

ONLINE BUYING BEHAVIOR

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Abstract: The foundation of marketing activity in the online environment cannot be achieved without the acknowledging of the importance of understanding consumer behavior by entrepreneurs and marketers. The significant way buyers decide on the purchase of products and services, by which factors they are influenced in the process of electronic interactions, what are the advantages sought and how they are perceived in the purchase process - all this determines different behaviors and consumption patterns, in which they find the factors reflecting the personality, values, perceptions and attitudes, lifestyle, etc. purchase decision and user status: non-user, occasional user, frequent, migratory, reversible. This research addresses the decision-making process of purchasing in the online environment and analyzes the purchasing behavior of some products. The research highlighted some obstacles in the purchasing process in the online environment, as well as opportunities of improvement of the purchasing experience.

Keywords: consumer behavior, online environment

JEL Classification: M30, M31

Introduction

The virtual space represents a challenge for marketers, who actively promote various products and services within it, as well as an effective purchasing environment for consumers. Within the virtual market, virtual businesses are conducted, which in turn include e-commerce—transactions carried out through virtual platforms. Among the important components of the virtual market we can identify: virtual players—suppliers, intermediaries, and buyers (Rădoi, 2005, p.136)—who are recognized online; virtual products (digital or smart goods, digitized physical goods, physical products, and digitized services); and digital processes—digital applications, electronic tools, and technologies, which together form the infrastructure of the virtual market.

In the virtual (electronic) space, the supplier presents electronic catalogs of products and services, pursuing multiple objectives: informing potential clients, encouraging purchases, facilitating the reciprocal exchange of information between businesses, enabling collaboration within common platforms for conducting electronic business, and carrying out joint business activities. The consumer interacts electronically with the supplier and makes decisions regarding the purchase of a product or service.

According to previous studies, online purchasing has emerged as the most dynamic and visible dimension of the new digital economy (idem, p.152), providing it with flexibility and responsiveness (idem, p.127). The digitalization of the economy, IoT, and AI have transformed—and continue to transform—the interaction between consumers and sellers. Consumer behavior manifests itself through new trends and dimensions that must be thoroughly researched and considered in the development of market strategies.

The aim of this article is to investigate the behavioral shifts of consumers in the online environment in the Republic of Moldova, to highlight obstacles in the process of online purchasing, as well as to identify opportunities for improving the purchasing experience. The applied research methods are: general methods of analysis and synthesis, statistical data analysis, and documentation.

Characteristics and Trends of Consumer Behavior in the Online Environment

Consumer behavior, as the dynamic outcome of specific interactional relations among the consumer’s psychological processes and influenced by a multitude of exogenous factors, is highly complex, regardless of the purchasing environment. In the process of acquiring goods, whether offline or online, consumer behaviors may differ as follows:

Complex behavior – characterized by high consumer involvement in the occasional purchase of luxury products, following thorough market research;

Dissonance-reducing behavior – where consumers are involved in the purchase but remain uncertain, hesitant, and poorly informed;

Habitual behavior – developed over time through the repeated purchase of frequently used products;

Variety-seeking behavior – corresponding to the consumer’s intention to try something new.

Online buyers exhibit the following inherent characteristics and behavioral particularities:

They are generally younger than offline buyers, innovative and risk-taking, predominantly men but also women, the latter being more sensitive and exploratory. Buyers possess digital skills or are digital natives, attentive, convenience-oriented, time-conscious, and attracted to a wide variety of choices.

They search for solutions to their problems on the internet, drawing information from bloggers and vloggers focused on addressing everyday issues. In this way, organizations gain both authority in the online environment and the trust of their audiences.

They compare different brands to identify the advantages offered by competitors, with price remaining the main factor in making an online purchasing decision.

They purchase with agility and without bureaucracy. Buyers are flexible in their decision-making, avoiding lengthy, difficult, confusing, and discouraging processes that lead to cart abandonment.

They analyze the opinions of other people who have purchased online, showing strong trust in such sources, with influencers becoming highly popular.

They expect purchase safety and maximum cybersecurity. When the buyer confirms the purchase of a product, it means they expect complete security at all stages of the buying process, as well as beyond it.

According to the Deloitte Report, the main trends of European consumers in the online environment in 2025 are the following:

Personalization and hyper-personalization – the implementation of innovative technologies, AI, and the use of data lead digitalized consumers to develop new, unique experiences aligned with their individual profiles. Consumer data is shared by its owner, while ensuring confidentiality.

Community and authenticity – brands increasingly rely not only on major marketing influencers but also on developing loyal customer communities. This involves building deeper connections through exclusive content, private communications, and collaborative content, thereby fostering a sense of belonging.

Immersive and conversational experiences – consumers increasingly use voice assistants for search and commerce, creating a more seamless and conversational shopping experience. Furthermore, the metaverse and augmented reality (AR) bridge the gap between online and offline commerce, offering new ways to interact with products.

Speed and convenience – when choosing products, consumers have growing expectations for speed, convenience, reliability of digital services, and delivery. Consumers tend to choose brands that provide transparent, fast, exclusive, and safer experiences and solutions. Customer loyalty is targeted in the long term, based on subscription models and client community memberships.

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Conscious consumerism – consumers are increasingly making mindful, rational purchases, based on value and digital interactions, aimed at reducing overload and decision-making fatigue.

Digital responsibility – sustainability and ethical consumerism are becoming increasingly important in the behavior of digital consumers. This demands social and ethical responsibility in marketing from suppliers in their processes and operations.

Research on the virtual market in the Republic of Moldova has highlighted the following trends:

According to statistical data provided by the National Bank of Moldova (NBM), in 2024, e-commerce was carried out through 2202 e-commerce platforms (compared to 411 in 2018); the value of transactions conducted through e-commerce platforms using payment cards issued in the Republic of Moldova in 2024, carried out within the country, amounted to MDL 3,253.8 million (Table 1), representing an increase of 29.1% compared to 2023 (idem, p.35);

Table 1. Number and Value of Transactions Conducted Through E-Commerce Platforms Using Payment Cards Issued in the Republic of Moldova, 2024

Operations	Conducted in the Republic of Moldova		Conducted Abroad	
	Number of units	Share, %	Number of units	Share, %
Number of transactions	6,395,220	23.0	21,679,595	77.0
Value of transactions, MDL	3,253,848,358	24.0	10,209,565,131	76.0

Source: elaborated by the author based on data from source Raportul privind evoluția infrastructurilor pieței financiare din Republica Moldova, anul 2024. Available at: <https://bnm.md/ro/content/raportul-privind-evolutia-infrastructurilor-pietei-financiare-din-republica-moldova-anul-2024>. (Accessed: 23 September 2025).

- both in terms of transaction value and number, the majority of online purchases are conducted abroad (76% and 77%, respectively);
- according to research conducted with the support of American Chamber of Commerce in Moldova, in the Republic of Moldova, there are approximately 480 retail service platforms (hotels, guesthouses, educational centers, airlines, and electronic ticket vendors), forming the largest group of online service retailers;
- about 470–520 active online stores sell tangible products in the Republic of Moldova; in the second semester of 2023, approximately 327,600 urban consumers aged 18–64 had online shopping experience, of which about 100,000 purchased tangible products online;
- in 2023, the virtual purchases of Moldovan consumers averaged approximately €91 per month;
 - approximately 80% of the adult population does not engage in e-commerce;
 - e-commerce in the Republic of Moldova is represented 40% by electronics and household appliances, followed by auto parts and automotive maintenance products (10%), then three other product groups: ready-to-eat foods, clothing and footwear, and finally cosmetics and ticket sales;
 - in 2023, 67.2% of online consumers paid cash/card upon delivery, initially wishing to verify the quality of the delivered product before payment;
 - approximately 30–40% of purchases of electronics, household appliances, furniture, and other products are made using the "buy now, pay later" method.

The main problems related to consumer behavior in the online environment in the Republic of Moldova are: distrust in product quality, perceived differences between the ordered and received product, delivery of refurbished or damaged products presented as new, leading to consumer dissatisfaction; fear of cyber fraud and scams; incomplete information; low development of websites, among others.

From the perspective of web development and Search Engine Marketing (SEM), a multitude of other factors can have direct implications for explaining consumer behavior. Data such as the time a consumer spends on a specific page of an online store or the entire site, the landing page, the source that directed the consumer to the online store (a search engine, a banner click, an online magazine, or a social network website), and the keywords that led to accessing the online store, represent only part of the abundant information sources that can help merchants optimize their online store to better meet consumer needs. Research shows that when searching online, consumers use search engines more than manufacturer websites, comparison websites, or discussion forums (Hovsepyan, 2020, p.73).

Additionally, factors such as income, family, buyer values, demographic factors, etc., significantly influence purchasing decisions, determining consumption patterns, preferences, and attitudes. The influence of these factors determines the status of users on e-commerce platforms in the online environment: non-user, occasional user, frequent user, or migrator.

For effective online sales, it is important to build trust in product quality and price, as well as a sense of security. The perception of costs (including both product price and costs arising from the process of searching, informing, ordering, and receiving the product) and the availability of the website are also important.

Conclusion

At the current stage, online commerce in the Republic of Moldova is still underdeveloped. A deeper understanding of online consumer behavior helps businesses forecast sales more accurately and design effective marketing strategies, ultimately boosting profits through digital channels. The main solutions in this regard are: enhancing public trust in the security and advantages of online shopping, developing websites and increasing their availability, and offering differentiated product portfolios available at the requested time.

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