

E-Consumers in the E-Services Market

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In economics, the “consumer” is considered in terms of choice theory, representing the entity that consumes and creates demand. Typically, the term is identified with the purchaser who consumes the products bought and enjoys their use value. In marketing theory, the consumer is the starting point of marketing activities that are undertaken in the market for goods and services. The purpose of these activities is to direct the marketing strategy of producers and sellers to identify the requirements of consumers.

Keywords: e-consumers ; buying behavior

1. Introduction

In today's market environment, the increase in market activity has led to a complete redefinition of the market role of buyers who, being market participants, intensify their involvement in its functioning ^{[1][2]}. The new economic reality is governed by entirely new technologies that are in close relationship with each other, intertwining and conditioning each other. The new modern economy is digital ^[3]. The role of the consumer as a passive spectator has evolved into a partnership requiring high-quality communication in the form of an ongoing dialogue ^{[4][5]}.

Over the past few decades, there have been numerous technological changes referred to as Web 1.0, 2.0, 3.0. Access to Internet resources has developed, mainly offered in the form of LTE (Long Term Evolution) ^[6]. There are lots of products on the market with a huge range of possibilities, manifested by access to the network. The use of smartwatches, smartphones, or tablets enables mobile use of the Internet, which makes it possible to communicate without physical contact ^[7]. That can be extremely important in times of crises ^[8] as enterprises need to pay close attention to all social, environmental, and economic crises faced by the global community ^[9] as these components contribute to sustainability ^[10]. These components also contribute to the development of healthy lifestyle digital technologies that affect consumption patterns—especially of young people ^[11].

Due to the increasing environmental awareness of consumers, companies have had to react by introducing sustainability strategies. Today, almost all companies and organizations regularly publish sustainability reports ^{[12][13]} and, while designing their market offer, take into account aspects of “sustainable development”. One element is related to green products.

Sustainable national development obviously depends on the profitability, global performance of enterprises ^{[14][15]}, and renewable energy production ^[16]; however, sustainable consumption should also play a prominent role in the formulation and implementation of the sustainable development goals ^{[17][18]}. Transforming both production systems and consumption patterns has become one of the most important trends towards achieving sustainable development ^[19]. Sustainable production based on the green-marketing approach aims to protect the environment while producing goods and services. Thus, consumers, while satisfying their own needs, can easily find environmentally friendly products in the market ^[20]. Buying green products, reducing consumption, eliminating disposable carrier plastic bags, or buying second hand products are important patterns in sustainable consumption ^[21], while excessive consumption causes many negative environmental effects and aware, responsible consumers prefer organic products, or they keep other sustainable consumption patterns ^[22].

2. E-Consumers in the E-Services Market

In economics, the “consumer” is considered in terms of choice theory, representing the entity that consumes and creates demand. Typically, the term is identified with the purchaser who consumes the products bought and enjoys their use value ^[23]. In marketing theory, the consumer is the starting point of marketing activities that are undertaken in the market for goods and services. The purpose of these activities is to direct the marketing strategy of producers and sellers to identify the requirements of consumers ^[24].

Contemporary concepts of consumption converge with the postmodern paradigm. It assumes that consumption is not only a mundane tool for satisfying needs but is also a way of seeking exciting experiences and sensations. The ability of consumers to choose available goods and services from a wide palette remains very important. Apart from the possibility of satisfying needs, this choice allows for individual expression of one's personality, developing hobbies, as well as realizing one's dreams ^[25].

In the past, the image of the consumer shaped his activities and decision-making behavior in the area of purchase; the modern economic reality, dominated by new technologies based on the Internet, has been significantly modified. The availability of a variety of communication and transactional solutions and the multiplicity of commercial offers mean that consumers have full freedom of choice and determine the fate of companies ^[26].

Today's consumers are not passive and submissive market subjects who consume what they are offered. They play the role of partners of companies in marketing activities, as well as product and service analyses. Consumers communicate with each other through various instant messengers and social media, acting as reflectors of consumers' emotions ^[27]. They comment, give opinions, and exchange suggestions among themselves. In addition, they share their insights with manufacturers. In other words, a continuous transfer of knowledge takes place between consumers and companies, which becomes the seed for the creation of innovations. It runs in two directions: from consumers to the company and from the company to the consumers ^[28].

Consumers should be considered as conscious market participants, as well as a source of knowledge transfer, which is a key determinant of innovation. In addition, consumers are becoming aware of the deficiency, which results from limiting the scope of their activity and marginalizing their role only to the purchase dimension. This forces modern producers to redefine their role. In addition, bidders have begun to notice the activities of buyers, their increasing activity, and preparation of marketing offer ^[29]. Today's consumer has evolved from passive recipient to co-creator of goods and services. He remains fully aware of his rights and position on the market. He has the opportunity to give his opinion on products and services and to exchange his suggestions, and he also becomes, in a way, the creator of innovative ideas ^[30].

The customer's expectations are rising, and he begins to demand personalized products, the final shape of which he can influence through collaboration with the provider. Consumption becomes interactive. It is possible to provide the manufacturer with information about the perception of the product, verifying the market offer and analyzing customers' experiences ^[31]. Therefore, it can be said that the consumer has become an external employee of the company, actively participating in the design and manufacture of individualized products and often innovations ^[32].

It should also be added that today's consumers are the generation of the Web, treating the Web as a place for creating goods and services. Technology is one of the key factors supporting customer value creation ^[33]. These buyers are endowed with a strong need for individualization, freedom, and choice, and they want offers targeting their demands and personalities.

3. Characteristics of the Market of Eco-Friendly Products

In the current economic reality, there is already growing consumer interest in natural products in most areas of everyday life ^{[34][35]}, and the level of environmental awareness has become a global phenomenon ^{[36][37]}. The general belief that food choice can help mitigate environmental challenges is very strong ^{[38][39]}.

A growing interest in sustainability has led enterprises to become green for a variety of reasons. Responsible behavior in the food sectors have now led consumers and producers to become more conscious of food values and lifestyle changes ^[40], which are reflected in food quality and safety ^{[41][42]}. Moreover, both consumers and producers have increased their interest in environmental protection ^[43] and want to preserve the depletion of the natural environment; however, the main reason is still financial ^[44].

Products from organic production are referred to as biological, biodynamic, or organic products ^{[45][46]}, and organic products are increasingly being chosen by people who care about their health and also by those who care about the environment. Under the regulation of the European Parliament and the Council of the EU, an organic product is a product that comes from organic production. Organic production, in turn, is understood as production that has the best impact on the environment and climate, and has a high degree of biodiversity, taking into account animal welfare and production ^[47].

The market for organic products in Poland is still a niche market, despite its rapid development, especially in recent years. Poland is regarded as a country with an average level of development of the organic food market, but with huge potential

and very dynamic growth ^[48] due to low air pollution and high biodiversity ^{[49][50]}. Additionally, in many regions of Poland, there are optimal environmental and economic conditions that allow for the development of organic farming, which would ensure the supply of raw materials for the production of processed products, as well as the supply of finished products ^[51].

Food undoubtedly accounts for the largest share of organic products, but organic products also include cleaning products, natural cosmetics, organic clothing (e.g., biodegradable pants), cosmetics, toys for children and babies, and even construction and interior design materials.

Despite fluctuating numbers of organic producers in Poland, there is an increasing demand for organic products among consumers ^{[52][53][54]}. The upward trend has been continuous for over twenty years. It is caused, among other things, by increasing consumer awareness and their orientation towards the quality of organic products. Various studies present different motives of consumers to buy organic food, such as taste, nutritional value, health, environment, and even farmers' welfare ^{[55][56][57][58][59]}, but the quality of organic food is one of the main reasons for its advantage over conventional food ^[60]. Despite the development of the market for organic products, the development of organic agriculture is quite hindered by the low level of consumer income, the territorial dispersion of farms, and the low scale of production ^[61].

Organic products are not only food, but also cosmetics, household chemicals, and clothing. Ecological clothing is not only made of 100% ecological materials, such as organic cotton, linen, lyocell, but are also produced in accordance with appropriate standards ^[62].

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