding impression and perception, behaviour and common natural events, through which human beings direct the changes taking place in their lives". (Grigorut and Serban Comanescu, 2007, p. 93)

A more concise definition belongs to J.F. Engel, D.T Kollat and R.D.Blackwell: "the ensemble of the acts of individuals, directly related to the purchase of goods and services, the ensemble that includes the decision-making process that precedes and determines these acts". (Grigorut and Serban Comanescu, 2007, p. 94)

Why is the reason to innovate, create, produce, sell, only in terms of consumer need and desire so important today?

Are there any situations contrary to this principle?

In certain situations, regarding companies and developing or undeveloped countries, marketing decisions belong to governments, manufacturers, distributors, while consumer options have been reduced to a minimum, this aspect being possible due to the low level of income available to the consumer and last but not least due to the lack of competition between the companies operating in these countries. It seems that in these cases, the marketing orientation does not target the customer in the first phase, but the producer. This situation can be assimilated to a stage of non-consumerism.

In the second situation, characteristic of countries with a developed, capitalist economy, the difference is clear, the producers thinking entirely about what the consumer wants, what they really want from its product. In this context, as compared to the first case, the purchasing power increases, the possibility of purchase is higher, the competition is fierce in the respective market, so the role of the consumer becomes extremely important. This will influence all the decisions regarding the elaboration of the product mix of the respective company - product, price, promotion, distribution. (Thomas, 1998, p. 263)

In conclusion, we can say that the real success in marketing depends on the achievement and implementation of a marketing mix, which is inclined and oriented in principle towards consumers, rather than to the one used by the competition. This situation is conducive to the emergence and manifestation of consumerism.

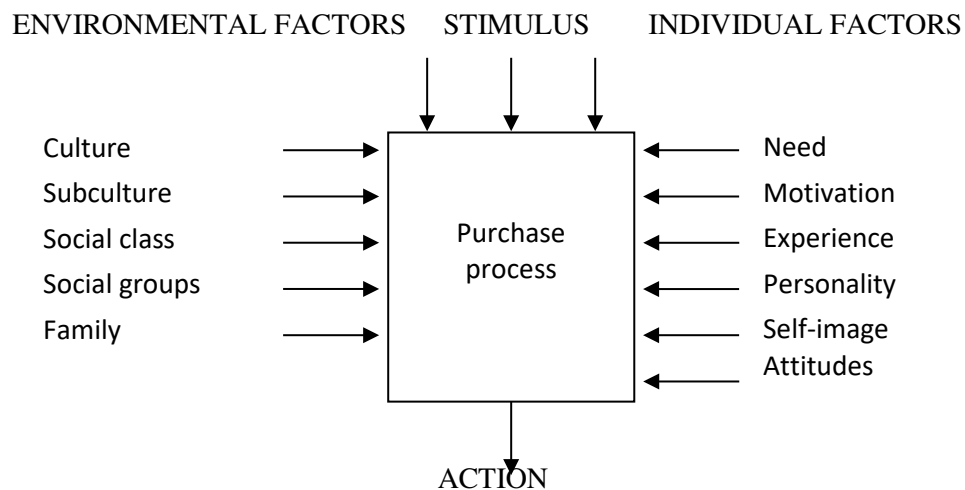
Regarding the composition of the goods market we distinguish two types:

- The consumer goods market, characteristic of individual consumers, or the B to C (business to consumer) market
- The market of industrial goods, characteristic of organizational consumers, or B to B (business to business) market

Within the consumer goods market, we distinguish two major groups of factors, included in the explanatory factors of the purchase, which influence the consumer's purchase decision:

- Environmental factors: culture, subculture, social class, social groups, family
- Individual factors: need, motivation, experience, personality, self-image, attitudes. (Meghisan, Nistorescu and Serban Comanescu, 2008)

Figure no. 1. The explanatory factors of the purchase



Source: (Meghisan, Nistorescu and Serban Comanescu, 2008, p. 94)

The environmental factors can be highlighted with Veblen's scheme :

- Culture
- Subculture
- Social class
- Reference group
- Contact group
- Family
- Individual

1. Culture reflects the traditions, attitudes, beliefs, rules of behaviour, characteristic values of a country;

2. Subculture - is a group that can be differentiated and customized within a culture, having common features; the criteria for differentiating the subcultures are: area, religion, language, ethnicity, occupation, home environment, tradition.

3. Social class - is a relatively homogeneous division of the society, defined by factors such as wealth, income, occupation, degree of education, social conscience, values and similar behaviours.

4. Groups - group: a group is made up of several persons having common goals and needs that can only be met by cooperating.

a) belongingness groups: are groups to which the individual belongs physically at a given time (the family is the most eloquent example);

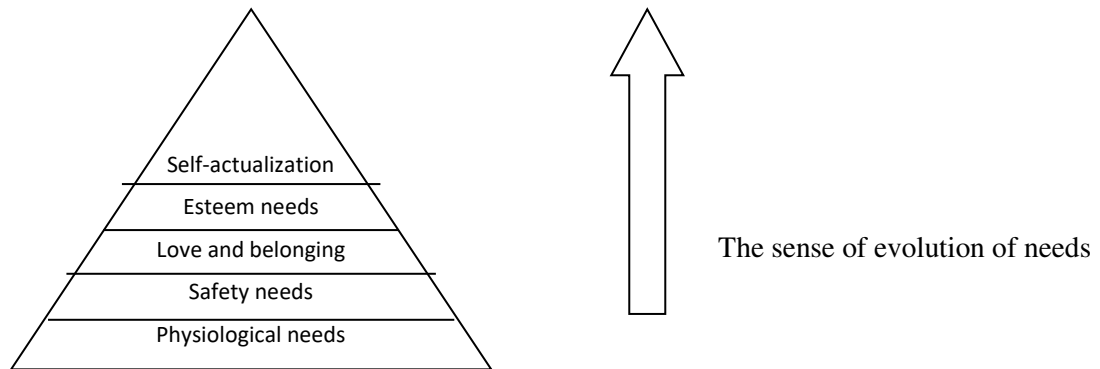
b) reference groups: are groups to which the individual refers and which influence their behaviour and values (associations, businessmen, unions). (Grigorut and Serban Comanescu, 2007, pp. 94-95)

5. Situational factors-all those factors specific to a moment or place of observation that do not result from knowing the personal (intraindividual) attributes or the stimulus (the chosen alternative), and which have a demonstrable and systematic effect on the current behaviour (Ristea, Ana - Lucia (coordinator) - op cit. P.174 - the source cited by Cornel Grigorut, Adrian Serban Comanescu - Marketing Elements - Tests and Applications, 2nd Edition, Ed Bren, Bucharest, 2007, p 95).

6. Individual factors

a) needs –represent a lack of something necessary, and in this context in order to meet it, the person must consume a certain amount of energy. The most famous list of needs is Maslow's famous Pyramid.

Figure no. 2. Maslow's pyramid



Source: (Meghisan, Nistorescu and Serban Comanescu, 2008, p. 101)

b) The reason is what can replace at any given time the need, it is the impetus, if we can say so, which pushes the individual towards the decision to buy the product or service.

The reasons may be as follows:

- psychological/physiological;
- rational/emotional;
- conscious/unconscious;
- positive/negative.

c) Experience is one of the most important aspects of the purchasing decision.

It consists of several stages, such as:

- the motivation of the individual to experiment
- the signalling coming from the consumer area
- an answer, after the individual analyses from the point of view of a mental or physical process
- a strengthening of the individual's argumentation, to perform the learning approach through the accumulated experience.

d) Personality represents the totality of the characteristics that relate to the fundamental characteristics of a person and which determines him to act in a certain sense, having a well-defined purpose.

Examples of features of the individual, which determines him deeply in making the purchase decision could be (stability/instability, reflection/impulse, activity/passivity, calm/nervousness).

e) The self-image, or the way the individual perceives himself, can be approached in two ways - the real self-image, as it is seen and perceived in reality, and the ideal self-image, that is the way he would like to be seen and interpreted by other people.

f) Attitudes represent those states, predispositions, feelings, towards people, objects, groups, etc. They have the role of interacting in the decision-making process of the individual with respect to the action of buying by attracting and rejecting.

3. Research methodology

In order to carry out a marketing research regarding the current consumer behaviour in Romania, I used the online questionnaire method, applied on a representative sample of respondents, more precisely we used Google Form.

The questionnaire was made of 11 closed and open questions.

Closed questions are those questions with a unique answer, by which the respondent offers a clear and firm answer to the inquirer, the latter being able to analyse precisely and concisely through such an answer.

Open questions are those questions that allow one or more answers, different answers as a rule.

To avoid certain inconveniences and problems I used a specific and easy-to-understand language for the respondent, delimiting myself from an economical technical language specific to marketing research.

The questions were addressed to a measurable sample of almost 100 respondents.

The area targeted demographically was the city of Constanta in particular, but also Bucharest, Romania.

The degree of education, people who have graduated high school and higher education.

The age category of the respondents was between 18-65 years.

Income level: dependents and financially independent persons.

Occupation: students, employees.

Gender: women and men

Marital status: married, unmarried

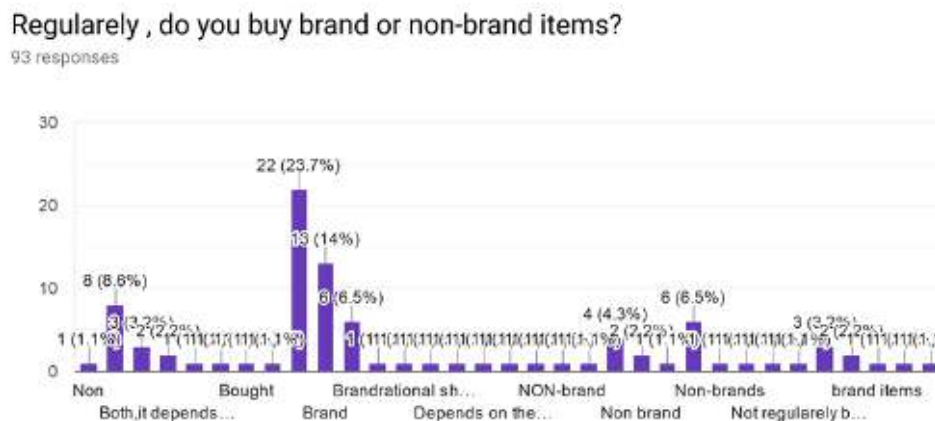
The purpose of the questionnaire was to identify a correlation, a strong link between the actual consumer buying behaviour from the target sample (Romanian retail and banking market) and consumerism, especially consumerism through brand purchase.

4. Findings

After analysing the results of almost 100 questionnaires, we concluded the following:

a) Consumerism is closely related to the brand purchase, most of the respondents being inclined only towards brand purchase and not towards non-brand ones.

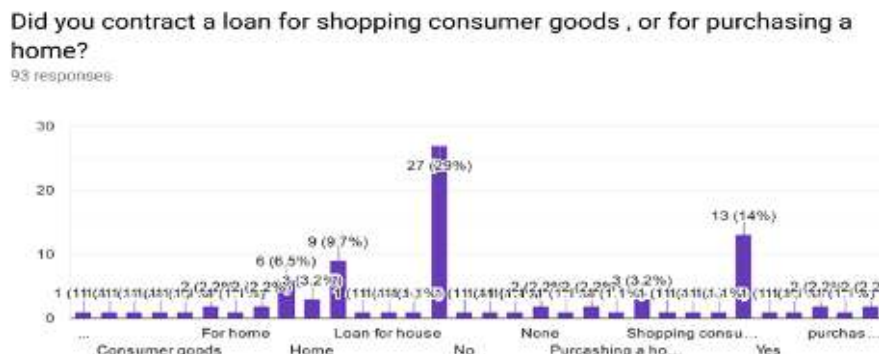
Chart no 1- Brands or non-brands



Source: Google questionnaire form

b) The current consumerism is related to the purchasing power, implicitly in the situation in which they do not have own income, the consumers resort to financial loans, both for the purchase of goods and real estate, the percentage of people who borrow being higher for the purchase of goods than of properties

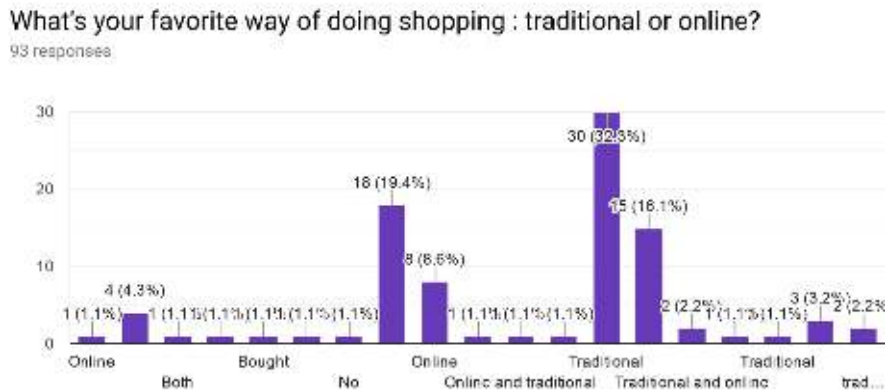
Chart no 2 Loan for shopping costumer goods or for purchasing a home



Source: Google questionnaire form

c) The traditional mode of purchase remains the main option, but it will soon be reached by the online mode of purchase -buying, as i would estimate an outrunning of the traditional mode by the online one in the near future.

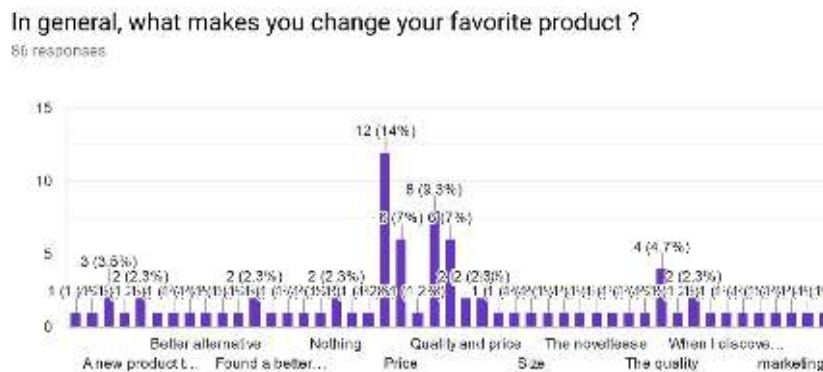
Chart no 3 Favourite way of doing shopping



Source: Google questionnaire form

d) Price is the main argument, for which the respondents would choose to change their favourite product for another product, but other options of the respondents are also interesting, such as quality, price&quality, innovation, a superior product with better characteristics, price versus quality, brand, etc.

Chart no 4 Decision to change favourite product



Source: Google questionnaire form

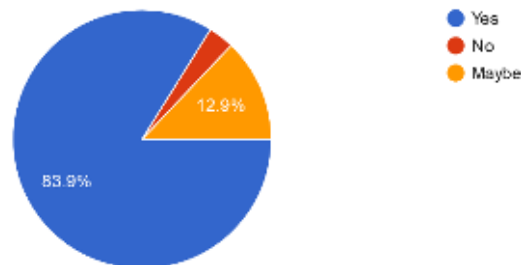
e) The rational mode of purchase is the one chosen by the respondent, versus that out of instinct.

h) Over 80% of the respondents stated that they buy more than needed.

Chart no 8. Are we buying more than we need

Do you think that we are buying more than we need?

93 responses



Source: Google questionnaire form

5. Conclusions

Consumerism is a reality, both in Romania and globally. There is a close connection between consumerism and globalization, since the desire to manufacture as much as possible and to diversify the product range is not a coincidence, and it has to do with factors such as the increase in the purchasing power globally, the influence of electronic commerce on the mass of consumers, the power of the brand owned by the big multinational companies, the innovation that shortens the life cycle of the current products, as well as the desire of the companies to obtain a profit which they can redistribute in the form of dividends to the shareholders, etc.

We observe the increasing trend of online trade versus traditional trade, as this aspect is going to change in the future the context given to current consumerism, more precisely the leisure component of the definition of consumerism will become an individual reality - isolated, the consumer relaxing himself only by means of online purchases, which will take few minutes.

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