

## BUYER BEHAVIOR: BUYING FROM PHYSICAL STORES VERSUS BUYING FROM ONLINE STORES

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### **Abstract**

*The purchasing behavior of the individual is a complex one and includes several aspects.*

*Buying from physical stores and buying online are two options to make the purchase in all countries; one older, one newer. Obviously, online shopping is related to the advent of the Internet. There are differences between online buying behavior and buying behavior in physical stores. Buying from online stores means quite a few different details than buying from physical stores. There are also common points between the two types of buying behavior. There is sometimes also the middle way (i.e. to combine online purchases with those in physical stores), with several possible forms. One of these is searching for information online by shoppers, followed by buying from the physical store.*

*Before the global coronavirus pandemic (Covid-19), with its peak in the period 2020-2022, most shoppers around the Globe did not shop online. The global Coronavirus pandemic has increased the number of those who have resorted to online shopping, out of necessity. After the global Coronavirus pandemic, the trend is to return to buying mainly from physical stores.*

*It remains to be seen what the future will hold for us, in terms of the relationship between the two purchase options, which have both advantages and disadvantages. It is not very easy to predict what will be, related to the two buying behaviors.*

**Keywords:** food labelling, irregularities, buyers, consumers

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### **1. Introduction**

Buying from physical stores and buying online are two ways to make the purchase in all countries; an older one, a newer one.

I thought it would be interesting to compare the buying behaviors in the two types of stores.

In addition, there was the period of the global Covid-19 pandemic, with its peak in the period 2020-2022, which also had effects on the behavior of buyers in the two types of stores. In this work I have pursued:

-to establish what are the essential differences between the two types of buying behaviors (buying in physical stores and buying online).

-to establish what are the similarities between the two types of buying behaviors (buying in physical stores and buying in online stores).

-to establish the changes related to the behaviors of shoppers in physical and online stores, during the recent global Covid-19 pandemic.

The methodology used in this paper includes is based on the analysis of secondary sources.

I think that especially the analysis of secondary sources can help, as a data collection method, to achieve

the objectives proposed in this article.

Some secondary sources used included published results of studies carried out in several countries and on large samples, meaning precious information, hard to get otherwise.

There are many factors that influence shopping behavior online and in physical stores.

There are quite a few differences between the characteristics of online buying behavior and classic (in-store) buying behavior.

Although they seem totally different, the two types of buyer behavior also have common points.

As a future of the two types of buying behaviors, I think it is not very easy to predict what will be. There are several sensitive aspects to consider regarding the future.

## **2. Buyer behavior - brief theoretical notions**

There are many definitions of buyer behavior. In summary, buyer behavior can be defined as everything that makes a buyer interested in a product or service.

There is an extensive literature on this topic, consumer behavior and buyer behavior.

It can be seen that many theoretical sources insist on consumer behavior, but there are often differences between consumer behavior and buyer behavior.

Differences exist especially when the buyer and the consumer are different entities, but also when they are the same entity.

The behavior (both of the consumer and of the buyer) is complex, having several dimensions and being influenced by many factors[5].

There are several types of buyers: individual buyers and organizational buyers, with large differences between them.

In this article, I am primarily interested in the behavior of individual buyers, but it should be noted that organizational buyers are also important and that they have special characteristics compared to individual buyers.

It can be seen that there are differences between the authors on the content of the purchasing behavior of individuals, an aspect that can be explained by the complexity of the behavior.

Certainly, however, purchasing behavior is complex and includes several aspects, such as:

-the reasons for buying or not buying

-buyers' attitudes

-buyers' perceptions

-effective behavior, meaning what the buyer actually does: what he buys, what are the criteria for choosing stores, other details.

## **3. Aspects of buying behavior in physical stores**

Buying from physical stores means the existence of physical stores and the movement of buyers to physical stores to make the purchase.

Physical stores can be large or small, with self-service or with salesperson in the classic sense.

There are many aspects of buying behavior in physical stores, of which I will detail only some, not intending to exhaust all these aspects:

-the reasons for buying from physical stores

-the reasons for not buying from physical stores

-the criteria for choosing physical stores for buyers.

Reasons to buy from physical stores include:

-physical contact with physical stores, with goods, with sales staff. Everything that defines the shopping atmosphere (colors, noises, movement) enters here.

-the possibility to try on the goods purchased, in some cases (for example clothing, footwear)

-the possibility in many stores to choose the purchased products.

-the presence of other shoppers in the physical store, which can contribute to creating a favorable atmosphere for buying

-going to the store, in the sense that it can be an opportunity for the buyer to get some fresh air, relax and change the atmosphere for the moment.

-the possibility of promotions in physical stores, promotions that can be very convincing for many buyers.

-the possibility of interacting with sales agents, with other employees of physical stores, from whom useful details can be found to the buyer.

The reasons for not buying from physical stores are in particular:

-travel (round trip) to the store, which can mean several types of problems (a certain loss of time for the buyer, travel expenses, possible car accidents, possible sanctions given by the police for violating traffic rules, etc.)

-the existence of queues in the store, which means waste of time and discomfort for shoppers, sometimes.

-the existence of queues at the checkout, at the payment of goods.

-the non-existence of goods in the store, sometimes.

-problems sometimes in making payments in the store (for example, it is not possible to pay by card at the moment)

-the crowd that is sometimes in physical stores, especially during some periods (such as around the big holidays)

-In some stores (especially small stores), the product range is limited, due to the limited space available. Obviously, the store offers as much merchandise as it can offer.

-The fixed store timetable can be a disadvantage for some shoppers, although many large stores have a timetable that covers much of the day and work in multiple shifts. If the physical store schedule is only 8-16, for example, some potential buyers will not arrive at the store.

-There may be problems with finding a parking space, for those who travel with their own car.

The criteria for which shoppers choose physical stores include:

-advantageous prices

-promotions in physical stores

-diversity of the offer

-the behavior of employees of physical stores, the interaction between customers and these employees

-the reputation of physical stores

-location of physical stores, advantageous for customers

-payment methods

-convenience of purchase

-the habit of buying from physical stores

-other criteria.

#### **4.Aspects of buying behavior in online stores**

The emergence of online shopping is related to the emergence and development of the Internet.

It can be said without a doubt that there have been online purchases for several decades and that the expansion of online transactions is related to the expansion of the Internet worldwide. That is, this has been done only in the last decades [11],

In 2019, around 1.5 billion people in the world were shopping online. So most shoppers didn't shop online [12].

Buying from online stores means quite a few different details than buying from physical stores. Buying from online stores has special features, including:

-the buyer's access to the Internet is required

-the order is given by the buyer from a website, using a device for accessing the Internet, such as PC (Personal Computer), mobile phone, tablet.

-the buyer's data must be completed on that website.

-there is the possibility of returning the goods within a certain period of time

-payment is often made without cash; however, there are sometimes several possible forms of payment.

-social media platforms influence purchasing decisions [14].

There are many aspects related to buying behavior in online stores, of which I will detail:

-the reasons for buying from online stores

-the reasons for not buying from online stores

-the criteria for choosing online stores.

The reasons to buy from online stores include:

-you can take advantage of the advantages that the Internet offers, such as:

-the order can be placed at any time.

-it can be bought from anywhere in the country, or even from other countries.

-the convenience of online shopping

-the speed of online shopping; In other words, saving time compared to buying in physical stores.

-avoiding travel (round trip) to the store, i.e. avoiding all the problems that traveling to the store may involve (loss of time, expenses, car accidents, sanctions given by police officers for violating traffic rules, etc.)

-the order can be given at any time

-the lack of queues or crowding in physical stores

-the range of products offered online can be wide.

-Quick comparisons can be made by buyers between different online offers, offers made for the same products or services.

-You can often find online reviews, which reflect the opinions of other buyers, which can be useful for those who want to buy

-There may be multiple payment methods for buyers

-Time saving, if the delivery is made quickly.

The reasons for not buying online include:

-the lack of physical contact with the goods sought, contact desired by many buyers.

-the possibility of lying online reviews, which mislead the online buyer.

-fear of negative effects of the existence of the online buyer account.

-there are expenses related to the transport of goods, which can sometimes substantially increase the total price paid by the buyer.

-buying online can mean high costs if you order from abroad.

-unwanted problems may arise for buyers, related to the protection of personal data of buyers.

-errors made by traders, who can make delivery mistakes, can send something other than the requested goods.

-duration of delivery (the time until the buyer arrives to actually receive what he ordered)

As a rule, it is not immediately taken possession of the product. Even if the ordered product is delivered quickly, the duration of delivery can still mean discomfort for some authors of online orders.

-long delays in the delivery of products ordered online. It can lead to long delivery delays, which can mean frustration and nerves for online shoppers.

-errors can occur in online payments, errors that annoy the buyer and can sometimes make him regret that he ended up buying online.

-Some online reviews can deceive the buyer, give him an impression that will not be confirmed in reality.

-Of course, there are also manipulative practices in the online environment, which can confuse or deceive buyers. And this conclusion comes from the verification of several hundred online stores, carried out in 2023, in several European countries [8].

Also among the disadvantages of buying online are the disadvantages related to accessing and using the Internet:

- there must be an Internet connection device, which means expenses.
- the Internet connection must be made, which does not always occur quickly (it can also mean connection problems, sometimes).
- there are expenses related to the Internet, even if they are not usually large expenses. There can be no talk of zero expenses.
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Criteria for choosing online stores

The buyer chooses online stores according to criteria such as:

- the prices offered
- the diversity of the online offer
- ease of navigation on the site
- speed in creating a customer account on the website
- previous experience in online shopping, in the positive sense, of trust in online commerce
- online recommendations of other customers.
- the possibility to quickly return the products
  - the possibility to quickly communicate any dissatisfaction or uncertainty; which means a well-developed Customer Service department of the bidding company [3].

It should be noted that there is also the mixed way of buying, meaning a combination of buying from physical and online stores.

The mixed way has several variants, also reflected in the behavior of buyers.

For example:

- searching for online shopper information, followed by in-store purchase
- the order given online, followed by the pick-up of the ordered product from the store
- searching for the product in the store in order to edify itself, followed by ordering online.

### **5. Essential differences between online shopping behavior and buying behavior in physical stores**

There are some key differences between online shopping behavior and buying behavior in physical stores, including:

- Lack of physical contact of the buyer with the goods, when buying online.
- In physical stores, some products can be tried on (for example, shoes).
- Online shopping means the customer coming into contact with a shopping site, filling in personal data, choosing the payment method and the delivery method. That is, a different purchase than in physical stores, where the buyer is usually anonymous (i.e. he is not asked for personal data, although there are exceptions to this aspect).
  - The way the shopping site works and the information provided on the site are often important to determine the visitor on the site to complete the order.
  - The lower trust that buyers who have never ordered online have.
  - Online purchase can also be done from other countries, provided that you can afford the delivery costs. It is more difficult to buy from physical stores in other countries.
  - Buying online can mean saving time in choosing products, if the site offers the ability to filter products and prices. This way you can save precious time, compared to visits to physical stores.
  - The shopping environment in physical stores means the interaction of the buyer with other buyers and employees of the physical store, or purchase made together with other family members.
  - The online purchase option can mean the possibility of comparing many offers.

-Returning products bought online can mean discomfort and lost time for customers forced to do so.

-Some influencing factors of purchasing behavior are different. There are specific factors for each of the two types of behaviors. For example, as important factors influencing shoppers, there may be online reviews from other shoppers in the case of online purchases, and person-to-person recommendations in the case of in-store purchases.

The importance of the criteria (of choosing physical or online stores) is an interesting topic of study.

A study of 23,000 shoppers in 23 countries on several continents, showed that:

-There are several factors that determine the purchase decision

-The most important factor in the decision to make the purchase online rather than in the physical store is represented by the money saved (better prices, offers)=55%

-The most important factor in the decision to make the purchase in the physical store is the possibility that customers have to see and feel the products before buying (51%) [7].

**So the importance of the criteria is different for the two types of stores.**

### **6. Similarities between online buying behavior and buying behavior in physical stores**

Although online shopping is different in some ways, there are also similarities between online shopping behavior and buying behavior in physical stores, including:

-in essence, a purchase is made.

-there are reasons to buy or reasons not to buy, in both situations.

The motivations that drive in-store shopping versus online shopping aren't as different as expected, according to James Llewellyn, director of shopper research at GfK[7].

-A purchase decision process is also followed when buying in physical stores and when buying online.

-There are many factors that influence buying behavior in both situations.

-Among the factors that influence buying behavior, price will be of great importance in both situations.

-There may be promotions that attract the buyer, both when buying in the physical store and when buying online.

-It is possible to achieve customer loyalty, customers who are loyal to physical stores or online stores, who repeat the purchase and who attract other customers.

### **7. The recent global coronavirus pandemic and its influence on shopping behavior in physical stores and online stores**

The global coronavirus pandemic (Covid-19), with its peak in the period 2020-2022, had effects on many levels on humanity, including on purchasing behavior[10].

The pandemic has caused millions of deaths, being one of the deadliest in history.

The global coronavirus pandemic has meant, as expected, an increase in the volume of online purchases

The impact of the Covid-19 pandemic on trade has not been the same; there is a study conducted by Ecommerce Europe at the end of 2020, which shows that there were differences between the 19 European countries studied. [9].

The Covid-19 pandemic has influenced consumer behavior[4].

The avoidance of physical meetings, which was recommended for medical reasons during the pandemic, has led to an increase in online transactions across the planet, a phenomenon that was expected to happen.

The Internet helped a lot in making purchases during that difficult period for all countries of the world.

Among the implications of the Covid-19 pandemic (with its peak in the period 2020-2022) on the behavior of consumers and buyers (from all countries) are:

- the purchase and use of protective masks, which had to be worn in areas with several people. Such products were not needed in large quantities in other periods, for ordinary buyers, being usually used in hospitals.

- isolation of individuals, to avoid illness

- avoiding crowding in stores, to avoid getting sick

- avoiding crowds in general (including parties, parks), so as not to run the risk of getting sick with Covid-19

- going shopping less often, precisely to avoid contact with others.

- the greater emphasis placed during the pandemic on the purchase of basic products [1].

- making certain stocks on some products, so you can go shopping less often.

- the prohibition in a period for football supporters and not only to go to stadiums or gyms, for the same reason (avoiding the risk of getting sick with Covid-19).

- vaccination against Covid-19. It should be noted that there were also opinions against anti-Covid vaccines, opinions expressed including by some doctors, in the online environment and on television.

Regarding the issue of vaccination against Covid-19, there are differences between countries and it can be a separate topic of study related to consumer behavior.

## **8. The future and the two types of buying behaviors (from physical stores and from online stores)**

In my opinion, in the future there will be both forms of purchase (from physical stores and from online stores). I do not agree with those who exaggerate the advantages of one of the two forms of purchase.

In the future, online shopping will certainly exist, because the Internet will continue to exist and will continue to evolve, and the proportion of those who will have access to the Internet will be increasing. But in my opinion, this does not mean that buying from physical stores will disappear completely.

On the contrary, there are indications that after the global pandemic of Covid-19, there is a return to buying from physical stores[13].

A study of more than 23,000 consumers in 30 countries in spring 2024 shows that more than half of the shoppers surveyed say they want to see, touch and rate items before purchasing them.

In my opinion, this is an interesting result, obtained on a very large sample, after the Covid-19 pandemic period. And that can provide clues about what is to come.

In the future, buying from physical stores and buying online will also mean some changes, probably under the impact of new technologies and higher education of buyers.

Success in digital marketing lies not only in the adoption of new technologies, but also in the ability to understand the customer[2].

I think it is not easy to say what will be in the future, related to the two types of buying behaviors. There are many aspects to take into account.

Shoppers change over time, and buying behavior partially changes.

And in the future, the disadvantages of online shopping will weigh heavily in the choice made by many buyers.

The future will probably mean the coexistence between buying in physical stores and buying online.

There will probably be differences between buyers depending on factors related to buyers, such as the time available for purchase, income, preferences, the degree of use of new technologies.

It remains to be seen how wide the mixed buying path will be in the future, that is, that path that combines buying from physical stores with that from online stores.

## 9. Conclusions

There is a rich literature on the topic of consumer behavior and buyer behavior.

Buying behavior is complex and includes several aspects, such as: reasons for buying or not buying, buyers' attitudes, buyers' perceptions, actual behavior.

There are different characteristics of buying behavior in physical stores and buying behavior in online stores.

There are obvious differences between online shopping behavior and buying behavior in physical stores, among which the most important are:

- lack of physical contact of the buyer with the goods when buying online.
- the customer's entry into contact with a shopping site, when buying online
- purchasing behavior is influenced by a multitude of factors (this is true for purchases in physical stores, and for purchases in online stores)

Some influencing factors of purchasing behavior are different in the two situations.

It should be noted, however, that there are common points between the two types of buying behaviors. In essence, a purchase is still made, but in a different way.

It is worth mentioning that there is sometimes the middle way (to combine online shopping with those in physical stores), with several forms.

In my opinion, it is obvious that online purchases are of the future, due to the development of the Internet and the increasing access to the Internet. Development will continue in this area, and this conclusion is valid all over the Planet.

And in the future, the problem of the disadvantages of online shopping for buyers remains to be solved. The most important of which are:

- impossibility to check the products before purchase.
- additional costs to be paid by buyers, for transport.
- problems related to the protection of personal data
- the costs of accessing the Internet.
- problems related to the expansion of the Internet from a technical point of view on a global scale. It remains to be seen if it will be possible to access it in any area of the world.

In my opinion, both forms of commerce, i.e. in the physical store and online, have chances to exist in the future. I do not agree with those who exaggerate the advantages of the Internet and consider it as the only future option for commerce.

It remains to be seen whether the man of the future will primarily use the Internet, will want to combine the two ways of buying or will prefer physical stores.

We should not forget that it is difficult to predict buyer behavior and that it is not possible to know buyer behavior in its entirety. As a result, the future, although it should be oriented towards new technologies and modern aspects, including in purchasing, may bring surprises, in the sense that the purchase from physical stores may not be reduced as much as it would be thought today, due to the disadvantages encountered in online shopping.

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