INTERNET USER BEHAVIOUR

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Abstract: *Internet is a useful tool for everybody in a technologically advanced world. As Internet appears and develops, it creates a totally new network environment. The development of commerce on the Internet based on virtual communities has become one of the most successful business models in the world. After analyzing the concept of internet, the e-commerce market and its marketing mix and the benefits and limitations of the Internet, we have presented a few studies on Internet user behaviour. Furthermore, the paper looks at a representative sample of Romanian internet users. The results reveal that the Romanians are using the Internet especially for information gathering, e-mail, entertainment and social networking.*

Key words: *Internet users, advertising, social networking, blog, Romania.*

1. Introduction

The Internet is a global system of interconnected computer networks that use the standard Internet Protocol Suite (TCP/IP) to serve billions of users worldwide. It is a network of networks that consists of millions of private, public, academic, business and government networks, of local to global scope, that are linked by a broad array of electronic, wireless and optical networking technologies. The Internet carries a vast range of information resources and services such as the inter-linked hypertext documents of the World Wide Web (WWW) and the infrastructure to support electronic mail. [8]

The Internet has spawned an entirely whole new industry which is called electronic commerce or electronic business. Businesses sell to other businesses and to consumers on the Internet using secure Web sites.

The Internet has been one of the most productive technologies in recent history. The Internet is capable of transporting information from nearly any place on the globe to nearly any other place in just a few seconds. The Internet is becoming a major cause of time compression. [5,7]

Information about products, advertising space, software programs, auctions are available on the Internet. Companies like Google.com, Yahoo.com, Amazon.com and Youtube.com have revolutionized the way Internet can be used for marketing. Internet marketing has brought forth so many strategies such as affiliate marketing which consists of pay-per-click, pay-per-view, pay-per-call, pay-per-click advertising. Affiliate marketing also includes banner advertisements. In addition to this e-mail marketing, viral marketing, interactive advertising, blog or article based marketing are also popular. New marketing techniques are being invented all the time and that is why it is very important to know how the trend would be. [2,5]

Companies are inventing new techniques to find better ways to make revenue and establish their brand on the Internet.

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Companies have to take into consideration many parameters during their presence on the Internet. Companies must understand which marketing channel is suitable for their products or services. Companies should provide security for information which is put up on the web in order to prevent hackers and malicious people from getting access to it. They should build confidence in the minds of buyers so that they can make purchases without the fear of credit card frauds.

The Internet has enabled or accelerated new forms of human interactions through instant messaging, Internet forums and social networking. Online shopping has boomed both for major retail outlets and small artisans and traders. Business-to-business and financial services on the Internet affect supply chains across various industries.

The Internet has become a very important element of the promotion mix.

The rapid growth of this industry is being driven by the increasing number of Internet users, rising awareness and growing broadband subscription rate and e-commerce, which is playing a key role in this industry. [7]

2. E-commerce Market

The growing prevalence of Internet access has enabled new markets to emerge online. An e-marketplace is an electronic exchange where companies or individuals register as sellers or buyers in order to communicate and conduct business over the Internet.

There are many types of e-marketplaces based on a range of business models such as business-to-business (B2B), business to-consumer (B2C), consumer-to-consumer (C2C) or consumer-to-business (C2B). [3]

➢ *B2B (Business-to-Business)*
- refers to companies doing business with each other such as manufacturers selling to distributors and wholesalers selling to retailers. The price is based on quantity of order and is often negotiable.

➢ *B2C (Business-to-Consumer)*
- refers to businesses selling to the general publicc typically through catalogues utilizing shopping cart software.

➢ *C2C (Consumer-to-Consumer)*
- refers to sites offering free classifieds, auctions and forums where individuals can buy or sell thanks to the online payment systems.

➢ *C2B (Consumer-to-Business)*
- refers to a consumer who posts his project with a set budget online. Companies review the consumer's requirements and bid on the project. The consumer reviews the bids and selects the company that will complete the project.

3. E-commerce Marketing Mix

The Internet's properties can have a major impact across the marketing mix. Internet technologies can bring new unique properties to each element in the marketing mix. [3,4]

➢ **Product**
There are several ways in which Internet can offer an opportunity for product enhancement:

• Individual – personal specification can lead to creating a highly individual product.

• Customized – based on the shoppers' regular purchase choice, companies can provide a customized list of favourites.

• Digital – the Internet has facilitated the growth and distribution of bid-based products. These are digital goods or services that can be delivered via the Internet – for example, information, software upgrades, flight booking, hotel reservation, and so on. Once the customer makes the payment he can download the product regardless of the

physical location of the supplier or the buyer.

> ➢ *Price*

Internet technologies reduce the search costs that buyers incur when looking for information about new products or services.

Prices become more dynamic as we can see from the auction site eBay. Priceline.com demonstrates how collective buying can change the price paid by the consumer, creating an opportunity for flexible pricing strategies.

> ➢ *Promotion*

The Internet is becoming a very important marketing communication tool. It enables a customer to respond by interacting with communication messages. Interactive features can be incorporated into online promotions in different forms, such as:

- surveys;
- banner advertisements (a web banner or a banner ad is a form of advertising on the World Wide Web. The advertisement is constructed from an image (GIF, JPEG, PNG), JavaScript program or multimedia object employing technologies such as Java, Shockwave or Flash, often employing animation, sound or video to maximize presence. Images are usually in a high-aspect ratio shape (e.g. either wide and short or tall and narrow) hence the reference to banners. These images are usually placed on web pages that have interesting content.
- interstitials (interstitial ads appear between web pages that the user requests. For example, an interstitial ad may appear after you click on a link in an excerpt to view the full content of news story. Because interstitial ads load in the background and do not interrupt the users' immediate browsing experience, they are a preferred method of delivering ads with rich media, streaming video and/or large graphics);

- viral marketing (viral marketing and viral advertising are buzzwords referring to marketing techniques that use pre-existing social networks to produce increases in brand awareness or to achieve other marketing objectives (such as product sales) through self-replicating viral processes, analogous to the spread of viruses or computer viruses. It can be delivered by word of mouth or enhanced by the network effects of the Internet).

Promotional planning for an e-commerce start-up is more difficult because the company has the dual task of:

- ✓ communicating the benefits of using the firm's online facilities;
- ✓ registering awareness for its website address.

A key consideration for companies is getting their websites identified by search machines. Another consideration is to improve the placing of a website on search engine page rankings. The higher the placing, the more likely a web user will visit the website.

> ➢ *Distribution*

The Internet has created opportunities for companies to utilize a new channel to market. The Internet has distinct advantages over traditional channels in reducing barriers to entry.

The most frequently encountered e-commerce distribution model is that of retraining control over transactions and the delegation of the distribution. This is a standard model used by the most online tangible good retailers.

Companies which are engaged in assessing the e-commerce distribution aspects of their marketing mix should recognize the need of the technology with its following implications:

1. Distance ceases to be a cost influencer because online delivery of information is substantially the same, no matter the destination of the delivery.

2. Business location becomes irrelevant because the e-commerce corporation can be based anywhere in the world.
3. The technology allows continuing trading, 24 hours a day, 365 days a year.

4. The Benefits and Limitations of the Internet

An organization should assess the benefits and limitations of Internet technologies in order to exceed customers' expectations.

4.1. Benefits and Limitations of Internet Technologies to Consumers

Any online company should be able to answer the following questions: "Does the Internet change the target or the scope of the market?", 'Will customers use the Internet over the long term?', "Does the Internet satisfy consumer needs?". Having the correct answers, the company will be able to differentiate its e-commerce from that of the competition.

• *Benefits:*
- consumers are able to provide access 24 hours a day; they can even avoid driving to a store, searching for products or queuing at the checkout;
- consumers can acquire detailed information about products, pricing, and all of these without leaving their home or office;
- consumers can gain a better understanding of their needs;
- consumers are able to search for the lowest prices available for the brand and they can even compare prices between brands;
- new products and services can be purchased in areas such as online financial services.

• *Limitations:*
- delivery times are not flexible, so the customer must stay and wait until the goods arrive;
- the amount of information available via the Internet can be overwhelming;

- many customers are afraid to use their credit or debit cards to purchase online goods for fear that their details will be captured by 'crackers'. [3]

4.2. Benefits and Limitations of Internet Technologies to Companies

• *Benefits:*
- investment reduction through actions like replacing retail outlets with an online shopping mail or saving on paper by converting a sales catalogue into an electronic form;
- reduced order costs through e-procurement systems;
- improved distribution because once the product is available online, the company can achieve global distribution without having to invest in obtaining placements in traditional outlets;
- customized promotion by developing communications materials on the website;
- new market opportunities;
- reduced personal selling costs through an interactive website;
- relationship building because, being online, a company can acquire data on customers' purchase behaviour that can be used to develop higher levels of customer service.

• *Limitations:*
- higher operational costs;
- moving from a paper-based system to an integrated procurement system can have high cost implications;
- the need to update content regularly;
- overspecialization by targeting unviable small groups of consumers;
- technological deserts – some parts of the world do not have access to the Internet. [3]

5. Studies on Internet User Behaviour

The recent literature review by Brandtzæg (2010) identified 22 different studies that have classified media and Internet users into user types from the year 2000 to 2009. [1]

Several studies focused on:
(a) the Internet in general,
(b) online services such as e-shopping,
(c) online communities and social networking sites.

Another study regarding the Internet user types was conducted by Ortega Egea et al.

(2007), which used a representative questionnaire dataset from 15 European countries. In Figure 1 we have presented the five types of European Internet users that were identified. [1]
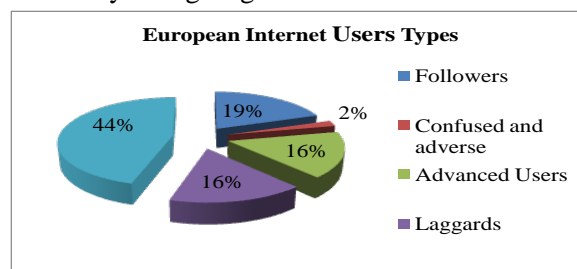

Fig. 1. *European Internet users types*

(1) Laggards (16%)

Laggards rarely use the Internet for private purposes. Most Laggards were found in Germany, France and Ireland.

(2) Confused and adverse (2%)

This user type shows confusion about Internet services. This category rarely uses the Internet for private purposes or for contacting authorities and they were mainly found in the UK and Austria.

(3) Advanced Users (16%)

Advanced Users are the most frequent online shoppers. Countries with most Advanced Users were the UK, Holland and the Nordic countries.

(4) Followers (19%)

Followers are using the Internet quite frequently but not on a daily basis. Most Followers were found in Holland and Denmark.

(5) Non-Internet Users (44%)

Countries with a majority of Non-Internet Users were in the southern part of Europe such as Spain, Greece, Portugal and Italy.

The user typology identified by Ortega Egea et al. (2007) is partly in line with the

unified Media User Typology (MUT) model presented by Brandtzæg (2010), which identified eight new media users:
(1) Non-Users,
(2) Sporadics,
(3) Debaters (people using Internet for discussion),
(4) Entertainment Users,
(5) Lurkers,
(6) Instrumental Users,
(7) Socializers (people using Internet to socialize with friends and family),
(8) Advanced Users.

Debaters and Socializers were found among users in blogs and social networking sites.

6. Romanian Internet Users

In June 2010, Romania registered about 7,7 million Internet users, about ten times more than in 2000, according to data published by the World Stats site.

In Table 1 we have presented the evolution of the number of Internet users in Romania, from 2000 to 2010. [11]

Evolution of the number of Internet users in Romania (2000-2010)   Table 1

Year	Users	Population	% Population
2000	800,000	22,217,700	3,6%
2004	4,000,000	21,377,426	18,7%
2006	4,940,000	21,154,226	23,4%
2007	5,062,500	21,154,226	23,9%
2010	7,786,700	21,959,278	35,5%

Most Internet users were found in Germany (65,1 million users), Great Britain (51,4 million users), France (44,6 million users), Italy (30 million users) and Spain (29 million users).

States with the highest Internet use were Sweden (92,5%), Holland (88,6%), Denmark (86,1%), Finland (85,1%) and Luxembourg (85,1%).

The penetration of online services was 35,5%, Romania ranking last in EU as against the European Community average of 67,6%.

The most important suppliers of Internet services in Romania are RCS&RDS, a company which had 1,1 million subscribers in 2009, Romtelecom and UPC Romania, operators which, at the end of June 2010, registered over 880,000 and 263,000 clients.

At the end of 2009, there were 2,82 million connections to Internet on broadband, 12% more compared to 2,51 connections at the end of 2008, the Internet penetration rate per 100 inhabitants being 13,1% and 34,1% per 100 households.

6.1. Profile of Romanian Internet User

Internet penetration and usage in Romania is still relatively underdeveloped in comparison to the rest of Europe, with availability and usage limited mainly to Bucharest, the capital city. [12]

Amongst Internet users, social media use is growing in popularity; particularly social networking sites, blogging, photo and video sharing and microblogging. Businesses are beginning to identify opportunities to use social media as part of their communications strategies. The government and state services have been slower to adopt social media, although individual politicians are experimenting with the media for campaigning purposes.

6.2. Romania's Access to the Internet

Romania had 7,430,000 Internet users in 2009, equating an Internet penetration rate of 33,4% across the country. Of this number, 41,5% use the Internet daily, 5,3% use the Internet "a few times a week" and 10,9% use the Internet "several times a month."

The majority of users in Romania access the Internet through a PC, with 67,3% citing this as their main point of access.

The home is the most popular place for people to access the Internet (46,4%), followed by work (15,6%) and school (8,4%). Over 20% of the Romanians access the Internet while on the move (via mobile networks, public access points e.g. Internet cafes). [12]

6.3. Internet Usage in Romania

Internet usage in Romania is split almost equally between three main functions:
- information gathering (38,6%);
- e-mail (37,4%);
- entertainment and social networking (34,1%).

33,8% of Internet users claim to be active on social media in all its various forms (e.g. reading/writing blogs, social networking/sharing multimedia content) – a significant proportion of the online population. Of this amount, 60% run their own social media account and at least 35% have uploaded a video file onto a website such as YouTube or a local equivalent

such as Trilulilu.ro. Photo sharing is more popular than video sharing, with 73% using services such as Google Picasa or Flickr. [11]

➢ *Social networking*

Facebook has a relatively smaller presence in Romania than the market leaders. Facebook is also the most representative social network in Romania.

Romanian Facebook users are fairly advanced social media consumers who tend to be educated, interested in reading blogs and interacting with other social media and interested in sharing experiences.

User age distribution on Facebook in Romania

3% 1% 1% 3% 4%
11%
37%
40%

13-15 years
16-17 years
18-24 years
25-34 years
35-44 years
45-54 years
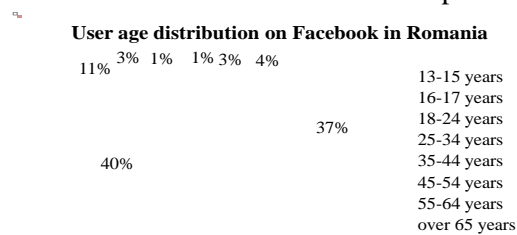55-64 years
over 65 years

Fig. 2. *User age distribution on Facebook in Romania*

The 25 – 34 age range is the largest group on Facebook, accounting for 40% of users. The second largest age group using Facebook in Romania is the 18-24 age group, representing 37% of users. 35 – 44 year-olds account for 11% of the users, according to www.socialbakers.com. [9]

➢ *Blogs*

Blogging is a popular online activity in Romania, although it is primarily the domain of educated, higher-income groups.

Blog readers in Romania tend to be younger, with the 20-35 age group participating most actively (73,7%), followed by the 25-31 age group (27,1%) and the 31-45 age group (18,6%).

With the low Internet penetration level in Romania, it is unsurprising that blogging is utilized more by experienced users, who typically devote more time to understanding the intricacies of the Internet and have developed more sophisticated patterns of online behavior.

The most popular platforms are Blogger, LiveJournal, TypePad, WordPress, and Romanian platform Webblog.ro. [12]

➢ *Microblogging*

Twitter is gaining popularity in Romania. Most Romanian Twitter users live in the capital city, Bucharest (58%), followed by people from Iasi and Cluj (approx. 6% each), although it is clear that the users numbers are significantly lower in these locations.

Most Twitterers are aged 21-30 (73%), working in either IT or the media/marketing sectors. [12]

7. Conclusions

Among many important features provided by the Internet, such as interactivity, irrelevance of distance and time, low setup costs, targeting, ease of entry, interactivity has been considered one of the main resources that the Internet is a unique marketing communication medium in comparison with other traditional media.

Considering the importance of interactivity on the Internet, it is natural that many researchers have examined why and how people use the Internet.

Synthesizing the data presented by World Stats, we can conclude the following:

- ✓ Romania has a relatively low Internet penetration rate with significant variations in access levels across the country.
- ✓ Information gathering, e-mail and entertainment are the most popular online activities amongst Romanians, each accounting for a third of Internet use.
- ✓ University-educated professionals and current students (undergraduate and post-graduate) are the primary community active online in Romania.
- ✓ Blogging is popular amongst the educated and technology "early adopter" communities, as is microblogging service Twitter.
- ✓ Romanian businesses are slowly integrating social media tactics into their marketing and communications programs.
- ✓ Politicians are beginning to recognize the value of social media as a campaign channel; Twitter, Facebook and blogging are particularly utilized.
- ✓ Journalists are increasingly using social media as an outlet for personal opinion, free from the constraints of publication editorial restrictions.

Acknowledgment:

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