Qualitative Analysis of the Digital Marketing Influence on the Behaviour of the Organizational Consumer

CONTANTIN SASU  
Alexandru Ioan Cuza University, Romania  
csasu@uaic.ro

DANIELA ICHIM  
Alexandru Ioan Cuza University, Romania  
ikiimd81@yahoo.com

The aim of the present study is to try to understand the behaviour of the organisational consumers in the online environment. We have attempted to identify specific activities undertaken in the online acquisition process by the persons responsible for purchasing within the companies located in Iasi district (Romania). The results obtained within this preliminary analysis, using a sample of 15 persons so far, show that the internet is used especially for informing and placing the orders, and less for the actual payment and contacting of potential suppliers.

Key words: IT&C technologies, online environment, organizational consumer behaviour, Web sites

Introduction

At the present time, the IT&C technologies became a daily necessity for all of us. Without taking into consideration the specific aim we follow when using these technologies, or the time and advantages they bring, it becomes apparent the role they play within the online communication environment, as well as the personal and professional life of any individual.

Given the growing importance of the IT&C sector not only in the personal life of the individuals but also the activities undertaken by the judicial persons, it has been recently observed a predilection among researchers from various fields towards studies which aim at determining the effect of using online means of communication on the consumer’s behaviour.

Because the advancement of the informational technologies, and especially that of the internet, have modified the acquisition behaviour of the consumers, numerous analyses have been done regarding the influence of the online environment on the consumer’s
behaviour, a fact which, for example, for the Romanian market, indicates an increase of 17% of the electronic commerce oriented towards the consumer, compared to 6% estimated in the case of the traditional commerce practiced by stores.

According to the study provided by Ernst and Young (2014), for approximately 45% of the Romanians, the online environment is mostly a source of influence in the search and selection of useful information, having a powerful impact on the entire shopping experience.

**Literature Review**

The influence of the online environment in the modelling of the purchasing decisions of the consumers makes the object of numerous papers in the speciality literature. Taking into consideration the considerable number of studies in the field presented in this section, we will provide a succinct summary of the most relevant works.

Understanding the purchasing behaviour is essential when attempting to achieve efficient decisions regarding the marketing mixture. Adcock (2000) observed that this had become a fundamental element in many marketing programs within the academic world and that it has roots especially in the social sciences, such as psychology, sociology and economics.

Many authors of papers regarding the buyer’s behaviour refer to Maslow’s pyramid of needs model, which is seen as a key instrument in the classification of the various levels of wishes and needs of the clients, with the conviction that the lowest level of needs can be first satisfied, before the ones with a higher level.

The nature of the buyer’s behaviour is various, from the purchasing of basic products, such as bread, milk and the SIM card for the mobile phone, until the products with a higher degree of implication such is, for example, choosing a holiday or purchasing a car.

Solomon et al. (2012) described this fact as a continuous effort, with usual decision from one end (typical to the daily grocery-shopping), namely with the solving of ampler problems, until the other end (typical important and implicit decisions such as products of the financial services on the long term). The study suggests that many purchasing decisions situate themselves between two extremes, requiring certain labour and thinking for purchasing. He refers to them as the solving of limited problems.

Normally, the effort done by the customer in order to purchase something is variable and has implications on the design of the website, for example, on the degree of detail of information regarding the product, information regarding the insurance of the service by
another partner, images of the products, warranties, sales and other elements useful for the building of trust and credibility, especially at the furthest end of the continuous process.

Schmidt and Hollensen (2006) suggest that the personality and lifestyle are not linked to the purchasing of basis products, which presupposes weak implications, related to the routine, because there are not linked powerfully enough to convictions, self-esteem and identity. However, these change significantly in the case of the purchases with major implications, when the product has a major importance for the individual because it satisfies superior needs. Consequently, the client’s expectations rise and the quality of the online offer must be at the level required in order offer satisfaction to the client not only at the first purchasing, but also the next ones.

Understanding the client and the efficient usage of the knowledge in the creative and logical marketing plans are essential for the marketing’s success. When taking a decision related to a purchase, the client confronts a large range of stimuli, to which he/she can answer or not, based on the selection criteria.

Jayawardhana (2004) claims that the stimulant which initiates the recognition of the need may appear from various sources which, initially, can be online or offline, especially given the fact that many organisations use both channels for communicating. Later on, Jayawardhana, Tiu Wright, and Dennis (2007) supported the idea that a website must attract the interest of the consumers for the online shop and that the information gathered from the customers is the absolute value for the development of the interest of a long lasting relation.

A client can enter the store online without being advised that there is a problem and, in the same fashion, he/she can exist it without recognising this fact, but he/she has searched for information, evaluated the results of the search and acted towards resolving it. The inner peace is an important aspect of the occasional search. For many users, the internet is an instrument used to search information which can help solve a problem. In the first place, the internet can be used by the marketer as a promotional instrument. For example, the online publicity or the direct marketing, via email, can stimulate the consumers’ interest. The advantage of the internet is that it allows the client to use the same website in order to purchase something, a fact which the other media channels cannot do it.

Cotte et al. (2006) claimed that the internet, given its unique features, offer new ways of interacting between the consumers, organisations and the ever larger space of the electronic market. It facilitates the dialogue between customers, who constitute different aims
and who show different behavioural types and who take into account different benefits.

Brennan et al. (2007) suggested that the efficient strategic marketing requires that the business planners should be almost ‘obsessive’ regarding the understanding of the clients’ needs. For this, the marketing decisions must be based on the knowledge of the processes and influences that dictate the purchasing habits not only of the consumers, but also of the organisations. This can imply the gathering of data referring to the general needs, motivations, attitudes and other stimuli modelling the behaviour or other variables such as time, which can determine the purchasing of a certain category of products or of a certain brand.

To summarize, the main works identified in the literature regarding the consumer’s behaviour in the online environment are as follows:

1. Cotte et al. (2006) provides an empirical study based on the questions of 310 residents from the North-East side of the United States. The results show that, compared to the persons with a spontaneous behaviour, the analytical persons target more readily the utilitarian benefits rather than the hedonistic ones. The study reveals that the internet is used especially in order to access faster the required information when taking certain decisions and not for the personal pleasure.

2. Jayawardhena (2004) uses an empirical study based on the questionnaires applied online. Here, the need of knowledge can be launched not only by the offline sources but also the online ones. It seems that the consumers are tempted to satisfy these needs using the online sources.

3. Jayawardhena, Tiu Wright, and Dennis (2007), based on the same methodology mentioned above, shows that the way the site is presented influences the online consumer’s behaviour. A website must be more attractive in order to be accessed by a higher number of users.

4. Lian and Lin (2008) use a regression analysis to emphasize that the factors which influence the behaviour of the online consumers differ according to the products or services offered, thus between the consumers’ features and the products/services offered online different relations are established;

5. Constantinides (2004) provides a comparative study in which the factors influencing the consumers’ behaviour prove to be different to the ‘traditional’ environment. Therefore, the identification and understanding of the factors typical to the internet will con-
stitute the first step into the development and the delivering of an attractive presence among the consumers.

From the short description provided above, it can be observed that the studies related to the online consumer’s behaviour followed a rather similar path, and there appears to exist, according to Gay and Charlesworth (2009), three significant motives, namely:

• The internet developed fast, especially when it comes to the technical side.

• Partially, as a result of the internet’s development, the way in which this was used has changed not only as a result of the internet development, but also the way in which this is used by the marketers and regular users has changed.

• The current users have changed. The technical users, mostly youngsters, who adopted it early, towards the middle of the 1990s, have managed later to become the main stream of the users, within a large range of ages.

A significant improvement to the business is the clear impulse of the shift in the marketers’ objectives from ‘let us help the seller sell’ to ‘let us help the purchaser purchase.’ The customers expect to be helped in searching the products or services which better match their own desires and needs. The internet is important from this point of view because it is a ‘source’ media channel, this signifying that users, to which any marketing message is being addressed, request information rather than be obliged to read the information – or be ‘pushed’ towards searching for it – as it is being done in the tv commercial or posters. For the marketer, this means that the client is the only one who selects which marketing messages he/she desires.

A major important aspect of the marketing process lies in the understanding of why a purchaser makes a certain acquisition. Without understanding this fact, businesses will not be able to satisfy completely the needs and wishes of the customers.

With regard to the organisational consumers, identifying their preferences and actions in the online environment becomes even more difficult in the context in which the majority of the companies do not divulge specific information regarding the manner in which the internet and other information technologies are used in order to satisfy the need for certain products, services or works. Within this context, it is imposed the usage of a qualitative type of analysis in order to have access to relevant information with regard to determining the behaviour of the organizational consumer within the online environment. Taking into account the aspects mentioned, we
continue by formulating the aim, objectives and the hypotheses of the research in the following section.

**Aim and Objectives**

The aim of the research is the identification of the organizational consumer’s behaviour located within the online environment of the Iasi district. The expression *organisational consumer* relates to the judicial person who purchases products, services and works either with the aim of unfold, in optimal conditions, its own activity, either with the aim of reselling on the market, to a final consumer or other companies. Within this process, we consider that companies use mainly the internet in order to inform themselves, contact suppliers, place orders and, finally, pay using the electronic payment instruments. Starting from this assumption, the specific objectives become the following:

- identify the general perception of the organizational consumers regarding the use of internet for the purchasing activity;
- identify the extent to which the organizational consumers use, are predisposed and perceive using the internet;

**Methodology**

In the qualitative research there are many methods which can be used in order to explore the premises from which this study has started from. To the extent that it relates to use, given the title of the proposed research, namely the influence of the online environment on the behaviour of the organizational consumer, we considered as the most suitable one using a direct interview because we wish to have access to internal information belonging to companies, information which the persons referred to would not have made them known within, for example, a focus group.

Our choice is justified also by the opinions found among the specialists (Munteanu et al. 2006), who identify the main features of the in-depth interview as follows:

- It is a technique suitable to approaching certain subject which are more sensible;
- A lot of information is obtained in a relatively short period of time (between one and two hours);
- Compared to focus-group, there is no dynamics of the group, a fact which reduces the possibility of influencing the opinions;
- Such research is adequate in case studies in a professional field (e.g.: doctors, engineers and other specialists) or of the business
Qualitative Analysis of the Digital Marketing Influence

to business studies, because the time and place of the unfolding of the interviews can be easily adapted to the subjects’ schedule.

These specialists emphasize also the advantages of using this method, among which we enumerate:

- The attitudes and emotions of the investigated persons, which can be explored in detail and close to reality without appealing to pre-established alternative answers;
- The motivation and opposition towards certain brands, markets, products or services can be determined;
- Ensure the analysis of certain complex research subjects or of new problems for which there was initially insufficient information;
- Development of trust connections between the interviewer and the subject in order to approach also other subjects considered taboo.

For the present paper, we opted for the interview because, since it was a preliminary analysis, we aim at easily processing the answers of the interviews’ participants. (The content of the interview’s guide is presented fully in the appendix.)

In order to undertake the interview, we have used as instrument for data gathering the interview guide, for the formulation of which we dedicate major attention to the following aspects:

- identifying and logically ordering the features included in the research’s objectives and their logical ordering;
- drafting questions which were to be addressed to the interview’s participants. While drafting them, we aimed at respecting certain criteria such as: be sufficiently specific, have a simple vocabulary, avoid ambiguity, be non-hypothetical and be without presumption.

In order to process the interview’ answers of the participants we used the ATLAS.ti software instrument (the demo version, available at http://atlasti.com/).

We started by transcribing all the answers provided by the participants. Following that, we have created an Excel file, in which we have grouped the questions based on each question (this was imported in the ATLAS.ti software from the Documents Menu, options New and Import Survey Data).

Questions 1–3 have been used as categories, based on which we will be able to make further analysis regarding the orientation towards the online environment of the interviewees, according to the
size of the company, the sector in which the company they represent unfolds its activity or the position occupied within the company.

The rest of the questions (4–9) have been changed into super-codes, each containing other codes within its contents. We have not used a predefined set of codes, each code being allotted according to the answers provided by the interviewees. The coding was done at the level of the phrase, within the same phrase existing one or more codes.

For example, in interview no. 12, question 4, the interviewee answered thus:

My responsibilities regarding the suppliers refer to: identifying suppliers, contacting them, sending them requests for offers and placing specific orders. The due payments placed are done by the financial-accounting department [and] I have no responsibilities in this regard.

At the level of the whole answer we have initially defined a large code, called ‘Duties related the suppliers.’ Following that, we have defined the following codes:

• ‘identifying suppliers’ was changed to ‘search for potential suppliers;’
• ‘contacting them’ was changed to ‘contacting potential suppliers;’
• ‘sending requests for offer’ was changed to ‘sending offer requests;’
• ‘secure orders’ was changed to ‘orders placed;’
• ‘the due payments placed are done by the financial-accounting department [and] I have no responsibilities in this regard’ was changed to ‘no payment of orders.’

The coding process was similar to all the answers of the interviewees to the questions no. 4–9. The five major codes created for the questions no. 4–9 are the following:

• Duties related to suppliers (which contains other 27 codes);
• Online contact of the suppliers (which contains other 9 codes);
• Placing orders to the suppliers (which contains other 5 codes);
• Online information regarding the suppliers (which contains other 18 codes);
• Payment of the suppliers (which contains other 8 codes);
• Overall appreciation of the internet (which contains other 9 codes).
In total, 82 codes were created.

The analysed population represents the group of individuals from which information is gathered. Within our study, the group is represented by the persons responsible with the acquisition of products, services or works within the companies located within the Iasi district, which use the internet in order to obtain information related to the products and services which they intend to purchase, contacting potential suppliers, placing orders and paying for them.

Given the fact that an exact dimension of the sample representative for the entire population taken into consideration is practically impossible (it would require from us to provide, initially, a questionnaire to all companies in Iasi, to determine how many of them actually use the internet in the activities previously mentioned or in activities related to them), the analysis we propose is a preliminary study, the persons responsible with the acquisition being the ones who accepted to participate in the study.

The actual unfolding of the research took place in the month of December 2015, at the headquarters of the companies who accepted to participate in the study. Initially, we have contacted 30 companies, we discussed with their managers, explaining the aim of the study and, in the end, only 15 persons from the contacted companies accepted to participate. The persons who were interviewed occupy, within the company, either a high-end position (general manager, marketing director) or are directly in charge with the acquisition (responsible with the acquisitions).

The average length of the interview was 20 minutes; the answers of the participants were audio recorded. Later on, these were transcribed in order to be processed with the ATLAS.ti software.

**Results and Discussion**

After we transcribed and codified the answers of the participants to the study, we decided to present the results in two major sections: one comprising the most frequent codes encountered in the participants’ answers to each question, the other one in which to emphasize a series of answers according to the categories defined at the beginning of the study (e.g.: company size, activity sector, position occupied by the participants).

Out of the 27 codes defined as representing the attributes of the interviewees in relation to the suppliers, only 4 were the most frequently mentioned, namely: search for potential suppliers (expression mentioned by 12 out of 15 participants), contacting potential suppliers (expression found in 11 out of 15 answers), sending re-
quest for offer (sentence found in 11 out of 15 answers) and placing of orders (expression mentioned by 13 out of 15 participants).

With regard to the online information related to the suppliers, we have codified the answers of the participants in 18 items. Their opinion was very different, the most often encountered options being: accessing the suppliers’ website (7), online search of the suppliers’ contact information (5) and those needed to make a comparison between companies (5).

Out of the 9 identified codes related to the online contacting of the suppliers, the most often encountered answers to which the participants to the study referred to were the fact that the first contact with the supplier is done via the telephone (8 answering), while only 5 interviewees mentioned that they prefer to contact the supplier via email. In the same way, 4 participants declared that they request an offer via email, after previously contacting the supplier via the telephone. Therefore, according to the answers provided by the interviewees, we notice that there is a high preference for a telephonic contacting, at least at the first stage, and, later on, they pass to stage of sending emails.

Regarding the orders shipped by the suppliers, according to the most frequent answers provided by the interviewees, out of the 5 initial options, when we defined the codes, only two appear most often. The first one, shipping the order via email, was mentioned by 10 out of 15 participants, while the shipping of a specific order, after a previous telephone contact with the suppliers, was found 5 times in the answers provided by the interviewed persons.

The payments continue to remain a major problem related to the internet. The most often encountered answers are found related to the payments done on commercial credit (10) and bank payments (6). The idea of using in the future electronic payment methods was found in only 3 out of the 15 answers. Furthermore, 6 of them do not use at all the online payment method, with reimbursement to the suppliers.

Out of the 9 codes defined for the overall appreciation of the internet in connection to the suppliers the most often found answers are two, namely that it is useful for information (6 answers) and that it is good for placing orders (5 answers).

Next, we tried to identify whether there the sector in which the company unfolds its activity, its side or the position occupied by the employees in the acquisition influences. The preferences revealed for the use of internet in the relation with the suppliers. Using the Codes-Primary Documents Table function from the Analyse menu
Qualitative Analysis of the Digital Marketing Influence

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category</th>
<th>Commerce</th>
<th>Production</th>
<th>Services</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Contacting the suppliers via email</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Placing orders via email</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The first contact with the supplier is via phone</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 1: Preference for Contacting and Placing Orders According to the Activity Sector of the Companies in Which the Participants at the Interview Work

In the ATLAS.ti software, we generated a series of tables and graphs in Excel (see the table 1 and figure 1).

Analysing the above figure, it can be observed that there is a larger preference for the contact of the suppliers via email in the case of the manufacturing companies, while the shipping of the order via email is often found in the companies with commercial activities. Phone contact is preferred by the manufacturing and service companies.

Out of the 15 persona participating to the study, in the end we were interested in finding out from what perspective they shared the opinions related to the use of internet regarding the supply in general and the relations with the suppliers. We realised that the position of responsible with acquisitions and marketing responsible were the most frequently declared by the interviewees (3), 2 participants occupying the position of responsible for acquisitions, marketing director and directors of acquisitions, while, towards the end, we faced an interviewee occupying each one of the following positions: administrator, acquisition director and financial department director.

Conclusions

Following the analysis of the answers given by the 15 participants to the interview, we have reached the conclusion that when the participants to the interview talked about their tasks related to suppliers, they considered mostly the search for suppliers, contacting them,
sending them requests for offers and placing orders. With regard to
the online information, it was noted that the most frequent activities
they referred to was accessing the websites of the potential suppli-
ers, making comparisons between existing and potential suppliers
and searching for the contact details. In the majority of the cases, it
is preferred the phone contact, followed by the connection via email,
namely sending the request for offer.

We also realized that the online environment is used for the ship-
ning of orders by a considerable part of the interviewees, even when
previously there was a telephone contact with the suppliers. Unfor-
tunately, with regard to the online payments, an insignificant part
of the interviewed ones is thinking to start using it; the majority of
the participants in the study still using the classical reimbursement
means.

Finally, we appreciate that the majority of the interviewed per-
sons consider the internet and the associated technologies more as a
mean of gathering information and a medium in which to place the
orders, the electronic payment methods not being yet used.

Based on the analysis done we think that a more in-depth analysis
needs to be undertaken regarding the motives for which the compa-
nies do not make online payments, why they do not trust and main-
tain a contact via email with the suppliers, as well as why a company
places an order without previously making any phone calls.

Another research area to be explored in the future may take into
consideration the technologies known and actually made use of
by the persons responsible with the purchasing within a company,
namely the way in which they appreciate its efficiency in the work
done through the perspective of the mentioned technology.

References

Adcock, D. 2000. Marketing Strategies for Competitive Advantage. Chich-
ester: Wiley.


Constantinides, E. 2004. Influencing the Online Consumer’s Behaviour:

Cotte, J., T. G. Chowdhury, S. Ratneshwar, and L. M. Ricci. 2006. ‘Pleas-
sure or Utility? Time Planning Style and Web Usage Behaviors.’

Ernst & Young. 2014. ‘Venus şi Marte în comerţul online din România.’
http://www.ey.com/Publication/vwLUAssets/POV_Comertul_online
_din_Romania_30sept14/$FILE/POV_Comertul%20online%20din%
20Romania_30sept14.pdf
Appendix 1: Interview Guide

Subjects. The persons responsible with the acquisition within the companies located in the Iasi district.

Objective. Finding out the habits of information gathering, contacting the suppliers, acquisition of products, services or works and online payment.

Introduction

Good day! My name is Daniela Ichim and I am a doctoral student at the Doctoral School of Economics and Business Administration of the ‘Alexandru Ioan Cuza’ University in Iasi (the marketing section). I am currently undertaking a field study regarding the influence of the internet on the behaviour of the organisational consumers in Iasi.

Any information from you would be useful to understand the companies’ preferences in using the internet for the related services in order to obtain information related to products, services and works which you might want to purchase, to contact potential suppliers and place orders, and pay for the goods or services purchased. I would like to ask you, should you desire it, to award us approximately half an hour of your time in order to answer a series of questions.

After the consent is expressed by the interviewee, continue with the following sentences:

Also, I would like you to accept to audio record the interview in order to be able later on to process your answers. I assure you that
nobody besides me will have access to the recording of today’s discussion, and that what we will discuss will be exclusively used to identify the organisational consumer’s behaviour in the online environment.

After consent is expressed by the interviewee, go on addressing the questions themselves from the interview guide.

UNFOLDING OF THE INTERVIEW ITSELF

Questions addressed to the participants at the interview are the following:

1. Please mention the activity sector in which the firm you represent is active.
2. According to the criteria imposed by the present legislation, in what category is your company included? [Micro business, small and medium business, large business – options are provided if the interviewee cannot identify the category in which the company he/she represents is included.]
3. State the position you hold in the company.
4. According to the position held, what tasks related to the acquisition of products, services and/or works do you have?
5. What internet services do you use in order to obtain information related to products, services and/or works you wish to purchase?
6. What means do you prefer of contacting the identified potential suppliers?
7. In what way do you place orders to the suppliers?
8. What method of payment for the suppliers do you usually choose?
9. Generally characterize the use of internet in the acquisition process and the related activities.

ENDING THE INTERVIEW

Thank you for the dedicated time and the information you have shared. Should you desire, please provide us with an email address in order to electronically ship you the results of the study once it has been concluded! Have a nice day!

This paper is published under the terms of the Attribution-NonCommercial-NoDerivatives 4.0 International (CC BY-NC-ND 4.0) License (http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-nd/4.0/).