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# QUALITATIVE INSIGHT AT THE PROCESS OF PURCHASING

## Introduction

In the literature there exist several models of consumer purchasing process – defining and describing its stages, length, or complexity. In some popular approaches the process starts at the time of realization of the consumer needs, then he or she tries to satisfy them by seeking the right product with specific parameters, compares the offer and as a result – decides to buy chosen one. However, when the number of perceived alternatives increases, decision difficulties are arising as an effect of significant growth of the advertising intensiveness and diversity of advertising tools, as well as significant changes in retail including the physical channel and virtual channel (e-commerce, and through the development of virtual communities even f-commerce) competition and complementarity. In effect there are observed frequent shifts from one channel to another even in particular decision process, characterized as multi-channel behavior<sup>1</sup>.

The emergence of the Internet and e-commerce has changed many aspects of consumer behaviour, particularly more intense users. What was a novelty for some, to which they had to adapt because of the way they affected life functioning, work, for others it is a reality that was. All of these attitudes and behaviour affect the development of modern trade. Determine the success of some players and the fall of others. Although, this is a fairly big simplification, it is undeniable that purchasing decisions affect profits or losses of the sellers. Therefore, it is worth

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<sup>1</sup> P. L. Mokhtarian, W. L. Tang: *Accounting for Taste Heterogeneity in Purchase Channel Intention Modeling: An Example from Northern California for Book Purchases*. “Journal of Choice Modeling” 2009, 2(2), pp. 148-172.

a closer look at the buying process of the consumer. While the buying behavior of people the Internet heavy users moderated by information technology are well researched – described in the literature including previous works of the authors<sup>2</sup> – the corresponding attitudes and behaviors of people rarely or never use the Internet are not yet sufficiently deepened.

## 1. Method

The article was developed based on the results of qualitative research conducted in October 2012, funded by a grant from the National Science Center. Was carried out 60 mini IDIs, which uses a projection techniques: sort of pictures and unfinished sentences test. The participants were people of all ages (from students to retirees up) does not benefit or rarely use the Internet.

## 2. The image sort technique

Using techniques of the sort of images allowed to see diversity in the procurement processes of consumers who, for various reasons, do not use the internet for shopping. Participants in the study were presented 18 drawings, of which 3 is repeated to give the participant the opportunity to amplify certain stages (Figure 1).

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<sup>2</sup> R. Mącik, G. Mazurek, D. Mącik: *Channel Characteristics Influence on Physical vs. Virtual Channel Choice for Information Search and Purchase – The Case of Polish Young Consumers*. “International Journal of Cyber Society and Education” June 2012, Vol. 5, No. 1, pp. 35-54; R. Mącik, M. Nalewajek: *Motywacja racjonalności w korzystaniu z ICT w procesie podejmowania decyzji zakupowych przez konsumenta w świetle wyników badań empirycznych*. In: *Badania marketingowe w zarządzaniu przedsiębiorstwem*. Red. K. Mazurek-Łopacińska i M. Sobocińska. „Prace Naukowe Uniwersytetu Ekonomicznego we Wrocławiu” nr 237, pp. 85-98; *Wpływ technologii informacyjnych i komunikacyjnych na zachowania konsumentów – studium empiryczne*. Red. R. Mącik. Wydawnictwo UMCS, Lublin 2011.

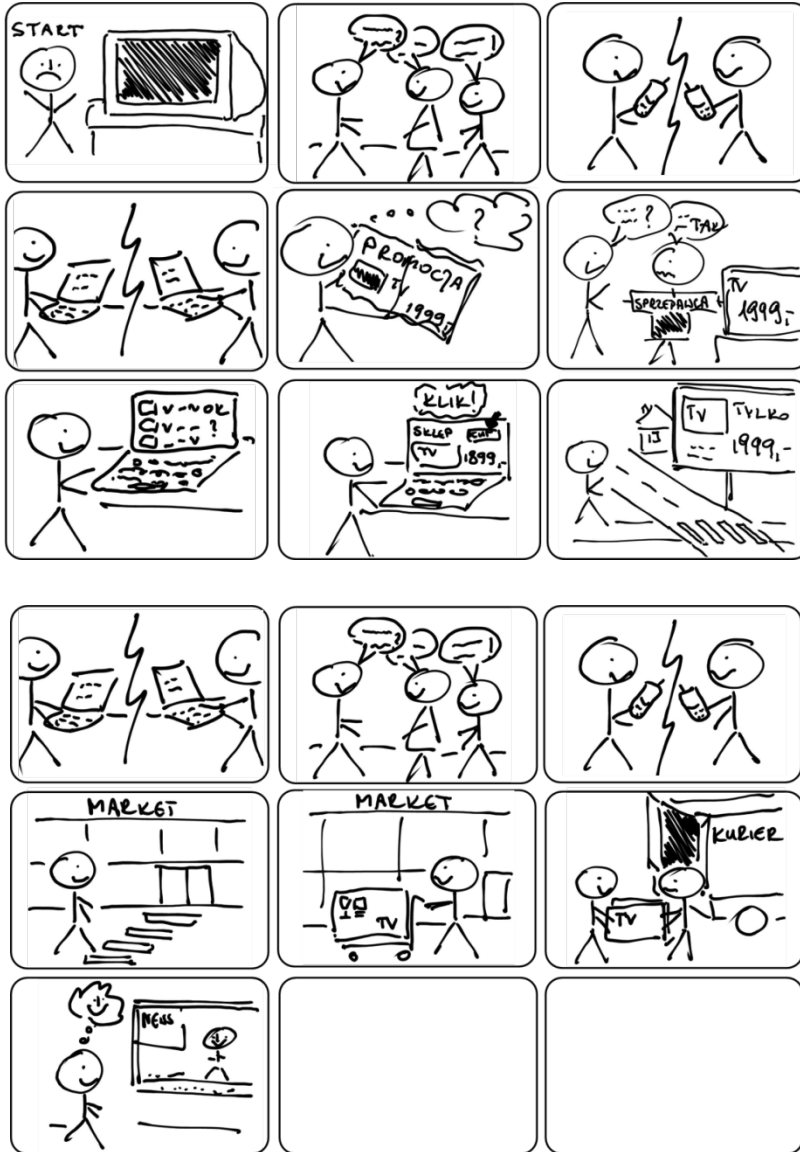


Figure 1. Stimuli for sort of pictures

Two of them was empty, which gave the opportunity to sketch in any fitting for them situation. The task has been described to the participant as follows: “Your old TV-set in some weeks become obsolete because of switching-off analogue TV-transmitters. You decided to buy new TV-set. Please use following drawings to make a story of your purchase, showing the sequence of steps leading to pur-

chase. You have the opportunity to use as many images as needed. The condition was only to be used as the first drawing with the word START (illustrating the situation of the broken TV-set)”.

On average, a story depicting the purchasing process consisted of 6-7 images. The shortest photo story had 3 pictures and the longest – 13. The vast majority showed a great similarity in the layout process, which can be summarized as follows (Figure 2).

Broken TV → Talk (direct or phone call) → [looking for special offer] → going to the market → talk with salesperson → purchase.

Choosing “looking for special offer” picture (like watching advertising paper or billboard) was very often but wasn’t use by everybody so authors decided to place it on bracket. The rest was used by almost each person.

People using internet rarely or never didn’t use in their stories drawings showing: conversation among people through the laptop computer, usage of price comparison agents, delivery by courier service, nor online shopping. There are pictures connected with “online word”. So their behaviour are very consistent.

Next they were asked to talk about their buying process story. The authors wanted to verify the motivation of using particular pictures.



Figure 2. Typical story provided by participant

The results show that the conversation with other people is very important. It helps in many situations. One of them is situation when people needed have conversation to understand what happened, why their TV is broken. In other case, they wanted to consult – where they can buy this, how they can do it or how is the approximate market price because they did not inspect it all the time. Some of them needed to help with choosing the best product because they did not feel so good choosing electronic item.

People were interested in looking for special offers. If they have to buy something now, they wanted to buy it in good price. So they were taking leaflets and advertising paper from friends and markets or looking for promotions on billboards. For part of them – price is very important.

People trust more their friends rather than salesperson. They decided to gather information from their friends first, and next to verify this with salespersons knowledge and recommendations. The respondents showed awareness of market practices, for example, that depends on the seller to sell a product, but a family or friend who is interested in this topic (electronics) – choose the best one for them.

### **3. Unfinished sentences test**

Purchasing behavior of persons who personally do not use the Internet is less affected by ICT related developments in retail industry. Such persons don't like and don't need to buy over the Internet, asking to do so their family of friends, or have strong negative attitudes toward the internet. These issues were verified by the unfinished sentences test.

For participants purchases were usually associated with: expense, spending money, counting cash in a store, lifting heavy things with pleasure, with the release of a large amount of money, waste of time, the need (housewife), women (men). As you can see outweigh the negative associations that may influence the shape (length and diversity) of the purchasing process.

The Internet was seen as a tool to: gather information, to receive information, contacts, to all, especially to the study, contact to the world – “everything you can find on the Internet, read, see, a lot of interesting things to learn”, to find difficult words to explain, to play, to buy and to sell, to work, to waste the time. Very common examples was to gather information and communicate with others.

Unfinished sentences test also examined the situations in which people call from the store to the other. Most indicated there were occasions when I need to

get advice (“When he wants advised me what to buy and do what I needed at all”). Help is needed in the evaluation of the brand, the company and the quality of the product. Others call when they do not know what to buy or want to tell that there is a new product, or special offer. The important question was why people are not using the Internet?

The research show some objective issue like having problem with getting fixed-line connection to the internet or Internet is now too expensive in place, where they live. For certain people it is no necessity using internet because they have children who can check what they (parents) want.

Some people has too much work and they do not have enough free time to spend (internet takes too much time in their opinion). As much as they have work, family and domesticity they won’t chose internet.

Other said that they are not interested in learning how it works, how to use computer, so they prefer stay aside. They do not feel necessity to change it now because someone is doing it instead of them.

For some people the reason in somewhere else: “(...) people just have never used it and do not know that you can go shopping and find something and to communicate and have fun, meet a new person (...) just there is no one who has to convince, persuade, they do not have a computer nor the internet”. They are thinking that: “(...) not everyone likes (to do things on the internet), not everyone can, not everyone needs and not everyone knows how to use the internet, not in all cases. The core maybe everyone can, but some specific issues (...) I am not sure. People have different personalities, some want, others do not”.

Respondents noted about age which determine using Internet. According to them, the younger people use the Internet more frequently than older. This is due to both the education and the fact that they were not being learn how to use computer – “It seems to me that older people are more such fossilized, less open, afraid of what certain decisions on the basis of a single button, and therefore do not use”.

An important issue is also beliefs like the Internet is a waste of time “(...) which means that it is not effective, and this time, I’d rather be doing something more useful”.

People showed also some concerns. For example they are afraid of child pornography, pedophiles. One said: “They are afraid that if something bad to click will be brought to justice costs, a result of their actions. Not everyone on the internet are oriented” or: “I’m afraid that I can spoil. Well, I can turn something may accidentally block something. The computer can go wrong”.

Do not using Internet binds to specific preferences. People prefer to read traditional books and newspapers, because it is more convenient and healthier for your eyes. They believe that the Internet is bad for your health.

Some see conflicting information on the Internet and it decides that reject it – “(...) other people think that, for example, there are many other, more reliable sources of information and should not be, for example, be limited only to the internet”.

Study showed some specific behaviour: “I think some people do not use the internet because they prefer their lives more realistic. People who sit at home and browse the internet all the time, (...) they sit in it – you can tell, these are so-called «no-life people» I sometimes hear. They have problems with the contact of the normal man, afraid to approach on the street, park or store. Therefore, such people are deficient in my opinion, as eager to use the internet. They do in the shop and everything and they cannot go to the store and speak to a live person. Therefore, the internet gives them the illusion that they are anonymous and therefore not afraid to speak there as vulgar, as it often is”.

Another very interesting behaviour there was: “I believe that those who stay away from the internet already know it, so to speak, addictive properties. Oh and just decided that they prefer to live such a life as it once was, that is, without the internet, where everyone met frequently saw each other more often, in some places than just keep sitting at home, talking only through the internet and just enough. (...) Because that's what I'm one of those people who are used to its features and consider it to be evil”.

The authors decided to ask people in IDIs interview is the Internet does not have anything to offer them? Answers have been mixed. Some of them think it have some, but they still do not use it: “Yes, it have. But I do not know and I do not want to know. I am sorry to waste time sitting on the Internet”. Some said that: “I cannot find myself in the Internet”, or that they are too old. The others showed their belief that limited them like this: “I think the internet as a thief of time and know that it is dependent on the Internet, so I would not want me to get addicted to the internet, because I know that at this time I can do a lot of other activities that will be more beneficial for me, for example, read any interesting book, or meet up with my friends or going for a walk”. Only one person said that: “I believe that there is nothing to offer, I prefer my life for what it is”.

In the face of all beliefs and barriers to people who do not use the Internet often are able to start using it? The authors verified what would have to happen to make use of the internet often. The answers were very interesting. Some of them were external obstacles that must be overcome. For example, the issue of getting

connected to the Internet at home (not using it in friends' house or in an Internet cafe), a smaller fee for the internet or have a computer on the property, without sharing it with other family members.

People still feel the fear associated with the use of the Internet: "If it were easier to service and even this fear that can creep into a virus that can infect my computer and then I could not use computer to work" or "maybe if I feel a greater sense of security in using it, I can use it more often".

Some people were very determined and declared that they would not normally choose to use the internet. Change the situation can only call situational factors, such as:

- illness: "I do not know what would happen. I guess I would have to be pinned to the bed wheelchair, I could not go out of his apartment because I live on the 7th floor (...)", but sometimes they changed their minds after a moment: "I was sick or bedridden, I could not get out of the house and it would be so my window to the world then (...) or (...) If I would have to spend at the moment more time to explore the Internet, then maybe I would wanted more use of the Internet";
- loosing job: "It seems to me that I would have to lose my job. Or neglect household chores, then it seems to me that this would lead to would start to use the Internet more often. Either day would be extended by a few hours";
- no other possibility to perform certain tasks: "For example, if I really wanted to learn something and there would be no children at home, which is usually in such things disclaim. I think that if I looked in and through trial and error I might finally bit into. I think then that I was mobilized more to peek into the Internet and to overcome any barriers that currently accompany me", "I think if the kids left the house, and I would not have data out there who outsource things like bills or other things there. Well I would have to get";
- job requirement: "Would have to be that, for example, my job would require me to do, make greater use of the Internet. But I would not want to work in this profession";
- no other possibility to contact: "If I had only one opportunity to communicate with their loved ones who were far away, in a remote corner, and I can be contacted via the internet is only would use this option";
- there are no shops in the area (so they have to buy over the Internet);
- when all important information from their point of view, will be available only in the online edition.

Sometimes, however, they missed the simple things: "I would have to go through training, I will use the internet then".



People have associated online shopping as a quick, convenient, stress-free (everything can be bought quickly, without running the shops). But also as: uncertain, dangerous – you cannot touch and see, the possibility of fraud – pay and do not receive the goods, or send bad. Some people treated online purchase as a walking in the fog because “You cannot see tangible goods, the goods may be (...) it may be defective or different quality than we thought” or “this is such a buying a pig in a poke, but it gets a guarantee (...). The thing is that once you buy better, the other time – the worse goods. This is the lottery”.

A great example of fears was this: “I do not understand how you can buy something you do not see the reality and we have confidence that what we ordered for our will. My biggest concern is that at the time when I will send someone my money, he will send me a piece of soap instead of the phone. Then it will not be a good deal for me. And as we know, the police in our country very rarely catch the perpetrators of such a situation”.

Buying over the internet for non-users is perceived as taking the easy way out. The negative attitude of parents to their children caused even that they discouraged their children online shopping. But when they were asked about perception of people doing online shopping – mostly it was positive (they save time and money) or neutral attitude. Further discussion showed, however, that the people buying the network are seen as lazy and closed to the world, wasteful, more comfortable.

For persons not using the internet buying in physical stores is in contrast: pleasant, material, real, true, safe and without waiting or hidden charges. There is a daily routine, gives a pleasure from looking at things, touching them, trying etc. Only negative connotations are: pressure from sales personnel or amount of time spent on shopping.

## Conclusion

The Internet and connected with it information technologies are influencing purchases of consumers, also those who are using the Internet less frequently or even personally are not using it. The influence is rather on the level of not doing something rather than using technology. So such persons have knowledge about possibility to buy over the internet, but mostly from mental reasons they don't want to engage personally in such activities (suppressing known advantages with imagined disadvantages). But those obvious advantages of virtual chan-

nel are leading some of them to ask somebody (family, friends) for making purchases for them.

Most important thing is that refusal of the Internet use has a dimension of fear of technology, fear of the unknown, irreversible and addictive. Such negative beliefs about the usefulness of the Internet in everyday life and thus the purchasing, leads to the lack of motivation to use it<sup>3</sup>. If we add the possibility to use other people – such as children, spouse / partner to meet their targets and to avoid the use of the Internet, transferring the perceived risk to another person can be attractive – you can achieve your goal without incurring liability for its implementation. They present learned helplessness.

In conclusion there is a great need for consumer education, providing true information and training to learn – particularly older persons – how to safely use the internet, how to buy and pay over the Internet, which allow them not to be digitally excluded from society.

Further research and monitoring of attitude changes are needed to help to promote internet usage by consumers nowadays avoiding it.

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<sup>3</sup> J.A.G.M. van Dijk: *The Deepening Divide: Inequality in the Information Society*. SAGE 2005, p. 21.

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## QUALITATIVE INSIGHT AT THE PROCESS OF PURCHASING

### Summary

The article is based on the results of qualitative research and is an attempt to find answers to questions about how the consumer decides to buy in contemporary retail environment on example of durable good. On the basis of projection techniques the consumers' decision making processes have been revealed and some of their determinants found for light users and non-users of the Internet.

Keywords: consumer purchasing process, qualitative methods