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To Buy or Not to Buy from the Internet: Reasons to Behave in a Certain Manner in An International Online Commerce Society

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TO BUY OR NOT TO BUY FROM THE INTERNET: REASONS TO BEHAVE IN A CERTAIN MANNER IN AN INTERNATIONAL ONLINE COMMERCE SOCIETY

Oana TUGULEA*
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Abstract: *The purpose of this research is to identify the most important reasons that drive young Romanian Internet users to buy or to avoid buying from the Internet and to investigate the differences in the reasoning between two groups of Internet users. The most important reasons to buy from the Internet, as selected by the buyers group, are aspects concerning physical and financial gains: “comfort ability” and “time saving” (easiness to place an order – physical gain) on one hand, and “advantageous price” (financial gains) on the other hand. By far, the most important reason to avoid Internet shopping, for both analysed groups was the “impossibility to touch and test the product”.*

Keywords: Internet; online shopping; reasons to buy; reasons not to buy

JEL Classification: M31; M39

Introduction

Businesses and customers from all over the world can easily now communicate and share businesses and ideas using the Internet. International marketing activities are built around personalisation of the relationship between the company and the client. The IT and the web took the marketing process further, allowing marketers to customise all the actions involving a client.

In the context of a global economy, where competition is extremely strong, where technology is practically used in any field of activity, the implementation of the digital applications drives to a more intense supplier – customer relationship (Ivang *et al.*, 2009).

Due to the evolution of the digital market, the marketing activities needed to be extended and adapted to new conditions. Yet, customers are the same people from the traditional markets, with the big difference that they make a click behind a device in order to purchase a product. For this reason, marketing operates with the same general principles, with extensions and adaptations for the digital market. Some of these adaptations are represented by transformations from the seller’s agents into

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client's agents, from marketers of goods and services into client's consultants (Achrol and Kotler, 1999).

Aspects of businesses in the IT industry, such as the product life cycle, developing new products, developing new businesses, are changing extremely rapidly (Fine, 1998). According to Amit and Zott (2001), the sources of E-Business value creation are: (1) efficiency, (2) complementarities, (3) lock-in and (4) novelty.

The online market's expectations changed. This change drove to adaptations of the electronic businesses in order to support the objectives and the strategies of the online companies.

The Internet allows people in general, customers specifically, to have fast access to information and make better choices, which makes the implementation of information technology a real challenge (Ivang *et al.*, 2009). The Internet supports and makes stronger connections between people in general by offering a new interaction channel, rather than replacing an existing one (DiMaggio, 2001).

Online companies involved most of their resources in IT capabilities. This drove to lack of attention to clients and services supplied to them; all online companies have at least one e-mail address to contact, but still many e-mails have no reply to customers (Etzel *et al.*, 2001).

It is very important to understand why people buy from the Internet and, even more important, why some people refuse to consider any online purchase. This aspect is much more complex, as differences may occur due to demographic differences, such as regional/cultural aspects and age/sex/income aspects and psychographic aspects. The reasoning for purchasing or refusing to purchase needs to be studied in specific contexts and for specific targets.

1. Literature review

The efficient information exchange became a source of efficiency itself for online companies (Emerick, 1996; Eder and Darter, 1998); the web proved to be useful for any kind of promotional activity, such as delivering any type of information about the company, products or philosophies (Palumbo and Herbig, 1998; Palmer and Griffith, 1998).

It was vital to understand the buying intentions of the consumers online. There is no marketing strategy that works without understanding what the target wants and needs. Also, no marketing strategy worked without understanding the reasons behind a purchase. When buying online, researchers identified and examined influencing variables, such as: (-) security of transactions, (-) sales quality, (-) price matters, (-) quality of information and services, (-) quality of the system, (-) security risks, (-) pleasure to buy, (-) perceived product quality (Liao and Cheung, 2001; Miyazaki

and Fernandez, 2001; Saeed *et al.*, 2003). Building decision support systems and assisting consumers with decisional instruments are helpful (O'Keefe and McEachern, 1998).

Grunert and Ramus (2005) studied the literature on Internet shopping. According to their observations, there are two important aspects about products that influence the tendency of consumers to purchase them online: (-) need for explanation and (-) added convenience for the customer.

The reasons to buy or not to buy from the Internet were studied for various types of products sold via the Internet.

For example, according to Kim *et al.* (2003), Goldsmith and Goldsmith, (2002) and Yingjiao and Paulins, 2005, reasons for which young Internet buyers make cloths online purchases or repeat purchases from a certain Website are: (-) perceived good quality of the products; (-) good prices; (-) correspondence between the ordered product and the one that was received; (-) comfort ability; (-) easiness to return products; (-) online payment certainty, (-) amusement, (-) self-trust in the abilities to make the correct decisions. The content of the Website and the atmosphere are factors that influence the online satisfaction, while security aspects and relations with customers influence the buying intention of clothes from the Internet (Ha and Stoel, 2012).

Grunert and Ramus (2005) propose a model to represent consumers' intentions when buying food from the Internet. According to their proposal, there are four types of beliefs that explain the intentions of consumers: (-) others' reactions' beliefs, (-) personal abilities beliefs, (-) perceived benefits and disadvantages and (-) availability of resources beliefs.

Also, results showed that the more experienced Internet users are, the more willing they are to make online shopping, as they understand how to deal with the perceived risks. (Grunert and Ramus, 2005).

2. Purpose and hypotheses

This study has the **purpose** to identify the most important reasons that drive young Romanian Internet users to buy or to avoid buying from the Internet. Also, the **purpose** is to investigate the differences in the reasoning between two groups of Internet users: those who have bought at least one product from the Internet in the past year (called *buyers* in this article) and those who use the Internet for other purposes but buy online (called *non-buyers* in this article). The aim is to identify possible different reasons for the two main groups.

This research has the following **objectives**:

1. To Identify the reasons for which buyers chose to buy online;

2. *To Identify the reasons for which Internet users (buyers and non-buyers altogether) chose not to buy online;*
3. *To Identify the reasons for which buyers chose not to buy online;*
4. *To Identify the reasons for which non-buyers chose not to buy online;*
5. *To identify differences in reasons to avoid buying from the Internet between the two groups.*

The **research hypotheses** are:

H1: “Comfort ability” and “time saving” are the most important reasons for which Internet users buy from the Internet.

In a previous qualitative research, these reasons mentioned in the first hypothesis were mentioned by most participants. Also, in a past similar research, that took place five years before, these reasons were the top reasons selected by the participants in the study (Ciobanu, 2011).

H2: “Impossibility to touch and test the product” is the most important reason for which Internet users don’t buy from the Internet.

As in the case of the first hypothesis, this reason was revealed in the past qualitative research and the similar research that took place five years before (Ciobanu, 2011).

H3: The most important reasons that drive buyers to refuse to buy from the Internet in various situations are different from the reasons that drive non-buyers to totally avoid the Internet when it comes to make a purchase.

The previous qualitative research emphasized that non-buyers avoid offering personal card data on online sales pages. Also, the main reason they seemed to speak about in the qualitative research was the lack of trust that the product presented on the Internet “looks the same” as it looks in reality, when being delivered.

Buyers, on the other hand, seemed to handle the trust issue, based on personal experience and use of other users’ reviews. They have methods to place a certain online page in the trusted or un-trusted category. This is why the most important reasons to avoid buying from the Internet in certain situations are expected to be different for buyers, comparing to non-buyers.

3. Methodology

The questionnaire that was used to gather data in this research was similar to the questionnaire used in past research (Ciobanu, 2011). Data was gathered the second time, using the same instrument five years after, in order to study in more depth the reasons to buy or to avoid buying from the Internet.

The purpose of the initial research was to identify the credibility dimensions of commercial Web sites (Ciobanu, 2011). As it is presented in the study of Ciobanu (2011), the initial instrument was built on a previous qualitative research that investigated Internet users and it was tested.

4. Population and sample

The population is represented by young Internet users. The sample is represented by students, men and women, attending most of the education levels (bachelor and master studies). The sample is representative for the studied population, as in Romania, most active young Internet users are students. In order to understand behavioural aspects (James and Sonner, 2001; Oakes, 1972), especially when using the Internet (Kwak *et al.*, 2002; Miyazaki and Fernandez, 2001; Sexton, Johnson and Hignite, 2002) students represent a preferred category of studied population.

Ethical aspects of the research were accomplished. Participants in this study were not forced by any means to fulfil the questionnaire as there was asked for their verbal consent beforehand. All questionnaires were anonymous, so there is no possibility to identify the name of the students. Students were informed about the research and that fulfilling the questionnaire is on their willing and that there is no connection with their evaluation criterion. Also, the permission of the professors coordinating the seminars was asked in order to get access to students.

There were 1399 valid questionnaires. Data was collected during two semesters of an academic year in Romania.

Out of the 1399 students, only 30% were from Iasi. Students were randomly selected from all the majors of the Faculty of Economics and Business Administration, first, second and third year of study for Bachelor's cycle, first and second year of study for Master's cycle. 58% of the students fulfilled the buyers' questionnaire and 42% fulfilled the non-buyers' questionnaires.

5. Results

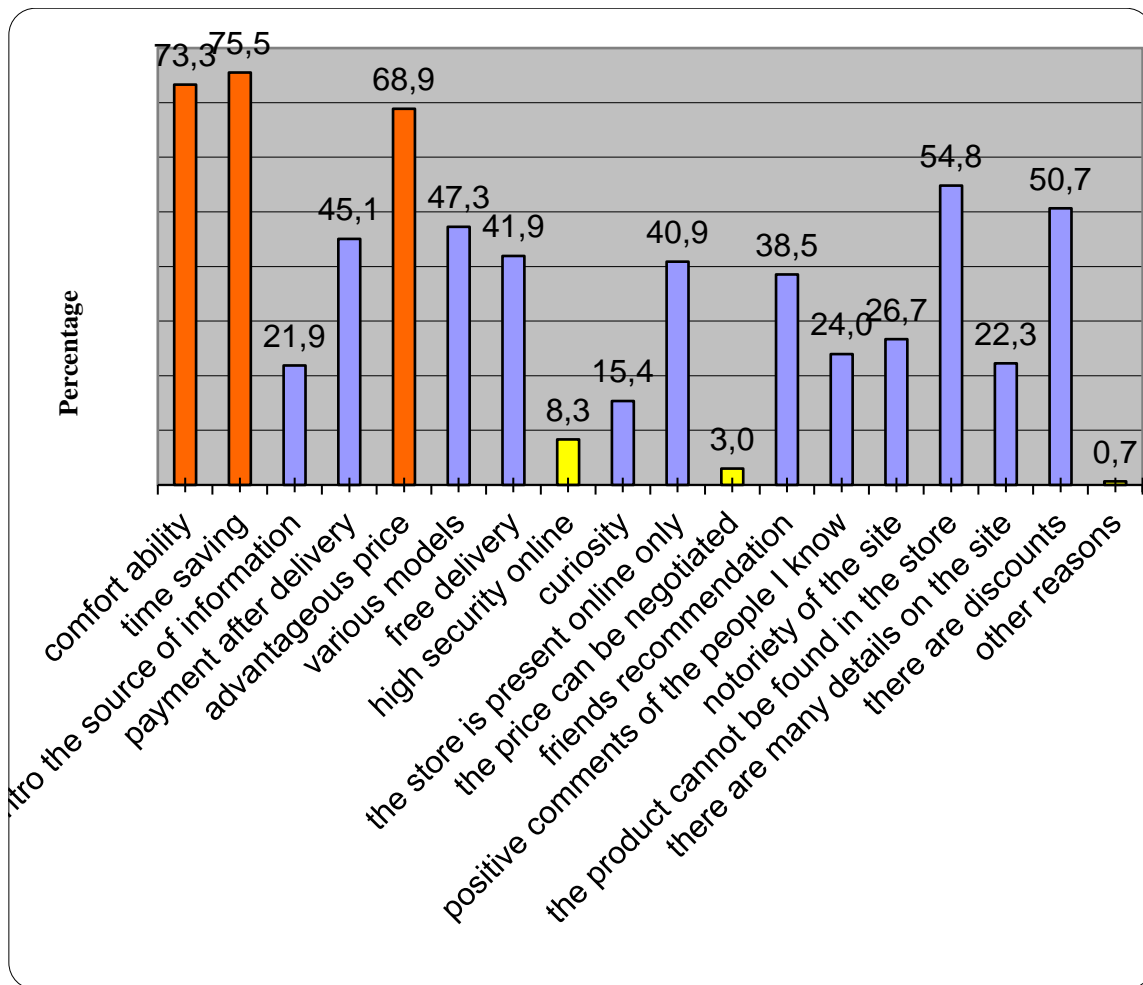
Objective 1. Identify the reasons for which buyers chose to buy online

In order to identify the reasons that buyers chose to buy from the Internet, a list of possible reasons was offered to participants. This list was fulfilled only by participants that made at least one online purchase (the *buyers* group of this study). Students were asked to fill in all the sections concerning the reasons that drove them to buy from the Internet in various situations.

The table below lists the possible reasons to buy from the Internet. The list was generated after the previous qualitative research, when students that participated mentioned all the reasons for buying from the Internet, from their experience.

Table 1- Reasons to buy from the Internet

comfort ability
time saving
trust into the source of information
payment after delivery
advantageous price
various models
free delivery
high security online
curiosity
the store is present online only
the price can be negotiated
friends recommendation
positive comments of the people I know
notoriety of the site
the product cannot be found in the store
there are many details on the site
there are discounts
other reasons

Figure 1 - Percentages of students that ticked each reason in the list above

The figure above suggests that the most common reasons for which students make online purchases are:

- “*Comfort ability*” – more than 70% of respondents;
- “*Time saving*” – more than 70% of respondents;
- “*Advantageous price*” – almost 70% of respondents.

Reasons that were selected by very few of the respondents were:

- “*High security online*” – less than 10% of the respondents;
- “*The price can be negotiated*” - less than 3% of the respondents.

Important reasons to buy from the Internet may be translated into physical and financial gains: “*comfort ability*” and “*time saving*” (easiness to place an order – physical gain) on one hand, and “*advantageous price*” (financial gains) on the other hand. Other important reasons (gathering over 50% of the respondents’ options) are “*the product cannot be found in the store*” and “*there are discounts*”. Both reasons are connected to physical and financial gains.

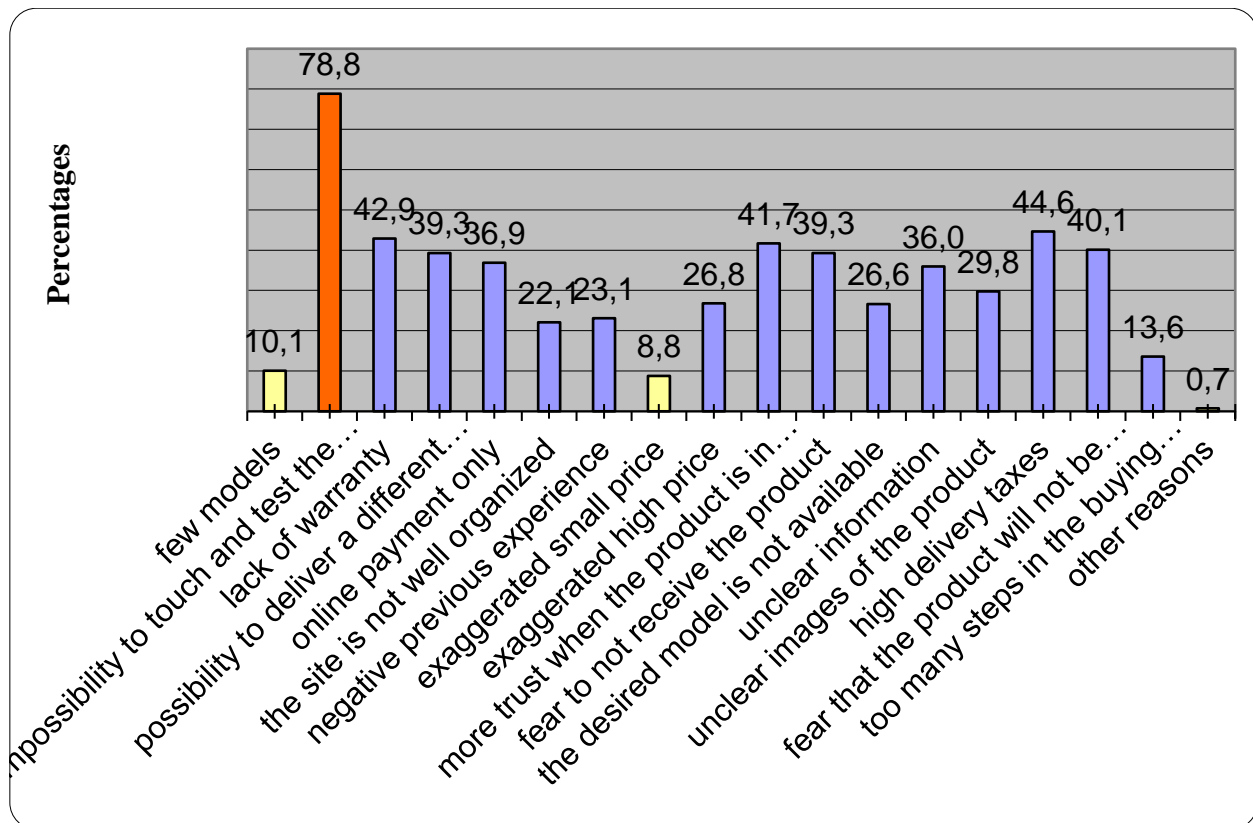
Objective 2. Identify the reasons for which Internet users (buyers and non-buyers altogether) chose not to buy online

In order to identify the reasons why Internet users chose not to buy from the Internet, another list of possible reasons was offered to participants. Students were asked to fill in all the sections concerning the reasons that convinced them not to buy from the Internet in various situations. All students (buyers and non-buyers) filled in this list.

The table below lists the possible reasons for not buying from the Internet. As in the case of the first list, this list was also generated after the previous qualitative research, participants mentioning all the reasons for not buying from the Internet, from their experience and perception.

Table 2 - Reasons for not buying from the Internet

few models
impossibility to touch and test the product
lack of warranty
possibility to deliver a different product
online payment only
the site is not well organized
negative previous experience
exaggerated small price
exaggerated high price
more trust when the product is in offline
fear to not receive the product
the desired model is not available
unclear information
unclear images of the product
high delivery taxes
fear that the product will not be delivered in the presented form
too many steps in the buying process
other reasons

Figure 2 - Percentages of students that ticked each reason in the list above

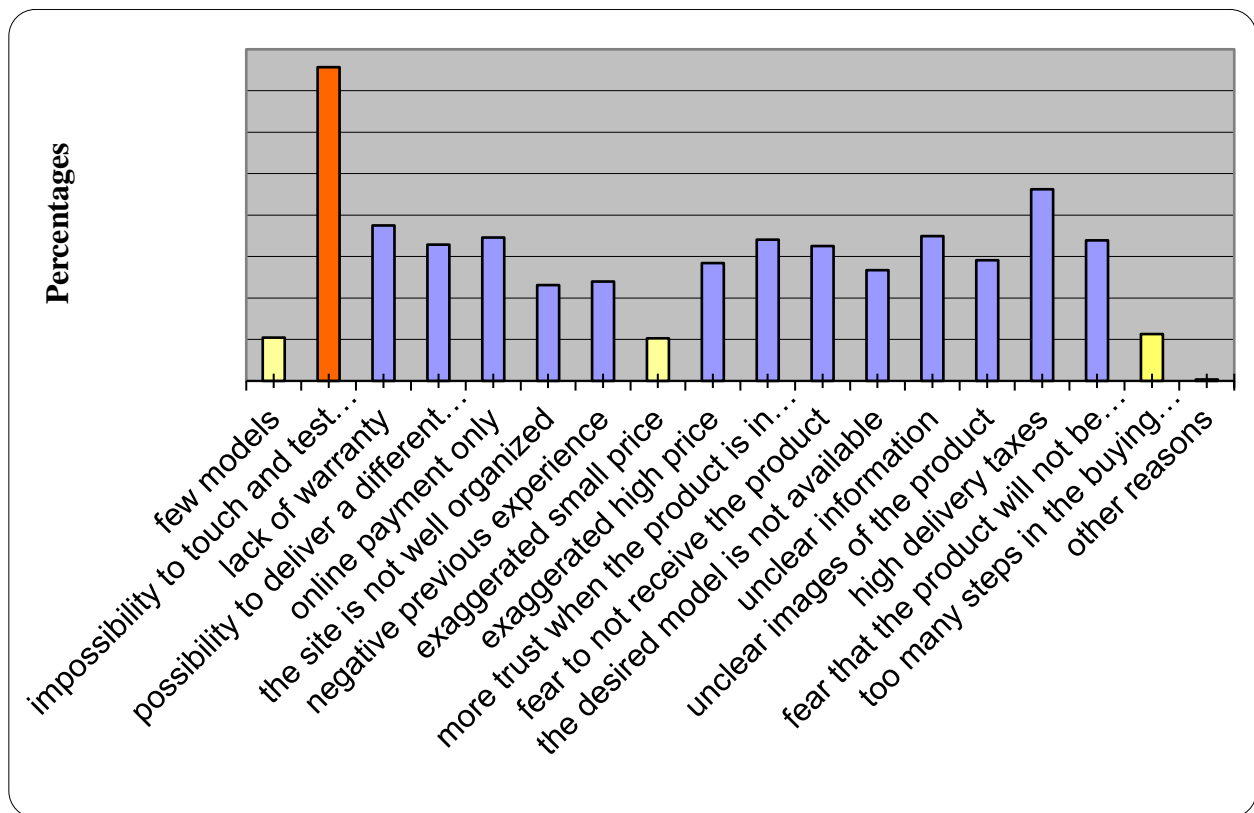
By far, the most important reason for which users avoid buying from the Internet is the “*impossibility to touch and test the product?*”. All the other reasons gather less than 50% of the respondents’ perceptions.

The most important reason that still keeps the users away from making a purchase is the lack of the *real world feel*, an important dimension of the credibility of commercial websites (Fogg *et al.*, 2001; Ciobanu, 2011).

Objective 3. Identify the reasons for which buyers chose not to buy online

In order to identify the reasons why buyers chose not to buy from the Internet, the same list of possible reasons was statistically analysed. The difference between Objective 2 and Objective 3 was that, in this statistical analysis only buyers were selected before running the frequency analysis of the reasons for avoiding buying online.

Figure 3 - Percentages of students - buyers that ticked each of the reason to avoid buying

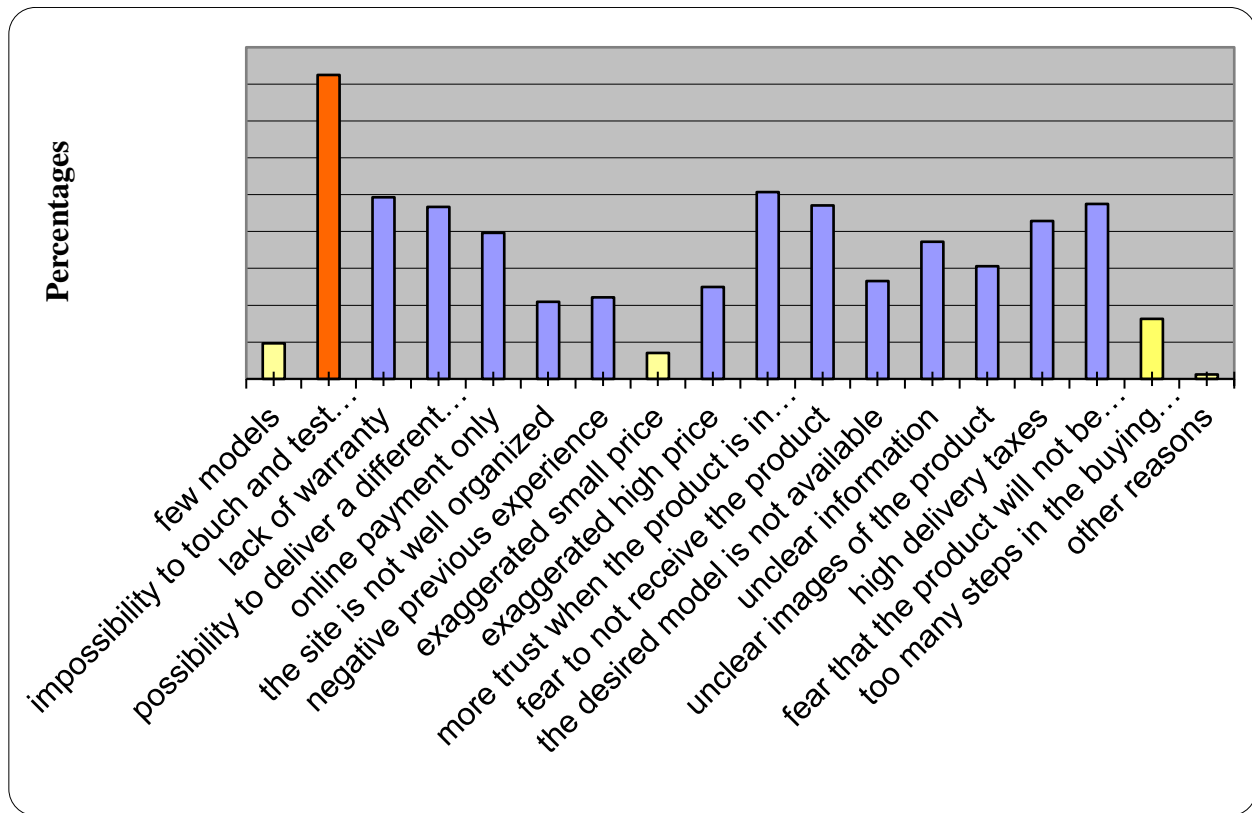


As in the analysis commented under Objective 2, the most important reason for which buyers avoid buying from the Internet in certain situations is the “*impossibility to touch and test the product*” (the lack of the *real world feel*, Fogg *et al.*, 2001). All the other reasons gathered less than 50% of the respondents’ perceptions.

Objective 4. Identify the reasons for which non-buyers chose not to buy online

In order to identify the reasons why non-buyers chose not to buy from the Internet, the same statistical procedure was run on the same list as in Objective 3. The difference between Objective 3 and Objective 4 was that, in this statistical analysis only non-buyers were selected before running the frequency analysis of the reasons to avoid buying.

Figure 4 - Percentages of students – *non-buyers* that ticked each of the reason to avoid buying



As in the analysis commented in the Objective 3, the most important reason for which buyers avoid buying from the Internet in certain situations is the “*impossibility to touch and test the product*” (the lack of the *real world feel*, Fogg *et al.*, 2001).

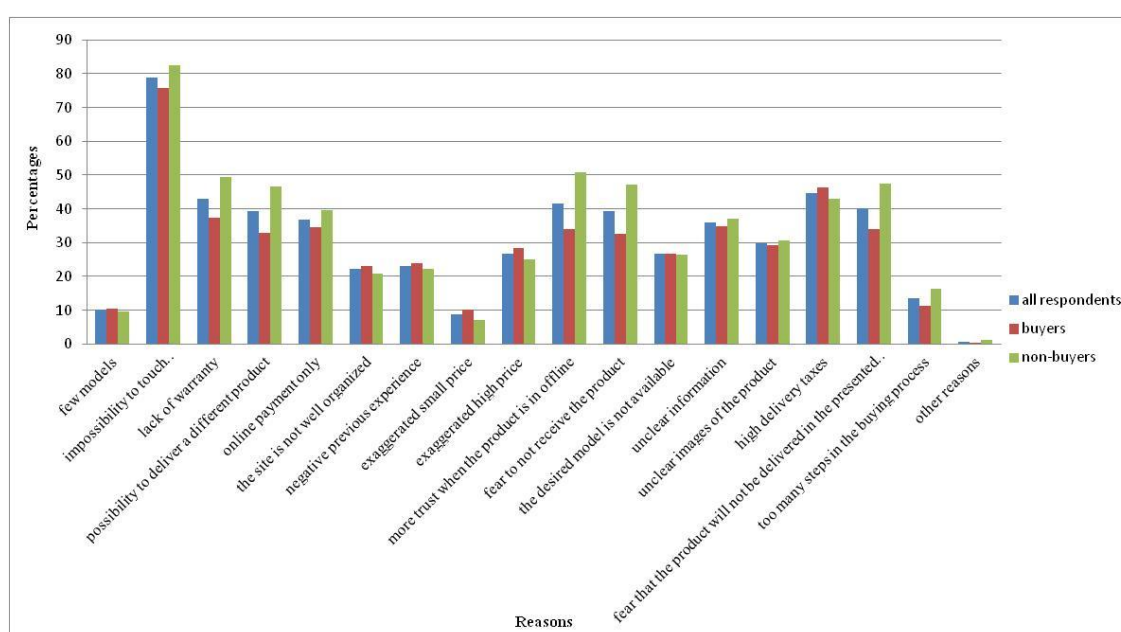
Objective 5. Identify the differences in the reasons for avoiding buying from the Internet between the two groups

In this section, data was gathered from Objectives 2, 3 and 4 in order to see if there are any differences in the selection of the reasoning between the two analysed groups: *buyers* and *non-buyers*.

Table 3 - Reasons not to buy from the Internet – comparison between the groups of respondents

Reasons	all respondents	buyers	non-buyers
few models	10.07	10.45	9.66
impossibility to touch and test the product	78.84	75.68	82.49
lack of warranty	42.88	37.50	49.30
possibility to deliver a different product	39.28	32.88	46.68
online payment only	36.88	34.59	39.64
the site is not well organized	22.09	23.12	20.93
negative previous experience	23.11	23.97	22.13
exaggerated small price	8.78	10.27	7.04
exaggerated high price	26.8	28.42	24.95
more trust when the product is not bought online	41.68	34.08	50.70
fear to not receive the product	39.28	32.53	47.08
the desired model is not available	26.62	26.71	26.56
unclear information	35.95	34.93	37.22
unclear images of the product	29.76	29.11	30.58
high delivery taxes	44.64	46.23	42.86
fear that the product will not be delivered in the presented form	40.11	33.90	47.48
too many steps in the buying process	13.59	11.30	16.30
other reasons	0.74	0.34	1.21

Figure 5 - Comparison between percentages of students – *all together, buyers and non-buyers* that ticked each of the reasons for avoiding to buy online



The fact that the most important reason to avoid Internet shopping in certain situations is the *“impossibility to touch and test the product”* (the lack of the ***real world feel***, Fogg *et al.*, 2001) is known already from the analysis discussed in Objectives 2, 3 and 4. As a comparison between the groups of *buyers* and *non-buyers*, it is noticeable that this reason is selected more frequently by the group of *non-buyers*.

According to Figure no. 5, it is obvious that most reasons for avoiding Internet shopping are more frequently selected by the *non-buyers* group. These reasons are:

- *“impossibility to touch and test the product”*
- *“lack of warranty”*
- *“possibility to deliver a different product”*
- *“online payment only”*
- *“more trust when the product is not bought online”*
- *“fear not to receive the product”*
- *“unclear information”*
- *“unclear images of the product”*
- *“fear that the product will not be delivered in the presented form”*
- *“too many steps in the buying process”*

If these reasons could be categorised, there would be divided in reasons concerning the product (most of them), reasons concerning the communication related to the product and reasons concerning the buying process. All these reasons are connected to the (lack of) experience of the Internet users. It seems as the more inexperienced the user is, the more these types of reasons are mentioned that influence the user to avoid buying from the Internet. This is only a hypothesis that should be developed in a future research.

On the other hand, the list of reasons that were selected more frequently by the *buyers* group included:

- *“the site is not well organized”*
- *“negative previous experience”*
- *“exaggerated small price”*
- *“exaggerated high price”*
- *“high delivery taxes”*

All these reasons may be included in these categories: reasons concerning the site structure, reasons concerning the price and reasons concerning the personal experience. Overall, these reasons lead to the idea that frequent Internet users pay more attention to more complex aspects, such as the structure of the website or the prices, than aspects related to the product itself, which may be more easily manipulated by the site owner.

The reason “*the desired model is not available*” is relatively equally selected by both analysed groups. The possible explanation is that this is an objective reason that has no relation to the user’s experience with the Internet in general.

In order to understand if these differences presented above are significant, Independent Sample test was conducted in SPSS.

Table 4 - Test Statistics(a) for 4 reasons

	few models	impossibility to touch and test the product	lack of warranty	possibility to deliver a different product
Mann-Whitney U	145335,000	136400,500	128257,500	125746,000
Wilcoxon W	318501,000	261150,500	252010,500	249997,000
Z	-,402	-2,802	-3,999	-4,742
Asymp. Sig. (2-tailed)	,688	,005	,000	,000

a Grouping Variable: Group of respondent

Table 5 - Test Statistics(a) for 4 reasons

	online payment only	the site is not well organized	negative previous experience	exaggerated small price
Mann-Whitney U	138641,500	143373,000	144086,000	141993,500
Wilcoxon W	262892,500	316539,000	317252,000	315159,500
Z	-1,805	-,822	-,618	-1,745
Asymp. Sig. (2-tailed)	,071	,411	,536	,081

a Grouping Variable: Group of respondent

Table 6 - Test Statistics(a) for 4 reasons

	exaggerated high price	more trust when the product is not bought online	fear to not receive the product	the desired model is not available
Mann-Whitney U	140702,000	121359,000	124794,000	146082,000
Wilcoxon W	312693,000	245112,000	249045,000	270333,000
Z	-1,250	-5,636	-4,964	-,021
Asymp. Sig. (2-tailed)	,211	,000	,000	,984

a Grouping Variable: Group of respondent

Table 7 - Test Statistics(a) for 4 reasons

	unclear information	unclear images of the product	high delivery taxes	fear that the product will not be delivered in the presented form
Mann-Whitney U	142661,500	143708,000	141591,000	125937,000
Wilcoxon W	266912,500	267959,000	314169,000	249690,000
Z	-,876	-,603	-1,032	-4,625
Asymp. Sig. (2-tailed)	,381	,547	,302	,000

a Grouping Variable: Group of respondent

Table 8 - Test Statistics(a) for 2 reasons

	too many steps in the buying process	other reasons
Mann-Whitney U	139032,000	69742,000
Wilcoxon W	263283,000	144047,000
Z	-2,418	-1,349
Asymp. Sig. (2-tailed)	,016	,177

a Grouping Variable: Group of respondent

The Sig. value is < 0.05 for the following reasons:

- “impossibility to touch and test the product”
- “lack of warranty”
- “possibility to deliver a different product”
- “more trust when the product is not bought online”

- *“fear to not receive the product”*
- *“fear that the product will not be delivered in the presented form”*
- *“too many steps in the buying process”*

These reasons are significantly different from the two groups' perceptions – *buyers* and *non-buyers*. All these reasons were selected significantly more frequently by the *non-buyers* group. The lack of the Internet shopping experience seems to have an effect on the selection of the reasons concerning the product and the buying process itself.

Conclusions

The research had the purpose to investigate young Internet users' reasons for buying or refusing to buy from the Internet. Also, the purpose was to investigate differences concerning these reasons selection between two groups of Internet users, divided in this research into *buyers* and *non-buyers*.

The most important reasons to buy from the Internet, as selected by the buyers group, are the aspects concerning physical and financial gains: *“comfort ability”* and *“time saving”* (easiness to place an order – physical gain) on one hand, and *“advantageous price”* (financial gains) on the other hand.

By far, the most important reason to avoid Internet shopping, for both analysed groups, is the *“impossibility to touch and test the product”*.

Confirmation and lack of validation of the research hypotheses

H1: “Comfort ability” and “time saving” are the most important reasons for which Internet users buy from the Internet.

This research hypothesis was confirmed. Among the most important reasons to buy from the Internet these two reasons were noted: *Comfort ability* and *time saving*.

H2: “Impossibility to touch and test the product” is the most important reason for which Internet users don't buy from the Internet.

This research hypothesis was also confirmed. The reason *“impossibility to touch and make probations”* was the most important reason to avoid online shopping for both groups.

H3: The most important reasons that drive buyers to refuse to buy from the Internet in various situations are different from the reasons that drive non-buyers to totally avoid the Internet when it comes to make a purchase.

This research hypothesis was partially confirmed and partially rejected. As described in the Results section of Objective 5, some reasons were selected by significantly more students from the *non-buyer* group than from the *buyer* group. On the other hand, some reasons were relatively equally selected by both groups of respondents.

Research implications

The originality of this research is the investigation of the reasons to buy from the Internet, along with the reasons for avoiding buying from the Internet. Furthermore, the originality of the study is that Internet users were split into two categories: *buyers* and *non-buyers*. Analyses were conducted on the overall sample and on the two groups as mentioned before. No similar research was found in the research process for this article.

Managerial implications

This research reveals results that are useful to managers and Website designers. They should first of all clearly define their market segment before trying to sell online.

Is the intended segment composed mostly by experienced Internet shoppers? If so, when designing an online sales Website, aspects such as the site structure and what are perceived to be “correct” prices and taxes need to be carefully analysed before running a sales campaign on the Internet.

Is the intended target composed mostly by users that don’t usually buy from the Internet? If so, managers and Web designers need to focus on the presentation of the features of the product and support system. Also, it is very important to create an efficient sales process that does not imply many steps to place an order.

Limitations of the research

The consistency of the sample that was analysed in this research is the limitation of this research. We included university students, bachelor and master levels, to represent young Internet users. Young Internet users are also represented by young people that either finished their university studies, or don’t intend to apply for university at all.

Future research

A future direction for research is to better understand how the experience of using the Internet affects the perception as regard to the reasons to buy or not to buy from the Internet. A future research

hypothesis is that the more inexperienced the user is, the more the reasons concerning the product and the sales process influence the user to avoid buying from the Internet.

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