

GENDER OF THE CONSUMER AND THE ROLE OF ORGANIZATIONS IN PURCHASING DECISIONS

Izabela BEDNARSKA-WNUK^{1*}, Tomasz NOGA²

¹ University of Lodz, Faculty of Management; izabela.wnuk@uni.lodz.pl, ORCID: 0000-0003-0206-4633

² University of Lodz, Faculty of Management; tomasz.noga@uni.lodz.pl, ORCID: 0000-0003-3732-8782

* Correspondence author

Purpose: The aim of the article is to present the role of the organization and its impact on the process of making consumer purchasing decisions on the example of Poland and to explain how gender differentiates behavior.

Design/methodology/approach: In order to achieve the goal set in this article, first a literature review was used, then the diagnostic survey method was used. As a research tool, a questionnaire was used, which concerned the purchasing process and consumer behavior towards marketing activities undertaken by the organization. 199 consumers took part in the study.

Findings: The conducted research shows that Polish consumers are aware that companies influence them during the shopping process. Organizations use a variety of marketing activities to influence the consumer in the purchase decision process, both in-store and online. The answers obtained varied depending on gender (these differences are not statistically significant). The results indicate that despite the awareness of consumers related to the influence of the organization on them in the purchasing process, they are often affected by this influence.

Practical implications: Modern marketing departments should pay attention to the gender of the consumer, as it is one of the determinants in the purchase process. Therefore, it is necessary to adapt appropriate marketing communication tools that will highlight the needs of a specific target group. On the other hand, awareness of the factors affecting the customer's purchasing process will allow the organization to achieve greater sales effectiveness.

Originality/value: This article extends the current research by explaining the differences between genders and the marketing activities undertaken by the organization in the process of making purchasing decisions by the consumer.

Keywords: consumer gender, consumer behavior, purchasing decisions, marketing activities, Poland.

Category of the paper: Research paper.

1. Introduction

For many years now, issues of primary diversity regarding consumers' purchasing decisions have been considered in theory and practice (Hudgens, Fatkin, 1985; Johnson, Powell, 1994; Powell, 1990). They reveal how gender influences consumers' approach to decision-making (Lipowski, Anganowski, 2016; Mitchel, Walsch, 2004) and highlight the differences in this process that occur. Research addresses issues related to consumer risk-taking (Brzezinska, Maciejewski, 2015), product and service segmentation (Angowski, 2017; Putrevu, 2001), online shopping decisions (Perju-Mitran, Budacia, 2015; Lin et al., 2019), advertising effectiveness and its impact on the consumer (Wolin, Korgaonkar, 2003), perceived enjoyment in the purchasing process (Kotzé et al., 2012), determining the degree of congruence between decision-makers' perceptions of customer needs (Mohsen, Shekarchizadeh, Shahin, 2021) and consumers' purchasing decisions in the context of the organization's image (Rybaczewska, Sparks, Sulkowski, 2020).

Organizations, too, are constantly looking for ways to meet consumers' needs based on their knowledge of their decision-making processes, especially as they are nowadays informed and active market participants. In turn, following the impact of new technologies, consumers are becoming prosumers - believing other consumers more often than experts and companies (Bajdak, 2013).

In this situation, organizations need to undertake a variety of marketing activities using the known techniques of influence available (Cialdini, 2020). Their selection is dictated not only by economic and non-economic factors of consumers (Jurowczyk, 2013), but also based on their gender identity. In turn, knowledge of consumers' gender forms the basis of so-called gender marketing. It is oriented towards an organization that uses cultural/psychological gender codes of communication on the basis of research results and the knowledge gained in order to effectively reach a selected group of consumers (Pawlikowska, 2011). The basis for the distinction of gender marketing is the differentiated behavior of consumers in the market on the basis of gender and its manifestation in relation to the activities and marketing messages used. Recognition of this phenomenon by organizations makes them increasingly make conscious use of, among other things, the technique of neuromarketing, which is treated as a potential tool for commercial marketing (Perrachione, Perrachione, 2008). It is also a tool of this area to show rational and emotional responses to marketing stimuli. It also aims, by combining knowledge from marketing with knowledge about the brain, to better understand the consumer when making decisions in the purchasing process and to help shape marketing strategies (Senior, Lee, 2008). Finally, it helps to determine which product attributes affect the consumer positively and which negatively. It is also a group of techniques that aim to identify the areas of the brain activated by the action of a marketing stimulus and the cognitive processes taking place in them, relating to a range of different stimuli including hearing, sight, touch or the sense

of smell (Senior, Lee, 2008). The inclusion of neuromarketing by organizations in their marketing strategies contributes primarily to building a positive impression and relationship with customers, influences their attitudes and needs and determines the sales performance of the organization (Tarapata, Szadkowska, 2014).

At the same time, the literature most often shows the influence of gender on individual purchasing decisions (Putrevu, 2001; Meyers-Levy, 1986). In contrast, there is little empirical evidence on the influence of organizations on consumer decision-making and the findings of this influence by gender. This article extends the strand of research by explaining the differences between gender and the organization's marketing efforts in the purchase process. Therefore, the aim of this article was to show the role of the organization and its influence on the consumer's purchase decision-making process using the example of Poland and to explain how gender differentiates this behavior. In addition, answers were sought on the consumer behavior undertaken in the purchasing process.

2. Theoretical background

2.1. Influence of organizations on consumers' purchasing decisions

Influencing is an intrinsic part of social life. People influence each other in order to achieve personal goals, in an effort to satisfy their needs or because of the need to maintain an appropriate level of cooperation. Influence takes place in every human interaction and in every social setting (Winkler, 2011). It is most often analyzed in the context of the consciousness of the person or group of people being influenced. In this perspective, a distinction should be made between direct and overt influence and covert influence, which is based on social mechanisms and human behavior. Direct and overt influence exerted on human behavior and thinking is done by means of pressure (power, force) or persuasion. The person being influenced may therefore be aware that someone is trying to influence his or her behaviour or thinking, or persuade him or her to do something. It is also sometimes the case that the person is completely unaware that they are being influenced and that they are just being influenced. As Richard Nisbett and Timothy Wilson have shown, recipients of influence are unaware of the relationship between the behaviour of others and their own reactions, the mental process that creates a given reaction, and the presence of influences from others that have influenced their reactions (judgements, behaviour, decisions) (Maciuszek, 2012).

Nowadays, the purchasing process is taking on a new importance in times of global competition. In business practice, an increased interest of business managers in this area can be observed (Hadaś, Ragin-Skorecka, 2017). Today's consumer is to a large extent active and involved in the market, so more attention should be paid to activities by organizations

(Grzegory, 2013). Furthermore, customers, despite being more aware, educated and oriented to the offers on the market, do not always make rational purchase decisions (Koprowska, 2017). They often live in the belief that they are free when making decisions and that their opinions, beliefs and knowledge are independent (Dolinski, 2010). However, they are subject to many mechanisms that they do not even know exist. In the context of social influence, the most popular mechanism is the use of Robert B. Cialdini's six rules. These are the ones most commonly used by organizations to influence consumers and their decisions in the context of purchasing a specific product (Doliński, 2008).

An important technique for influencing organizations is the use of neuromarketing. It involves analysing the brain's response to a given advertising message, using neurophysiological measurements to study the subconscious of message recipients (Janiszewska, 2009). It is also the optimisation of marketing stimuli using measurement tools that are applied to the analysis of human psycho-emotional behaviour (Chmielewska, 2013). A potential consumer can be reached by means of multiple stimuli, as they are registered by perceptual processes and, in the brain, at the neural level, are processed and transformed into images, memories and internal pictures (Wrona, 2014). The stimulus affecting the consumer can be sound, smell, touch, taste. This is because the possibility of touching, smelling or tasting a good increases the likelihood of buying it (Bass, 2014). According to Fugate (2007), neuromarketing also helps organizations identify elements that are neurologically involved in television advertising. By evaluating images, phrases, sound effects and music, organizations develop advertising campaigns that are more appealing to consumers (Fugate, 2007).

An important element used by organizations to influence consumers is the use of subliminal advertising, which is based on the use of neurological mechanisms to influence the recipient. Advertising influences the recipient in such a way that he or she registers invisible stimuli, thereby exerting an unconscious influence, known as subliminal persuasion (Smolarek, 2013). A subliminal message is a manipulation in the subconscious sphere (Musiol, 2007), which involves the insertion of frames (images), with a suggestion or command, into a film or computer programme, which are not perceptible to humans but registered by the human subconscious. Thus, subliminal advertising can threaten a person's sense of security, because on a mass scale it can be used to achieve socially unacceptable, even harmful goals (Olszewska, 2013). Thus, despite the fact that the consumer may state that he or she is choosing the 'first better' products when shopping, the consumer is making a choice among many other alternatives, which he or she may not be aware of (Stasiuk, Maison, 2014). Moreover, this choice is also hindered by the range of different techniques used by the organization to influence the consumer in the purchasing process, which are often applied based on different characteristics of the consumer, including the gender of the buyer.

2.2. Importance of gender in the purchase decision-making process

Gender is one of the most important determinants used in marketing communications (Putrevu, 2001) and plays an important role in explaining market behavior, including consumption behavior (Lipowski, Anganowski, 2016). The gender differences that are revealed have their origins in the brain and appear in the course of normal biological development. They relate to different ways of solving cognitive and emotional tasks and encoding and recognizing stimuli (Zimbardo, Gerrig, 2021). Gender is also an important element that differentiates an individual when it comes to making product purchase decisions. Thus, men and women differ in their motives, goals, preferences, expectations and the course of the purchasing process (Lipowski, Angowski, 2016).

In turn, Kusa, Danechova, Findra, and Sabo (2014) argue that women are characterized by a more relaxed approach to the purchasing process, treating it as a social need, unlike men, for whom it is only a functional need. This means that male consumers decide to buy when they are compelled to do so, most often when a specific need is revealed. They are also more pragmatic and most often satisfy immediate and necessary needs. They use shopping only when it is actually necessary (Angowski, 2017).

Men value the product itself more than customer service, and what matters to them when making a purchase is functionality, practicality, price and workmanship. In addition, most men prefer simplicity, both of the product and the associated customer service (Izmalkova, 2013). They almost never look for a better product, as they believe there is no point in changing if it meets their needs (Niedzielska, 2015).

Women, on the other hand, want to satisfy needs in the long term. They also prefer to shop traditionally, at a relaxed, slow pace. For the most part, they want to try things on, desire to touch them and compare their prices with other products (Kraft, Weber, 2012). Women's preference for buying in a traditional setting is also indicated by the research of Wolin and Korgaonkar (2003), justifying it by getting more information about the product and the pleasure of such a form of purchase. Women also need more information to make a purchase decision, thus comparing a larger number of available options. J. Meyers-Levy (1986) points out the same aspect. Again, these studies indicate that both women and men have different patterns of searching for product information. Men focus on the most important aspect of a product, while women need to know all the information about a product before they decide to buy it (Meyers-Levy, 1986).

In addition, women are most likely to make purchases under the influence of advertising they have been exposed to. As research by A. Rosowska (2012), the favorable (and neutral) attitude of female respondents toward advertisements contributes to this. Women derive information from advertisements, on the basis of which they make a decision to purchase the advertised product or service.

Regarding the method of purchase, on the other hand, men are more positively disposed to online shopping. Women only opt for this shopping channel when they are influenced by social and emotional factors (Dittmar, Long, Meek, 2004). They are also more demanding customers and less brand loyal (Góralaska, 2012).

Instead, they become more attached to people (for example, employees of a store), while men are more loyal to brands and their participation in loyalty programs occurs only when they perceive a product as functional and necessary (Jasiulewicz, 2010). Thus, for a man, shopping is just a way to an end, the acquisition of a new item. They make purchases most often to satisfy a specific need that has arisen and the purchasing process itself takes place only when it is actually necessary (Angowski, 2017).

Thus, gender is a factor that differentiates consumers' approach to decision-making in the purchasing process. In turn, knowing their specific preferences, organizations can take them into account when designing marketing strategy and influence consumers' purchasing decisions.

3. Methods

The research was anonymous and implemented in 2022¹ using a diagnostic survey method. A survey questionnaire was used as the research tool. The research technique, in the form of an online survey, concerned the purchasing process and consumer behavior towards the marketing activities undertaken by the organization.

The independent variable that assumed the status of an explanatory variable in the study is gender. On the other hand, the dependent variables included marketing activities related to the purchasing process. In determining the relationship, Pearson's chi-square test was used with an assumed level of $\alpha = 0.05$, and the V-Cramer coefficient was used to measure the strength of the relationship between the study variables. It was assumed that for a degree of freedom $df = 1$, a weak relationship would be characterized by relationships of 0.1-0.3, a medium one of 0.3- 0.5, while a strong one from 0.5 (Szymczak, 2015). The empirical material obtained was then subjected to statistical analysis using IBM SPSS Statistics 27.0.

The research conducted was aimed at revealing the role of the organization and its influence on consumers' purchasing decision-making process on the example of Poland, as well as explaining how gender differentiates this behavior. In addition, answers were sought on the consumer behaviors undertaken in the purchasing process. 199 consumers participated in the study, of which 79.4% were women and 20.6% were men. There is a clear downward trend in the various age groups. Respondents in the 19 to 30 age group dominated, with 82.4%.

¹ Research conducted at the Faculty of Management of the University of Lodz for the purposes of the master's thesis "The importance of social influence on consumer purchasing decisions", which was awarded for the best business issue in the academic year 2021/2022 at the Faculty of Management of the University of Lodz.

Respondents from the 31 a 45 age group accounted for 14.1%, and from the 46 a 60 age group, 2.5%. Respondents from the 60+ age group were the smallest, at just 0.5%. The largest group considering age and gender were women aged 19 to 30 - 67.3% of all respondents. Most consumers (59.8%) were characterized by their working status.

4. Results

The research obtained indicates that 88.4% of respondents make their purchases stationary, including as many as 77.8% of women and only 22.2% of men. Similar results (85.4%) were obtained in the context of choosing to make purchases online. This channel was also mostly chosen by women 79.4% compared to men - 20.6%. It should also be noted that the respondents had the opportunity to choose more than one answer. Pearson's chi-square independence test, however, indicates that both variables declaring both stationary purchase ($\chi^2(1, 199) = 2.254$, $p = 0.133$) and online purchase ($\chi^2(1, 199) = 0.0002$, $p = 0.99$) are not gender-dependent. At the same time, respondents recognize that organizations influence consumers in the purchasing process. As many as 85.2% agree with this statement, 13.1% answered "difficult to say", while 2% of respondents disagreed. Perceived influence by organizations is also not dependent on gender ($\chi^2(1, 199) = 2.211$, $p = 0.697$).

Depending on the shopping channel, organizations use different consumer-targeted activities to get consumers to buy more often. Respondents mostly cited such activities as highlighting promotional offers on price tags (82.4%), turning on music while shopping (81.4%), being informed by the store about price reductions (72.9%), the store intentionally positioning products according to a scheme (71.4%), using voice messages (62.3%), intentionally spraying scents (57.8%) and also intentionally limiting offers (46.2%). In addition, respondents also mentioned other activities. These include: posting information about promotions on the front window of the store, frequent rearrangement of merchandise throughout the store to force the customer to constantly look for products and involuntarily look at other merchandise, promotions only with a customer card, pushy employees, and recommending selected products by store employees, such as at checkout counters.

It should be noted, however, that according to respondents' declarations, the listed marketing activities were more important for women than for men. First and foremost, women are influenced by such factors as the inclusion of music (84.7%) during their purchases and time restrictions on the offer of a particular product (84.6%). On the other hand, men are affected by information about discounts (21.3%). However, the marketing activities used by organizations are not statistically significant.

Table 1.

Willingness to buy a product declared by respondents after contact with marketing activity in a brick-and-mortar store, depending on gender

Marketing action	Women	Men	χ^2	Asymptotic significance (p)*
Spraying fragrance	80.4%	19.6%	0.039	0.843
Turning on the music	84.7%	15.3%	3.312	0.069
Setting products according to the scheme	81.3%	18.7%	0.714	0.398
Voise messages	80.4%	19.6%	0.039	0.843
Discount information	78.7%	21.3%	0.134	0.714
Highlighting promotional offers on price labels	81.1%	18.9%	1.456	0.228
The limitation of the offer	84.6%	15.4%	2.791	0.095

p – probability in Pearson's Chi-square test of independence.

* adopted significance level $\alpha = 0.05$.

Source: own elaboration based on the results of the CAWI survey.

On the other hand, the most important marketing activities encouraging online shopping were indicated by the respondents: ease of shopping (69.8%), lower prices than in-store (68.8%), low delivery costs or free delivery (58.3%), promotions and offers special (56%), price comparison (49.2%), short delivery time (44.7%), positive previous experience (35.7%), availability of various payment methods (33.7%), possibility of refunding most products (32.7%), opinions on ranking websites (25.6%) and opinions on newsgroups (16.6%). However, all these activities are more important for the surveyed women than men. Especially for women in the purchasing process, promotions and special offers (87%) and the possibility of price comparison (82.2%) are more important through the Internet channel. In turn, for men, low delivery costs or free delivery are important (25.9%), as well as promotions and special offers (24%), just like for women.

Table 2.

Respondents' stated willingness to purchase a product after being exposed to an online store marketing activity by gender

Variable	Women	Men	χ^2	(p)	V-Cramera
Ease of completing purchases	78.3%	21.7%	0.059	0.807	-
Reviews on ranking sites	76.5%	23.5%	0.359	0.549	-
Ability to compare price	82.2%	13.8%	0.970	0.325	-
Low delivery costs or free delivery	74.1%	25.9%	4.702	0.030	0.154
Ability to return most products	76.9%	23.1%	0.361	0.548	-
Availability of various forms of payment	77.6%	22.4%	0.197	0.657	-
Reviews on newsgroups	78.8%	21.2%	0.009	0.925	-
Promotions, special offers	87%	24%	0.159	0.690	-
Lower prices than stationary stores	77.4%	22.6%	1.102	0.294	-
Short delivery time	80.9%	19.1%	0.222	0.638	-
Positive previous experience	80.3%	19.7%	0.053	0.818	-

p – probability in Pearson's Chi-square test of independence.

* adopted significance level $\alpha = 0.05$.

Source: own elaboration based on the results of the CAWI survey.

The research showed no significant differences in the declarations regarding the analyzed marketing activities in the online store due to the gender of the surveyed buyers, apart from low or free delivery costs ($\chi^2(1, 199) = 4.702$, $p = 0.03$, with a weak $V = 0.154$). The actions

indicated above had a similar meaning in purchasing decisions via the Internet, both for the surveyed women and men.

On the other hand, when analyzing the respondents' attitude to the purchase of a product whose price was shown as attractive (e.g. the inscription "super price" or the old price crossed out and the new, lower price shown), it can be stated that when making such a decision, the surveyed women (77.9%) attached more importance to for this product component. This is confirmed by the analysis indicating significant differences between the assessments of women and men ($\chi^2(1, 199) = 9.854, p = 0.043$, with weak $V = 0.223$). Women are therefore more price sensitive, which in turn translates into their willingness to buy.

Interestingly, as many as 43.7% of respondents very rarely or rarely (26.1%) make purchases of products after contacting them with a TV advertisement. Only 24.1% of consumers indicated that they are very often guided by advertising when choosing a specific product. At the same time, referring these results to the gender of consumers, it is noted that women more often, as much as 91.7%, make purchases after prior contact with television advertising than men (8.3%). There were no significant differences in the assessment of this aspect between women and men ($\chi^2(1, 199) = 2.887, p = 0.409$).

5. Discussion and conclusion

Today's consumer is highly engaged in the market, and organizations are increasingly active in the marketing activities used in the purchasing process. In addition, despite the increasing awareness of consumers and their orientation to the activities undertaken by the organization, they do not always make rational purchasing decisions (Koprowska, 2017). Their diversity depends on many factors: individual or sociodemographic characteristics. One of the important elements that differentiate consumers in the market is their gender, which is a major determinant of consumer behavior (Wilborn, Brymer, Schmidgall, 2007).

The research and analysis carried out indicates that Polish consumers are aware of the fact that companies influence them when carrying out the purchasing process. They use a variety of marketing activities to influence the consumer in the purchase decision-making process both in the stationary store and in the online store. The answers obtained varied by gender (the differences are not statistically significant). Women declared a greater willingness to purchase a product when the organization primarily uses time-limited offerings or the inclusion of music in a traditional store. On the other hand, when shopping online, promotions and special offers are more important to them, as well as the ability to compare the price.

In turn, in the context of the results obtained regarding the most important marketing activities that encourage consumers to buy online, it should be noted that when comparing them with the results of the E-commerce in Poland 2018 survey (Economic Information Office,

2018), one sees slight changes that have occurred recently. In 2018, the factors most encouraging to complete purchases through the online channel were low delivery costs or free delivery, lower prices than stationary, short delivery time, positive previous experience and easy payment method. These factors are also indicated primarily by male respondents. In contrast, promotions and special offers and the ability to compare prices are more important to female respondents. However, the small differences obtained (no statistical significance) in the assessment of the importance of certain marketing activities used by organizations to influence the consumer in the purchasing process between men and women may also be a result of market globalization, including the homogenization of needs and the unification of purchasing behavior patterns (Angowski, 2017).

In addition, consumers are reluctant to buy products that have been shown in TV commercials. Such products are not or very rarely or rarely bought by 94% of respondents. Comparing the result indicated above with Petrykowska's research from 2009 (Petrykowska, 2010), it can be concluded that over the past 13 years, consumers have changed their behavior little and buy products advertised on TV even less (from 10% in 2009 to 6% in 2022). Interestingly, among the consumers surveyed, it is women who are more likely than men to purchase a product that has been previously featured in a TV commercial.

Women are also more sensitive to the price of a product. When the price is more attractive, they are more likely to purchase the good in question. This is because price is one of the most important factors when comparing the same products or services (Kraft, Weber, 2012). Therefore, it is this component (price), above all, that should be considered in the marketing strategies of those goods that target the female consumer.

The results also indicate that despite consumers' awareness of the influence of organizations on them in the purchasing process, they often succumb to this influence. In turn, organizations, being aware of the existence of differences between the gender of the consumer, can more strongly and with the help of dedicated actions apply a variety of marketing activities. In turn, knowing the preferences of purchasing groups, they can also better tailor their marketing offerings.

In turn, from the point of view of marketing activities, there is a need to create a more complete understanding of the customer and the determinants of his or her market decisions, hence the increasingly exposed belief that qualitative (so-called soft) factors should be taken into account in explaining and understanding buyer behavior (Kozielski, 2015). Modern marketing departments should therefore pay attention to the gender of the consumer, as it is one of the determinants in the buying process. Appropriate marketing communication tools should therefore be adapted to highlight the needs of a specific target group. In turn, awareness of the factors affecting the customer's buying process will thus allow the organization to achieve greater sales effectiveness.

However, the study conducted has some research limitations. The first relates to the research sample, in which there was an overrepresentation of women and its unrepresentative nature. A future study would therefore need to focus on obtaining an equal sample, which, also due to the need for greater representativeness for the best possible outcome of the study, should be increased. Therefore, given the unrepresentative nature of the sample, the purpose of the study in this article has been realized only up to the surveyed population. In addition, future research on the purchasing process and the impact of companies on the consumer should be made more specific. It would be appropriate to focus on making the differences between the stationary and online shopping channels more specific. It would also be interesting to learn more about the influence of organizations on the marketing activities used, depending on other sociodemographic characteristics of consumers. However, in spite of some research limitations, the present research presented here on the gender of consumers vs. implemented actions on the part of organizations on their purchasing decision-making process could be a contribution to more in-depth research and a broader discussion on the ground of science as well as practice.

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