

SOME CONSIDERATIONS ABOUT THE CHANGE IN CONSUMER BEHAVIOUR OF THE LAST DECADE

Mircea FUCIU¹, Anca ȘERBAN (SIMS)²

¹Lucian Blaga University of Sibiu, 0000-0001-9811-1179

²Lucian Blaga University of Sibiu, 0000-0002-8699-8590

Abstract: Consumer behaviour changes have been happening all the time throughout the development of modern society, but it seems that no changes have come as rapid as the changes that have occurred in the last decade or so. At the same time the fast-paced living, the economic, medical and military crises of the last ten years have powerfully impacted the consumer behaviour of individuals. The current paper represents on one side a brief literature review of some of the changes that have occurred when discussing the issue of consumer behaviour, and on the other hand it points out some secondary data analysis based on statistics about the changes in consumer behaviour, the values and interest of individuals of the last years. The literature review has shown that even if the classical definitions of the consumer behaviour concepts are still in place, the current market conditions are forcing us to consider other associated topics like: Behavioural Deviations, Sustainability and Environmental Concerns, Moral and Ethical Dimensions, Consumer Dominance etc. While the practical component presents some results that can be drivers for further consumer behaviour research, to understand the main change factors better and to potentially predict future behaviours.

Keywords: Marketing, Consumer behaviour, Change, Online behaviour, Crisis

JEL classification: M31, M39

1. Introduction

Consumer behaviour changes has been on the minds of academics in the last decade or so, especially due to the rapid adoption of social media, advancements in consumption, the changes in individual and business behaviours during and in the wake of the Covid-19 pandemic, and now in the context of the explosive evolution of artificial intelligence (AI).

While the theoretical background of the consumer behaviour might not have changed, over the last years, consumer behaviour has undergone significant transformations influenced by various factors, including health consciousness, technological advancements, and socio-economic changes. These shifts reflect a growing awareness for health-related issues and sustainability, driven by both individual choices and broader societal trends.

During exceptional times like the financial crisis of 2008 – 2012, the Covid-19 pandemic of the early 2000's, consumers can tend to exhibit a tendency towards simplicity and frugality, as they become more cautious with their spending. This phenomenon is characterized by a preference for straightforward, high-utility products, as consumers prioritize essential over luxury items (Sharma & Sonwalkar, 2013; SIWEK, 2023; Rayburn et al., 2021). The Covid-19 pandemic further exacerbated these trends, leading to increased panic buying and stockpiling behaviours driven by fear and uncertainty (Chua et al., 2021; Loxton et al., 2020).

¹ mircea.fuciu@ulbsibiu.ro * - corresponding author

² anca.serban@ulbsibiu.ro

2. Consumer behaviour – theoretical approaches of the last decade

While consumer behaviour is an “old” subject and concept, with definitions that have been covered by specialists and academics for more than 50 years, we consider that this is something that we need to cover, regardless of previous publications. In the last years, some newer definitions of the concept have appeared, mostly based on the current changes of the practical perspectives of the concept. In table 1, one can observe a list of 10 definitions of the consumer behaviour concept or related aspects that have been presented by authors since 2006 until now, but by all means not diminishing the classical definitions of Kotler and Armstrong (2010), Solomon et al (2012), Cătoiu and Teodorescu (2004) etc.

Table 1: Several consumer behaviour definitions

| Crt. No. | Author(s) | Definition | Main-focus of the definition |
|-----------------|-------------------------|--|---|
| 1. | McKechnie & Tynan, 2006 | Consumer behaviour is influenced by social meanings and rituals associated with consumption, such as during festive seasons, where social interactions and cultural practices shape how individuals engage in consumption | Social context |
| 2. | Denegri-Knott, 2006 | It includes both normative behaviours and deviations from established norms, particularly in online environments where consumer misbehaviour may emerge as a response to the unique dynamics of digital consumption | Behavioural Deviations |
| 3. | Kumar & Polonsky, 2017 | Consumers’ integration of environmental issues into their decision-making processes, reflecting a growing trend towards sustainable consumption and pro-environmental behaviour | Sustainability and Environmental Concerns |
| 4. | Li et al., 2018 | Consumer behaviour also encompasses the moralistic interpretations and ethical considerations that individuals apply to their consumption choices, particularly in contexts such as counterfeit consumption, where cultural meanings can redefine what is considered ethical | Moral and Ethical Dimensions |
| 5. | Millan & Wright, 2018 | Consumer behaviour can exhibit significant variations based on gender, with research indicating that men and women may have different preferences and motivations influencing their consumption choices | Gender Differences |
| 6. | Moital et al., 2019 | Consumer behaviour consists of understanding the cognitive, affective, and behavioural outcomes that are influenced by psychological factors such as attitudes, beliefs, and emotions, which can significantly impact purchasing intentions and actual behaviours | Psychological Factors |
| 7. | Seberíni, 2020 | It is shaped by cultural, social, and personal factors, where consumers' behaviours are influenced by their cultural background, social status, and personal experiences, leading to varied consumption patterns across different demographic groups | Cultural Influence |

| Crt. No. | Author(s) | Definition | Main-focus of the definition |
|-----------------|---------------------|--|-------------------------------------|
| 8. | Seberíni, 2020 | Consumer behaviour is responsive to external factors such as economic conditions, technological advancements, and societal changes, which can lead to shifts in consumption patterns, as seen during the COVID-19 pandemic | Impact of External Factors |
| 9. | Anker et al., 2021 | The definition extends to the role of consumers as active agents in the marketplace, where their preferences and behaviours can drive social marketing initiatives and influence corporate practices | Consumer Dominance |
| 10. | Verma & Rojhe, 2022 | Consumer behaviour refers to the processes that individuals go through when making decisions to spend their available resources (time, money, effort) on consumption-related items, which includes the recognition of needs, information search, evaluation of alternatives, and the final purchase decision | Decision-Making Process |

Source: Extracted by authors from Google Scholar and other international repositories

Looking at the above table, we see some similar and some different approaches to consumer behaviour, especially in the current online consumption and buying behaviour. At the same time, the rise of online shopping has transformed consumer behaviour dramatically. The Covid-19 pandemic accelerated the shift from physical retail to e-commerce, as consumers sought safe and convenient shopping options. This transition has been supported by technological advancements, which have made online shopping more accessible and user-friendly (V., 2023; Sumi & Ahmed, 2022).

Current research shows that factors such as website design, security, and user experience play very important roles in the development of online consumer behaviour (Cruz-Cárdenas et al., 2021). As consumers relying more and more on multiple digital platforms, their expectations regarding convenience and security have evolved, leading to a more discerning consumer base that values efficiency and safety in their shopping experience.

Also because of the the psychological aspects of consumer behaviour have been more an more present in recent studies. Theories such as event systems theory have been applied to understand how external events, like the pandemic, disrupt consumer psychological states and influence purchasing decisions (Wang et al., 2021).

The anxiety experienced by consumers during the last world crises has led to impulsive buying behaviours, as consumers react to perceived scarcity and social pressures (Chua et al., 2021; Loxton et al., 2020). This change points out the importance of understanding the emotional and psychological drivers behind consumer behaviour, particularly in said times of crisis. Furthermore, the last decade has seen a growing awareness of sustainability and ethical consumption among consumers. The increased influence of social media platforms and viral information dissemination has empowered consumers to make more informed choices regarding their purchases, often prioritizing brands that align with their values (Ancillotti et al., 2022; , Pogodina et al., 2020).

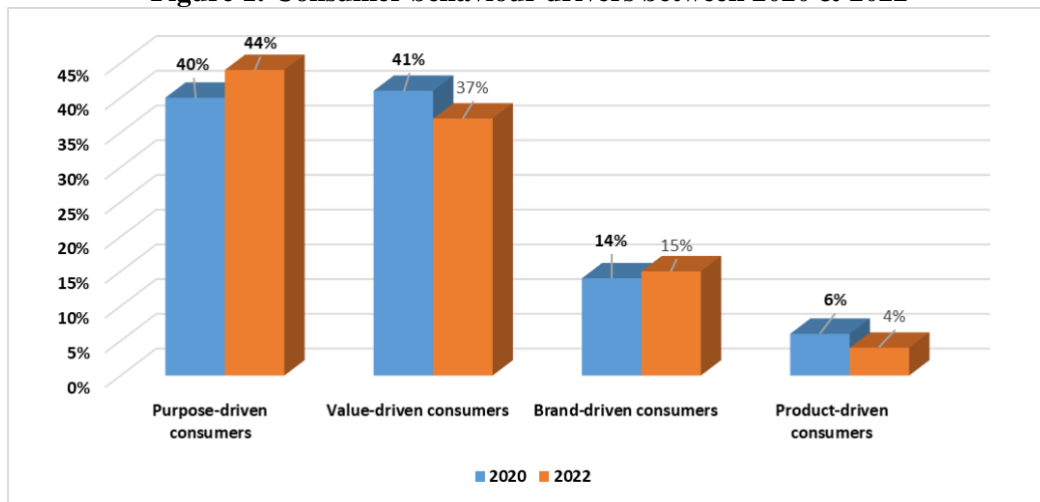
All this shows a real shift of some consumer, specially form developed countries, towards sustainability, where consumers are more inclined to support businesses that demonstrate corporate social responsibility and environmental protection actions (Ancillotti et al., 2022). So we can clearly state that, the theoretical changes in the area of consumer behaviour over the past decade have been shaped by a complex interdependence of economic conditions, technological advancements, psychological factors, and a growing importance of sustainability. As the market continues to evolve,

understanding these dynamics will be crucial for businesses aiming to meet the changing needs and preferences of consumers.

3. Consumer behaviour changes – some interesting statistics and insights

As we mentioned before, the changes in consumer behaviour have occurred especially in the context of technological changes, but also due to socio-economic crises, and nothing shows this better than research developed to capture these aspects. Based on a worldwide survey with more than 19 thousand respondents in Figure 1 we can see some interesting results.

Figure 1: Consumer behaviour drivers between 2020 & 2022

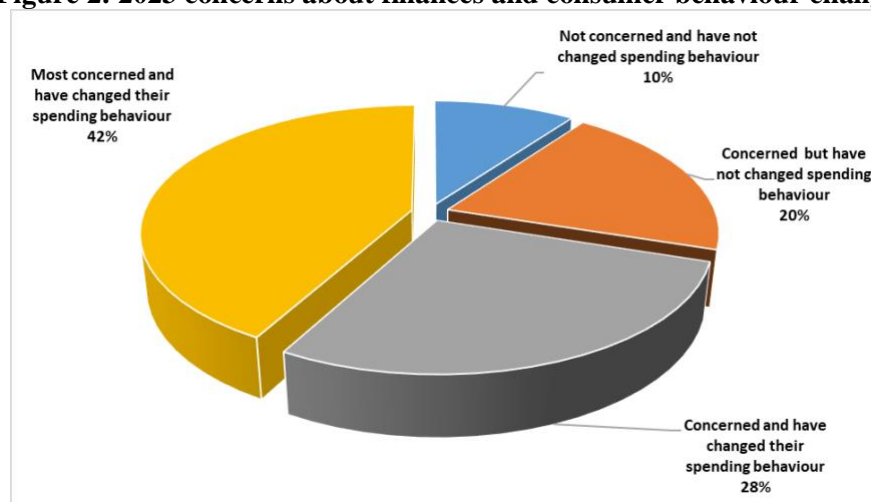


Source: statista.com, retrieved in 2024

As shown in Figure 1, even during and post Covid-19 times, the importance of the main consumer behaviour drivers has changed. It seems that the *purpose-driven consumers* have changed in terms of increasing from 40% to 44% over the two-year period, and the *brand-driven consumers* have improved with one percent from 14% in 2020 to 15% in 2022. At the same time, the *value-driven consumers* and the *product-driven consumers* are less in 2022 than in 2020.

Another study (Statista.ro, 2022), developed in 2021 on 19 thousand respondents and released in 2023, shows the main percentages of consumer changes regarding their spending and level of concern about their finances (Figure 2).

Figure 2: 2023 concerns about finances and consumer behaviour change

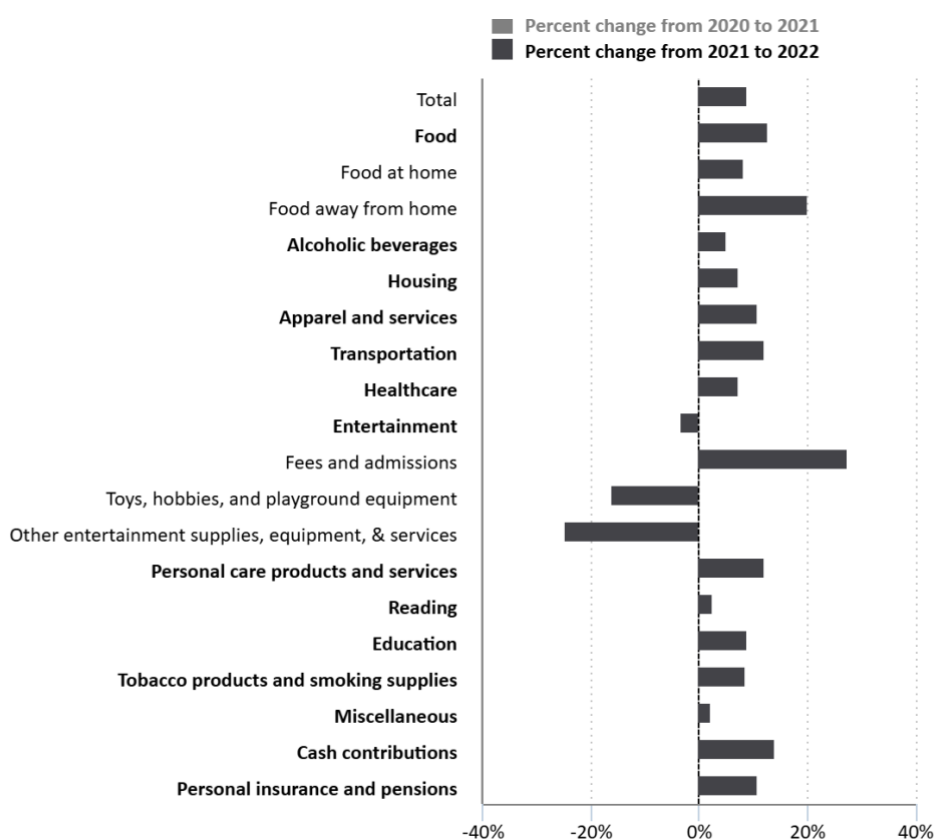


Source: statista.com, retrieved in 2024

Figure 2 shows the interesting results from another Statista.com (2023) survey that shows that the great majority of the respondents (70%) are *concerned and most concerned about their finances and have somewhat changed their consumption/spending behaviour*. Of the rest 20% percent of respondents show concern and 10% are not concerned about their financial status and have not altered their spending behaviour. The interesting fact about all this is that the results of the study are presented about 2023, the first full year with no pandemic, but a year in which another crisis has emerged in Europe, the Russia-Ukrainian military conflict that generated substantial economic issues worldwide.

At the same time, the US Labour Statistics Bureau shows that American household spending for certain basic and non-basic groups of products has changed and increased in 2022 over 2020, as seen in Figure 3.

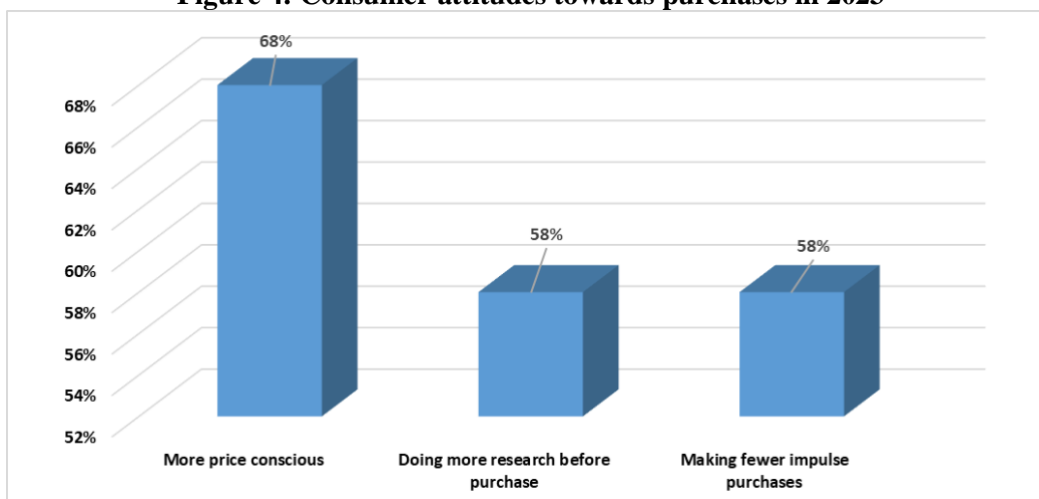
Figure 3: US household average spending changes 2020 to 2022



Source: US Bureau of Labour Statistics, retrieved in 2024

Looking at Figure 3, we can observe that the “average household spending on food increased 12.7 % in 2022, compared to an increase of 13.4% in 2021. The increase was driven by food away from home spending, up 20.1%, accompanied by an increase in food at home spending, up 8.4 %. Personal care products and services had the next largest increase over the year, 12.3 % in 2022, which follows an increase of 19.3 % in 2021. Transportation expenditures continued to increase over the year, up 12.2% in 2022, after an increase of 11.6 % in 2021. Entertainment expenditures decreased 3.1% in 2022, after exhibiting an increase of 22.7 % in 2021. This decrease was driven by a 24.5% decline in other entertainment supplies, equipment, and services expenditures, which contrasts with the 60.6% increase in 2021. Spending on toys, hobbies, and playground equipment also declined from 2021 to 2022 (-16.1 percent). A 27.4% increase in spending on fees and admissions partially offset the declines”. (US Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2023)

Figure 4: Consumer attitudes towards purchases in 2023



Source: statista.com, retrieved in 2024

Figure 4 shows the result of another Statista.com (2023) research developed from a sample size of 13,8 thousands of worldwide respondents that underlines the changes of their purchasing behaviour, the data shows that 68% are *more price conscious*, and 58% of the respondents are *both doing more research, and are buying less on impulse*.

Other aspects should also be considered when discussing the issue of consumer behaviour change, and that is the *generational differences in consumer behaviour*. Like never before have there been more than 3 generations coexisting at the same time, and the generational differences are clearly visible in their buying behaviour.

While ageing populations are a significant driver of changing consumer dynamics, they are not the sole demographic shaping evolving consumption patterns. For instance, Millennials (Generation Y, born between 1981 and 1996) and Generation Z (born between 1997 and 2012) exhibit distinct consumer behaviours and preferences.

A crucial distinction exists between developed and emerging markets: Millennials in developed countries often face high housing costs, student debt, job insecurity, and are typically less affluent than their parents, who benefited from periods of economic growth. In contrast, Millennials in emerging markets often enjoy greater opportunities, a more global outlook, and, in many cases, more wealth than their parents. Consequently, the second category group generally prioritizes affordability and utility, while the latter places greater emphasis on aspirational consumption, such as luxury goods and experiences. On a global scale, Generation Z displays a strong preference for accessing services over owning products, more so than previous generations. Examples include ride-sharing and subscription-based streaming services. Additionally, their tech-savviness makes seamless shopping and digital experiences essential to them. (UBP, 2022).

4. Conclusions

The changes that occur in our lives, the economic evolution of our city, country, the world, the dependence on acquired goods and services has changed in the last decade or so due to a multitude of external or better said macroeconomic and socio-politic factors that the average consumer can't change. In a world that is more and more driven by consumerism, by greed or even by the individual and organizational dependence on online / AI technologies, the *consumer behaviour* has had to change dramatically to cope with these major shifts.

The rapid succession of financial crisis, medical pandemic, extended and unexpected military conflicts have generated some important changes in consumer behaviour form the main values that drive our buying behaviour to increased spending and making individuals more aware of their financial and consumption behaviour. The current paper displayed some statistical insights and underlined the changes

that have occurred especially in the post pandemic world, while not forgetting the generational differences in a polarized world.

The latest crises have profoundly reshaped consumer behaviour, resulting in enduring shifts in purchasing habits, preferences, and decision-making. As people adjusted the new realities, social distancing measures, many individuals turned to online shopping, making online commerce a central method for obtaining goods and services. This shift has generated the rapid adoption of multi-channel approaches, enabling consumers to integrate online and in-store shopping to enhance convenience and broaden their options.

The pandemic has made people more aware of food security and access, encouraging many to rethink what they eat and how they shop. The emotional strain of the crisis, with increased stress and anxiety, has also shaped buying habits, leading some to make impulsive purchases to manage their feelings. At the same time, social media and digital platforms have changed the way people discover and connect with brands, creating a more informed and engaged audience. Sustainability has also become a priority, with more consumers choosing ethical and eco-friendly products, reflecting a growing desire to make socially responsible choices.

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