

Generation Y—Young Europeans' Consumer Behavior

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Generation Y is a group of young people, who draw on life to the full, with unlimited possibilities of choice. The segment of young consumers constitutes an attractive target market of many companies functioning on the Internet. The aim of paper is identification and comparison of e-consumers' purchasing behaviors in selected European countries. The results present following aspects of online purchasing process: motives for online shopping, a way of collecting and sources of information about an offer, determinants of product selection, conditions for online shopping and commerce organizational forms on the Internet, and determinants of selection of a shopping place. The extensive objectives of report required narrowing its subject scope and spatial direct research. The subjects of the study were e-consumers aged from 18 to 25, doing online shopping. The study was conducted in 2012 in six ultimately selected European countries: France, Poland, Portugal, Romania, Slovakia, and Italy, by a random survey on a sample of 1,800 e-consumers. The thesis was made that the differences of psychographic features (resulting from a national culture) and living conditions (resulting from social-economic development of particular countries) of e-consumers do not significantly influence their purchasing behaviors on the Internet, thanks to which people may treat e-consumers from different European countries as a homogenous group of e-purchasers. However, when analyzing young consumers' behaviors in the virtual scope (on the Internet), this paper may propose a thesis that regardless of a country and culture of origin, these behaviors are similar to each other. Young e-consumers "making a living" from the Internet on a daily basis, search for information in the same sources (www websites, in e-shops, and on Internet forum), in a similar way (e.g., using an Internet browser or a price comparer), and for the same reason (to compare prices of products).

Keywords: generation Y, consumer behavior, purchased products, sources of information, online shopping

Generation Y as Generation of E-consumers

Generation Y is a group of young people, who draw on life to the full, with unlimited possibilities of choice. More than half the world's population is less than 30 years old. Generation Y is one of the largest demographic groups in the world. Over the next 30 years, they will play a key role in the social, cultural, business, political, and economic aspects of their countries. Today is an important and valuable segment of consumers in all markets. The segment of young consumers constitutes an attractive target market of many companies functioning on the Internet.

Social-demographic features of young consumers of generation Y indicate that this is a relatively homogeneous segment (in this respect, sex, age, place of residence, professional activity, and education). Taking into consideration economic features, e.g., income, this segment demonstrates some differentiation.

Depending on a town/city, region, and country, young people represent different purchasing power. Culture belongs to the features profoundly differentiating young consumers' market (particularly in the international scope). Culture conditions approaches and behaviors of young e-consumers. However, when analyzing young consumers' behaviors in the virtual scope (on the Internet), this paper may propose a thesis that regardless of a country and culture of origin, these behaviors are similar to each other. Young e-consumers "making a living" from the Internet on a daily basis, search for information in the same sources (www websites, in e-shops, and on Internet forum), in a similar way (e.g., using an Internet browser or a price comparer), and for the same reason (to compare prices of products). Can such a formulated thesis be confirmed? The curiosity of the researcher (mostly an entrepreneur running a commercial activity on the Internet) may be satisfied by designing and conducting relevant market research.

Theory and Thesis

The available literature comprises reports on purchasing behaviors of individual consumer, households, enterprises, and other institutions as well as electronic commerce (e-commerce). The reports contain only fragmentary research on e-consumers' behavior in several countries (e.g., China, Australia, and South Korea). The theme of the research conducted abroad is most frequently trust, satisfaction, and loyalty of e-consumers (Chlipala, 2011). However, no research was found, in which the attempt would be done to recognize and compare purchasing behavior of e-consumers in Europe. The problem has not been recognized in a complex way in the objective scope (purchasing behavior of e-consumers), as well as in a spatial scope (in Europe) (Jaciow, Wolny, & Stolecka-Makowska, 2013).

The aim of this paper is completing knowledge within e-consumers' behavior in Europe, especially identification and comparison of e-consumers' purchasing behavior in selected European countries.

The thesis was made that the differences of psychographic features (resulting from a national culture) and living conditions (resulting from social-economic development of particular countries) of e-consumers do not significantly influence their purchasing behavior on the Internet, thanks to which people may treat e-consumers from different European countries as a homogenous group of e-purchasers.

Knowledge about the segment of young European e-consumers (generation Y) is significant for enterprises running a commercial activity on the Internet, making their offers for e-consumers in different countries. Information from appropriately designed and conducted international research outlines an area of marketing activity and constitutes a reference point, while preparing efficient strategies of acquiring, maintaining and building permanent relations with young customers.

Research Design

Research Framework

The subject of the research was the purchasing behaviors of e-consumers from six countries in Europe: France, Portugal, Italy, Poland, Slovakia, and Romania. The researches were not a set of national researches. They were designed as international researches, with full awareness of the necessity to take attempt to ensure the equivalence of research subjects, measurement, and research sample. A conducted research project has a direct, explanatory, quantitative, simultaneous, and comparative character. Regardless of the research type, the researchers faced many different problems in international projects. Methodological problems occur at all stages of research procedure. In first step is the research preparation: what approach to set: "emic" or "etic";

what sources of information to use; what is credibility, certainty, topicality, and usefulness of information from secondary sources (domestic and foreign); which methods and techniques of direct research to use in research; in what way to ensure comparability of collected information; how to ensure equivalence of research tools (measurement problems and appropriate translation); in what way to ensure comparability of research samples (number, features, and selection methods); and which methods of processing quantitative data to select. In second step of research is the conducting research: standardize or adapt local research to the conditions of local markets; in what way to organize local research; what is the share of research agencies in conducting local research on selected markets; in what way to select and organize work of local team research; in what way to control team work in the field; which method of data standardization to select; in what section to analyse collected data; and what methods of qualitative data analysis to use. In third step of research is the communicating result: what form of written presentation of obtained results to select; in what way to visualize results.

The first research dilemma was agreeing on the approach to research. It is assumed that because of globalization and popularization of the Internet, the observed consumers' behaviors are getting similar on the European level, the approach "etic" was possible. The researchers, aware of different cultural conditions determining traditional purchasing behaviors in selected studied countries, assumed that online shopping done by e-consumers (of the same social-demographic features) takes place (regardless of a place of residence) in a universal way, in accordance with the stages of a purchasing process.

At the stage of formulating the objective and scopes of research, it was assumed that the process of purchasing goods and services online is a comparable process in selected countries, universal for many markets, and the objective of international comparisons is identification of both similarities and differences in purchasing behaviors of e-consumers in selected countries; however, the degree of differentiation of the studied process is small.

Research Method

Research Subject

The assumptions were made in the project: using in research both secondary and primary sources of information (information deriving from secondary sources was used to recognize demographic, social, economic, cultural, and technological conditions of e-consumers' research behaviors in selected countries) and using a technique of direct interview in direct research (in pilot studies) and a technique of random survey (in proper studies). The research sample, homogeneous in terms of demographic features (sex and age) and social (membership in a social group), was selected to ensure the comparability of collected data. The entities for the research were selected due to a criterion of doing shopping online. The quantities of samples in tested countries were equipotent (which allowed for spatial comparative analyses) and amounted 300 people (total sample 1,800). The translation of standardized questionnaire into national languages was done to ensure equivalence of measurement tools. Measurement tools were consulted with national coordinators and necessary linguistic corrections were implemented. In the pilot studies, respondents pointed to several doubts related mainly to measurement scales in selected questions.

A young consumer, the representative of generation Y, is dynamic, continually creative, and discovering his new needs. He gains different experience in many aspects of life and possesses very high skills in using new technologies (Wolny, 2005; Van Den Bergh & Behrer, 2013). Having access to many miscellaneous sources of information, he gains knowledge about products, makes, prices, places, and conditions of purchase. He tries to

be rational in his decisions, by which he is forced by a wide offer, exhaustive market information, and limited income. He resigns from shopping done on the spur of the moment in favors of reasonable (planned) shopping. He is a user of mobile technologies, is permanently in touch with everything and everyone, is aware of his power as a consumer, knows his rights, and is able to enforce them (Reisenwitz & Iyer, 2009). Living in a real and a virtual world, he becomes an e-consumer. The definition of e-consumer states that it is a natural person, who demonstrates and satisfies his consumption needs by means of products purchased on the Internet (Jaciow & Wolny, 2011).

The basket of European generation Y contains products from different assortment groups. The subject of e-consumers' (generation Y) interest are products from a category of: computers and software, books and multimedia, clothing and footwear, radio, TV and photographic equipment, sport and tourist articles, and these related to health and beauty as well as food.

Computers and software on the Internet are bought by at least half of studied young e-consumers from Poland and Slovakia, almost 40% of studied subjects from France and Romania and almost every third studied Portuguese and every fourth Italian. Books and multimedia on the Internet are bought by twice more studied Poles (66.3%) than Italians (29.9%) and also almost half of studied Romanians and Slovaks. Almost the same percentage of studied French and Poles on the Internet buy clothing and footwear and it is almost twice more than studied Italians and Portuguese. Radio, TV, and photographic equipment on the Internet are bought by over half of studied French, Poles, and Slovaks, and only every 10th studied Italian. Sport and tourist products on the Internet are bought by less than a half of studied young consumers, including the most from Poland and the least from Slovakia. Big differences occur in case of purchasing products of health and beauty. These products are bought on the Internet by over half of studied Poles, every third French, Romanian, and Slovak, every fourth Portuguese, and less than 10% of Italians. Food on the Internet is bought by every third French, every ninth Portuguese, and a slight percentage of e-consumers from Italy, Poland, Romania, and Slovakia (Table 1).

Table 1

Products Bought on the Internet by E-consumers From Selected European Countries (in %)

Specification	Italy	France	Portugal	Poland	Romania	Slovakia
Books and multimedia	29.9	40.3	36.9	66.3	45.1	54.1
Clothing and footwear	29.0	62.0	33.6	63.3	45.8	43.9
Sport and tourism	35.1	42.3	37.1	48.1	41.6	32.0
Computers and software	23.0	39.6	31.1	50.0	36.4	58.7
Radio, TV, and photo	11.6	53.5	25.3	52.4	38.6	50.8
Health and beauty	8.7	35.1	22.8	51.3	35.3	32.0
Food	0.4	35.8	12.3	3.2	3.8	2.1

Before doing shopping for products on the Internet, young consumers search for information about the offer, interesting for them, on the Internet. The Internet enables generation Y the access to a wide scope of information, both this objective one and this subjective one, placed on domestic and foreign Internet websites and available for free or paid. The process of searching for information about the product offer on the Internet is very frequently based on entering a product on the web search, visiting the found Internet websites corresponding to searching criteria and contacting with a representative of an Internet shop or an enterprise with the intention of obtaining additional information about a selected product.

The object of searched information may be different. It depends mostly on information needs and requirements of consumers. Young European consumers, before a purchase, may search and compare different kinds of information using different Internet sources for this purpose and in case of the need to make contacts with a shop assistant on the Internet. The studied e-consumers, before a purchase, practice different methods of searching for information on the Internet. The object of interest was the way in which e-consumers begin searching for products on the Internet and their used system of selection of the Internet websites in case of searching for a product by means of the Internet web search.

As the research indicates, the most popular way of starting by young consumers to search for a selected product on the Internet is using the search websites. Such a method of searching for information about products on the Internet is chosen by most of e-consumers from Slovakia, almost 3/4 of subjects from Portugal, 2/3 from Italy, and half from France. Despite that 2/3 of Romanian e-consumers and almost 60% of Polish ones search for products in this way, the definite majority of subjects from these countries prefer to search for information on the websites of the Internet auctions and the Internet shops. Namely, before doing shopping, almost 2/3 of subjects from Poland get acquainted with the offer of the Internet auctions (E-bay) and 3/4 of subjects from Romania start browsing the Internet from browsing the offers of the Internet shops. The higher percentage of young Slovaks than subjects from other countries analyses the offer of the Internet shops and compares products on the websites of price comparers. A higher number of young Poles (in relation to subjects from other countries) browse the offers of the Internet auctions and familiarize oneself with the opinions of the users of the Internet fora, and more Romanians study the producers' websites. The least popular way of starting to search for products on the Internet by means of using price comparers and becoming acquainted with the offers on the Internet auctions is in Romania, however in Slovakia and in France, it is browsing the Internet fora (Table 2).

Table 2

The Way of Starting to Search Products With the Intention to Purchase Them on the Internet by Young Consumers From Selected European Countries (in %)

Specification	Italy	France	Portugal	Poland	Romania	Slovakia
Browsing offers of the Internet auctions (e.g., E-bay)	29.1	37.5	28.9	62.1	17.6	18.6
Using the search websites (e.g., Google)	61.4	50.4	72.0	58.4	65.6	83.2
Browsing offers of the Internet shops	46.2	27.2	59.6	54.3	73.6	78.5
Using price comparers	18.8	18.3	20.9	39.6	11.7	40.1
Browsing the Internet fora	19.3	14.7	21.3	36.9	27.1	11.1
Browsing the search websites of producers	34.1	19.2	36.0	33.8	58.2	31.2

The most used strategies of searching for products by generation Y are based on writing the Internet addresses and direct entrance on the website of the Internet shop selling a selected product, searching for a given product on the Internet auction or on the website of a favorite e-shop, writing a name of a searched product in the Internet search websites or clicking in advertising boxes places on different Internet websites.

Before placing an order for a product, a considerable majority of studied e-consumers from all countries search for a selected product by the search websites. Among these people, the highest number clicks the links and browses the websites, which occurred as the first ones in the Internet search websites. In this way, 3/4 of Polish and the same number of Slovak e-consumers, almost 2/3 Romanian, Italian, and Portuguese subjects and almost half of French e-consumers behave in this way. The equally popular way of searching for products in all

selected countries is precise browsing of offers of all Internet shops offering selected products (on average, every third subjects in each country look for products in such a way). The higher number of Italians than young e-consumers from the remaining countries finishes a process of finding products with the entrance on the first link in the search websites. For the Portuguese and the French, it is more common to buy desired products in the same e-shops without the necessity of using the search websites. The studied e-consumers searching for products on the Internet the most rarely click in advertising boxes, the so-called sponsored links (Table 3).

Table 3

The Way of Searching for Products by Search Websites by Young Consumer From Selected European Countries (in %)

Specification	Italy	France	Portugal	Poland	Romania	Slovakia
Selecting the first link in search websites	21.8	16.3	12.4	13.0	14.3	17.1
Browsing the first links in search websites	58.3	48.9	57.8	74.7	58.6	73.9
Precise browsing of offers of all shop possessing a given product	38.9	26.2	44.0	32.2	41.8	41.8
Buying in the same shops, without using search websites	12.0	21.5	24.4	9.6	12.5	13.9
Clicking in advertising boxes (sponsored links)	2.8	7.7	8.0	6.8	9.2	8.6

Young e-consumers not possessing before a purchase sufficient information about the product offer of the company/the Internet shop or conditions of carrying out a selected product frequently, make an attempt at contacting a shop assistant. A degree of young e-consumers' satisfaction from the process of a conversation with a commercial adviser and a scope of obtaining information influences the future purchasing decisions of e-consumers on the Internet. Almost 80% of studied young consumers declared that they contact a shop assistant before making an online purchase. Among them, a considerable majority are constituted by studied young Poles, subsequently Romanians and Slovaks, and then subjects from France, Italy, and Portugal. E-consumers contacting the shop assistants before a purchase most frequently send an e-mail with a query. A considerable majority of Polish and Slovak e-consumers, over 82% of Portuguese, 3/4 of Italian, over half of Romanian, and 1/3 of French e-consumers behave in this way. A definitely higher number of young Romanians than subjects from other countries call the company's contact number listed on a website. The young French definitely more frequently, than others before placing an order, ask questions to a consultant via the Internet communicators, and Poles send a query via a contact form. A conversation with a company's representative via the Internet communicators (in Italy, Slovakia, and Portugal) and in a chat room (in Italy, Romania, and Poland) is the least popular way of contact of studied e-consumers with a shop assistant before a purchase.

The Internet is not only a source of information about a product offer for generation Y, but also a tool enabling selection and comparison of information about a product, significant in terms of different criteria. Young consumers from studied countries search for different kinds of information. Before making a purchase, the highest number of subjects from France seeks information referring to offers of producers, whereas information concerning the time of fulfilling an order is the most important for subjects from Italy. Young Poles, Romanians, and Slovaks are most interested in availability of a selected product on the Internet, and the Portuguese in appearing information about product novelties. Before making a purchase, product price is more frequently an issue of young consumers' comparisons from all studied countries than searching. The price of a selected product is compared by nearly 90% of young Poles, the same percentage of Slovaks and the Portuguese, over 80% of Italians, 3/4 of Romanians, and 2/3 of the French. Information referring to prices of

products is the most rarely searched by young consumers from all studied countries, information referring to a company (in Poland, Portugal, Romania, and Slovakia), product availability (in Italy) and the time of fulfilling an order (in France) is most rarely searched and compared.

Generation Y searching for information about a specific product have at their disposal such Internet sources as: discussion fora, producers' websites, e-shops, price comparers, and the Internet advertising. All enumerated sources of information are known in studied countries, except for Portugal, where there exist no websites functioning as price comparers. The factors related to a cost of shopping are the most important for young consumers, while selecting a shopping place for a certain product on the Internet. Choosing the Internet shop, over 85% of young Poles, nearly 78% of Slovaks, 3/4 of the Portuguese, and almost the relevant percentage of Italians as well as 2/3 of Romanians, and almost half of the French pay attention to a price of offered product. Most of studied young consumers also follow the costs of product delivery while selecting the Internet shop. Two thirds of young consumers from Slovakia and almost the same percentage from Poland, over 60% of subjects from Romania, and every second Italians are interested in costs of delivery. However, the amount of purchase costs, both product price and costs of its delivery, makes no difference for the highest percentage of studied young French. The highest number of young Poles follows a product price, while selecting a shop, Slovaks pay attention to the costs of delivery of a given product. Despite that, product availability is what counts for over half of young consumers from Portugal and Slovakia selecting a shopping place on the Internet. Definitely the highest percentage of the French, than subjects from the remaining countries, while selecting a shopping place on the Internet, focus on the position of the shop/auction in the search websites, the layout of the website, and the content of shop's/auction's regulations. The highest number of young Romanians follows the offer of the shop/the Internet auction while selecting a shopping place. What is interesting is that the content of shop's/the Internet auction's regulations does not practically have any significance for consumers from five studied countries (except for the French) while selecting a shopping place on the Internet (Table 4).

Table 4

Determinants of Selecting a Shopping Place on the Internet by Young Consumers From Selected European Countries (in %)

Specification	Italy	France	Portugal	Poland	Romania	Slovakia
Prices of products	70.6	49.4	73.0	85.3	69.5	77.7
Costs of product delivery	50.2	44.7	46.1	64.8	60.7	66.1
Product availability	46.6	39.6	55.7	40.3	40.1	51.9
Comfort and easiness of doing shopping	46.2	15.7	41.7	24.2	19.9	28.3
Time of fulfilling an order	30.8	17.4	47.8	47.1	49.6	36.0
Possibility of comparing products	29.0	22.1	23.9	16.4	9.9	25.8
Promotion in a shop/auction	24.4	28.1	36.1	39.6	40.4	19.8
Offer of shop/action—wide choice	21.3	28.5	13.5	34.8	40.1	17.3
Own experience	20.8	20.4	15.2	19.8	17.3	35.7
Acquaintances' opinions about a shop/an auction	19.5	28.5	17.8	31.1	27.2	25.1
Location of a place for product delivery	12.2	17.0	14.8	12.3	24.6	25.8
Possibility of selecting different forms of payment	19.9	11.9	23.5	14.3	15.8	12.7
The layout of the Internet website	3.2	27.7	8.3	5.5	1.8	9.9
Position of a shop/an action in the search websites	3.2	17.0	4.8	7.8	2.6	3.9
Contents of the shop's/auctions' regulations	1.4	18.3	3.0	4.4	2.2	4.6

Conclusions

In the sphere of purchasing behaviors, there occurs a phenomenon of simultaneous convergence and differentiation of young consumers' behaviors (which is a symptomatic phenomenon for post-modern consumptions). Despite the differences occurring in national cultures determining purchasing behaviors, generation Y demonstrate certain similarities in purchasing behaviors online. Regardless of a category of a purchased product on the Internet, the common denominator in the consumers' purchasing process from selected European countries is a value, which is expected during shopping, an issue of compared information, used source of information about the offer and a shopping place on the Internet.

Young consumers (regardless of a country of origin) most frequently compare information about prices of products, which they are interested in. The basic sources of information for young consumers are the producers' websites. However, the subject of searched information is different in different countries. E-consumers from France most frequently search for information and analyze the offers of selected products; for young e-consumers from Poland, Romania, and Slovakia, the key information is the product availability; young consumers from Portugal most frequently seek information about market novelties; and for e-consumers from Italy, information about the time of fulfilling the order is the most important.

Generation Y most willingly do shopping in the Internet shop in their own countries. Before making a purchase, the young French, Portuguese, Slovaks, and Italians browse the Internet resources using the search websites (Google is the most popular among them); Romanians compare the offers of the Internet shops; and Poles browse the most popular Internet auction in their country.

The knowledge about quite a big segment of market which is European young consumer determines the enterprises an area of activities and constitutes a reference point while designing a strategy of marketing activities on market.

The results of the conducted research have a high application value for enterprises functioning on the Internet, targeting their offer at e-consumers in different European countries.

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