

## **ELECTRONIC COMMERCE AND SOCIAL CHARACTERISTICS OF CONSUMPTION IN INFORMATION SOCIETY**

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The article deals with electronic commerce in its inextricable interconnection with information society. It is noted that the evolutionary processes of formation of information society have become widespread in the area of exchange of goods and services, resulting in a new form of economic activity – electronic commerce. Under current economic conditions information is transformed into one of the most important productive resources. This trend contributes to the rapid development of information and communication technologies, an increase in the number of Internet users and stimulates the development of the e-commerce market. All this give rise to new phenomena, among which an important place is occupied by the online consumer (e-consumer) and his behaviour. Today, when considering this issue, scientists focus on such aspects as factors affecting consumption, consumers' attitudes toward online shopping, their intention to shop on the Internet, customer experience in online shopping, e-satisfaction level, trust in electronic commerce, customer loyalty in e-commerce, impact of social influence in e-commerce decision making, customers' adoption of new technologies, particular features of social commerce, etc. For sociological discourse it is important to take into account the considerably wider social context of electronic commerce and to consider the modern consumer as an active actor (subject) that creates new forms of socio-economic activity and actively influences his or her immediate environment.

*Key words:* electronic commerce, information society, online consumer, consumption, consumption factors, social commerce.

The phenomenon of electronic commerce since its emergence and dynamic penetration into all spheres of society's life is of considerable interest to researchers of various scientific fields, including sociologists. According to the data for 2018, 22 million of Ukrainians have access to the Internet, 31 % of them (6.9 million) buy online. The growth of e-commerce market in the world is 16 %, while the growth of e-commerce market in Ukraine is 30–35 % (it is the second place in Europe) [Fedorychak, 2018]. As for the study of electronic commerce in Ukraine, one of the first researches on a general analysis of the problem of consumption on the Internet was made by Y. Pachkovskyy in 2009. It is noted in the publication that at that time the Internet and personal computer in Ukraine were treated as a luxury, which was still not available to everyone (according to the national surveys conducted by “Gfk Ukraine”,

in the 3<sup>rd</sup> quarter of 2009 32 % of families had a computer, but only half of them had the opportunity to use the Internet at home) [Pachkovskyy, 2009]. At the present stage the target audience of the Ukrainian e-commerce is mainly active young people aware of the innovations in the area of information and communication. According to the study, urban youth, unlike the rural, has twice as much experience with online purchases. One third of urban residents are engaged in this practice on a regular basis; and this number was half as many among rural residents. It has been found out that young people aged 18 to 22 show greater activity when purchasing online [Pachkovskyy, Maksymenko, 2016, p. 213].

Electronic commerce is the subject of study of various sciences – economics, marketing, informatics, jurisprudence, sociology, psychology, etc. General issues of electronic commerce and consumption in this area are presented in the works of many scientists, such as S. D. Brunn, B. J. Jaworski, D. R. King, J. Lang, J. K. Lee, T. R. Leinbach, K. Orton, J. Outland, J. F. Rayport, P. Timmers, E. Turban, D. Viehland, L. Windham and others. Social aspects of electronic commerce are highlighted in the researches of R. Anderson, L. Arman, J. Choobineh, R. Curty, B. Dellaert, S. Dimitriadis, D. L. Ferrin, S. Gounaris, D. J. Kim, Y. A. Kim, A. Kini, T. Monsuwé, K. Ponnnavolu, H. R. Rao, K. de Ruyter, S. S. Srinivasan, J. Srivastava, V. Stathakopoulos, D. Te'eni, J. Weisberg, P. Zhang, etc. Particular features of online consumption in Ukrainian sociological discourse are presented by several publications of A. Khraban, A. Maksymenko, Y. Pachkovskyy, Y. Siusel, Y. Zoska, etc.

The scale and dynamics of the development of e-commerce market in Ukraine and in the world demonstrate the mass character of the phenomenon of e-commerce and its rapid penetration into economic and social life. At the same time, the segment of electronic commerce is currently not more than 4 % of the total retail market in Ukraine [Fedorychak, 2018]. According to experts, the e-commerce market in Ukraine is ten years behind the European [Malinovskii, 2014]. These figures confirm that the field of electronic commerce is a promising area of research in Ukraine. It can also be said that sociology has a significant research potential to study this phenomenon. In contemporary scientific discourse, sociological conceptualization of electronic commerce is only at an early stage. One of the productive approaches is studying the connection between e-commerce and the advancement of information society. On the other hand, there is a need to systematize factors of different order (from technological, economic, personal to social, etc.), related to the development of this phenomenon, taking into account mental and national characteristics.

**The purpose of the article** is to consider electronic commerce as an integral part of the information society and to determine in general terms the factors that have an impact on the development of this phenomenon, based on the main trends of social development.

Electronic commerce is a kind of economic activity aimed at gaining profit through information and communication technologies (ICT). E-commerce today is acquiring the features of not only economic, but also social phenomenon, which is inseparable from the information (network) society. Therefore, it can be argued that electronic commerce is a complex holistic formation, a new form of social interaction, an element of social reality, included in the system of social relations, which is characterized by the fullness of social

features and indicators. As a social phenomenon, electronic commerce is intertwined in the social context of human interactions, creating new forms of socio-economic activity.

Electronic commerce first should be considered in its interrelation with the information society, an integral element and the consequence of which it is. Moreover: according to some scholars, information and communication technologies and economic activities on the Internet, along with knowledge and information, are the basis for existence of the information society [Melnychuk, 2014, p. 94].

The founder of the theory of post-industrial society D. Bell singled out information and theoretical knowledge as resources for social development. Classifying society into three types, pre-industrial, industrial and post-industrial, the scientist formulated main characteristics of the post-industrial society in economic sector, structure of employment and decision-making. Transition to post-industrial society was accompanied by an increase in the role of information to such an extent that, to characterize the future society, D. Bell had to introduce the term “information society”, which had the following characteristics: transition from post-industrial to service economy, in which dominates the scope of information services; predominance of codified theoretical knowledge for implementation of technological innovations; transforming the new “intellectual” technology into a key tool for system analysis and decision-making theory [Bell, 1999]. Thus, electronic commerce has become a qualitatively new entity, ensuring the multifunctionality of service economy and becoming a new way to meet the needs of consumers. The fully functioning of information services industry is also provided by means of electronic commerce.

One of the most famous modern attempts of a theoretical analysis of the social consequences of informatization of society is the concept of “network society” by M. Castells, according to which the new state of society is a social structure that characterizes the information age of the development of society. According to M. Castells, we live in a new economy, which is characterized by three fundamental features: firstly, it is an information economy in which production of knowledge and processes of management information determines the productivity and competitiveness of all economic units – firms, regions, or nations; secondly, it is a global economy in the most precise and direct sense of the word; and thirdly, the new economy is covered by networks, which are a new form of social organization – a network enterprise, these are information networks where the production unit is not a firm, but a business project [Castells, 1996]. Therefore, the emergence of electronic commerce is a natural consequence and a form of informatization of society, and it is not only about the production and consumption of information: e-commerce is a space where consumers can meet their needs by getting material goods or services not directly related to information. Moreover, network forms of social organization actively function in the field of e-commerce.

One of the first images of information society was created by Y. Masuda, relying on certain ideas about the socio-economic foundations of social life that arise in the process of informatization. He highlights the following features of the information society: global interaction; domination of post-materialist system of values aimed at self-realization of every person; dynamic structure of social interaction, the basis of which are synergistic effects in the processes of creative interaction of associations of free individuals; the sociality of industrial society, built around the issues of intergroup interaction, is opposed to sociality, built around

the issues of interaction between individual and society, individual and individual; the image of information society is created by contrasting the image of the industrial society and by contrasting two conceptual spaces – the modern and the future [Masuda, 1981]. Consequently, Y. Masuda considers information as an economic category and a public good, which in the future will lead to transformation of all spheres of social and cultural life.

Z. Brzezinski considered the post-industrial society from the point of view of its dependence on the social structure of society and the prevailing cultural environment. At the forefront were the person and the “quality of life of the consumer”. At the same time, the determinant role left behind new technologies in the “technotronic society”. Z. Brzezinski fixed the following features of the image of information society: its development, beyond national or class ideologies, forms a new, global vision of the world, while the United States emerges as the natural carrier of new technologies in the centre of this world; global changes in the process of informatization; electronic audiovisual environment as the basis for organization of social behaviour of an individual and a group, separation from rationalistic, linear perception of society (deideologization); separation of individuals from traditional socio-cultural field and the resulting significant possibility of voluntarist behaviour; information society implies changes in personality types, focusing not on senses, but directly on feeling the needs [Brzezinski, 1982]. As we see, the author of the concept emphasizes the development of electronic audiovisual environment as the basis for organization of social behaviour of an individual and a group. This environment includes electronic commerce, which regulates online consumption.

A. Toffler formulated the concept of “post-industrial society” (or, according exactly to the author’s words, “superindustrial society”). Since satisfaction of “personal needs of customers” takes the leading place in post-industrial society, in the economy will continue the trend towards diversification and orientation on individuality [Toffler, 1987]. Electronic commerce is an environment that is maximally aimed at meeting the needs of consumers and that, among other things, creates unique opportunities to satisfy individual customers’ requests (for example, the possibility to design personalized custom clothing on the seller’s website).

Modern scholars interpret the concept of “information society” as a qualitatively new stage in social evolution of society, based on the domination of the role of information and knowledge, as well as on the formation and consumption of information resources in all spheres of life of society through the development of information and communication technologies that operate on a global scale and create network communication relations [Chernous, 2011, p. 5].

Evolutionary processes of formation of information society have become widespread in the area of exchange of goods and services, resulting in a new form of economic activity – electronic commerce. ICT determined the transition of economy to the information stage of its development and the direction of economic activity to the production and consumption of information, which led to the development of the information society. Under current economic conditions there is a rapid modification of productive forces and information is transformed into one of the most important productive resources. This trend contributes to the rapid development of information and communication technologies, an increase in

the number of Internet users and stimulates the development of the e-commerce market [Melnychuk, 2014, p. 93].

Information society as a global phenomenon has both direct and indirect influence on the behaviour of the modern consumer. There are two basic approaches in studying consumer behaviour in sociology: objectivist and subjectivist. The first approach is based on the methodology of positivism of A. Comte and E. Durkheim. According to the theory of social fact of E. Durkheim, consumer behaviour is formed under the influence of objective conditions of individual's existence in society. The modern version of this approach is the conception of direct impact on the consumer by production and corporations, for which intensive consumption is economically profitable. In this sense, consumption is the result of manipulations from the outside, which impose the structure and volume of consumption on consumers. Everyday consumption is regulated by economic, technical, political and media means. Penetration of regulation in everyday life has led to new contradictions in public life between the mass of consumers and techno-bureaucratic centres that streamline the public life. Representatives of this point of view are French sociologists, in particular the theorist of post-industrial society A. Touraine and the author of the theory of "colonization" of everyday life H. Lefebvre [Zoska, 2011, p. 310].

Subjectivist approach to interpretation of consumer behaviour is developed within subjective sociology, representatives of which believe that freedom, consciousness (subconsciousness), activity of a person and interactive interaction are factors determining human behaviour. The most notable figures that developed the outlined issues are T. Veblen (the theory of leisure class and conspicuous consumption); J. Baudrillard (the theory of sign consumption, which had become a kind of code, the language of communication between people); G. Ritzer (the theory of "McDonaldization of society"); A. Bard, J. de Graaf, J. Söderqvist, V. Ilin, K. Lodziak, V. Tarasenko and others (concepts critical to consumer society); E. Fromm (concepts related to socio-cultural psychoanalysis) [Zoska, 2011, p. 310].

It is important to note that these approaches explain the behaviour of a traditional consumer without online means. In this case, the consumer is a subject to external influence of other entities that use all available means (from up-to-date marketing technologies to advertising manipulations). A more valuable approach is to consider the consumer outside established systems, acquiring the features of an actively subject who is able to make choices and make conscious decisions, build his own consumer search strategy, use the potential of social networks, evaluate his own behaviour and behaviour of others in categories of trust, loyalty, etc.

In the study of consumption in e-commerce worth attention is the theory of planned behaviour, which confirms the interconnection between consumer's beliefs and his behaviour. This theory has been adapted to study consumer behaviour in electronic commerce. H. Lim and A. Dubinsky expanded the original theory of planned behaviour (TPB) by decomposing belief constructs and by including interdependency terms between salient beliefs. This was done to provide more specific explanation of consumers' purchase intention on the Internet. The findings of the study supported the existence of interdependencies between salient beliefs in TPB. The decomposition of attitude components is expected to provide on-line retailers with more clear-cut information about customers' evaluative criteria for e-tailers when they make a purchase decision on the Internet [Lim, Dubinsky, 2005].

Another version of the theory of planned behaviour on the Internet is presented by P. Pavlou. Consumer intention to transact in e-commerce is proposed as a three-dimensional behavioural intention to (a) receive information, (b) provide requisite personal information, and (c) engage in product purchases. Given the uncertainty present in e-commerce, trust in a Web retailer is hypothesized as a salient belief that indirectly influences transaction intentions, both through attitude and also through perceived behavioural control. Drawing upon the Technology Acceptance Model, perceived usefulness and ease of use are viewed as behavioural beliefs that indirectly influence consumer transaction intentions through positive attitude, following the theory of reasoned action. Subjective norm, perceived enjoyment, privacy, security, and self-identity add to the explanatory power of the proposed model, while adhering to TPB's nomology [Pavlou, 2002].

Studying social aspects of purchasing in e-commerce, J. Weisberg, D. Te'eni and L. Arman note that purchasing on the Internet has unique features that make it different from the traditional shopping process, particularly with regard to its social context. The study, which was conducted by authors, investigates the relationship between past online purchases and purchasing intentions, representing the social context by the notions of social presence and trust. Social context is important for understanding how past behaviour affects future purchasing. Designs should therefore enhance social presence and trust.

Moreover, it may be beneficial to monitor these mediators to detect potential problems [Weisberg, Te'eni, Arman, 2011].

T. Monsuwé, B. Dellaert and K. de Ruyter research on what drives consumers to shop online and propose a framework to increase researchers' understanding of consumers' attitudes toward online shopping and their intention to shop on the Internet. The framework uses the constructs of the Technology Acceptance Model (TAM) as a basis, extended by exogenous factors and applies it to the online shopping context. The review shows that attitudes toward online shopping and intention to shop online are not only affected by ease of use, usefulness, and enjoyment, but also by exogenous factors like consumer traits, situational factors, product characteristics, previous online shopping experiences, and trust in online shopping [Monsuwé, Dellaert, Ruyter, 2004].

Dividing consumers in e-commerce into potential and experienced, scientists note that the motivations that lead a potential e-customer to make a purchase are not the same as those that influence an experienced customer. The studies demonstrate the evolution of customer behaviour and the need to differentiate the perceptions of consumers depending on their level of experience [Hernandez, Jimenez, Martín, 2009]. A significant amount of potential revenue is lost globally due to poor online customer experiences. Easiness to locate the website / app, ease of use, perceived usefulness, hedonic and utilitarian features, perceived enjoyment, personalization, social interactions and multi-device compatibility are the antecedents of the unified online customer experience [Bilgihan, Kandampully, Zhang, 2016].

Whether a potential e-consumer becomes a long-term one depends on many factors, including whether the customer is satisfied with the services provided. Studies show a direct relationship between e-service quality and e-satisfaction. E-service quality has a positive effect on e-satisfaction, while it also influences, both directly and indirectly through e-satisfaction, the consumer's behavioural intentions, namely site revisit, word-of-mouth

communication and repeat purchase [Gounaris, Dimitriadis, Stathakopoulos, 2010]. Even special electronic commerce user-consumer satisfaction index (ECUSI) for Internet shopping was developed. Customers in an Internet shopping environment actually play dual roles. One is the role as a customer in a shopping place, and the other is the role as a user of information technology. In this vein, a way of measuring the satisfaction level that takes both roles into account is needed. Presented index for electronic commerce consumers has its base in the dual roles. There is a relationship between the index and consumers' purchasing intention [Cho, Park, 2001].

A large number of social studies of e-commerce deal with trust. Trust in electronic commerce is defined as a belief in the system characteristics, specifically belief in the competence, dependability and security of the system, under conditions of risk [Kini, Choobineh, 1998]. The results of the studies show that Internet consumers' trust and perceived risk have strong impacts on their purchasing decisions. Consumer disposition to trust, reputation, privacy concerns, security concerns, the information quality of the website, and the company's reputation, have strong effects on Internet consumers' trust in the website [Kim, Ferrin, Rao, 2008].

Customer loyalty in e-commerce has an impact on two customer-related outcomes: word-of-mouth promotion and willingness to pay more. Scientists identify eight factors (the 8Cs – customization, contact interactivity, care, community, convenience, cultivation, choice, and character) that potentially impact e-loyalty and develop scales to measure these factors. Data collected from 1,211 online customers demonstrate that all these factors, except convenience, impact e-loyalty [Srinivasan, Anderson, Ponnnavolu, 2002].

Studying the impact of social influence in e-commerce decision making, Y. A. Kim and J. Srivastava note that purchasing decisions are often strongly influenced by people who the consumer knows and trusts. Moreover, many online shoppers tend to wait for the opinions of early adopters before making a purchase decision to reduce the risk of buying a new product. Web-based social communities allow consumers to share their personal experiences by writing reviews, rating reviews, and chatting among trusting members. E-commerce companies have started to capture data on the social interaction between consumers, with the potential objective of understanding and leveraging social influence in customers' purchase decision making. Social influence can be used by e-commerce websites to aid the user decision making process [Kim, Srivastava, 2007].

In the researches on customers' adoption of new technologies, particularly the adoption of wireless Internet services via mobile technology, scientists note special role of personal innovativeness and social influences in this process. Studies reveal strong causal relationships between the social influences, personal innovativeness and the perceptual beliefs – usefulness and ease of use, which in turn impact adoption intentions [Lu, Yao, Yu, 2005].

Studying e-commerce through the prism of sociology, it is impossible to ignore the emergence of such phenomenon as social commerce. Social commerce can be briefly described as commerce activities mediated by social media. In social commerce, people do commerce or intentionally explore commerce opportunities by participating and / or engaging in a collaborative online environment. Social commerce activities appeared as early as the late 90s, but first it was widely acknowledged in 2005. As a relatively new phenomenon, social

commerce presents new opportunities to examine issues related to information / content, business strategies, management, technologies, and people's behavior [Curty, Zhang, 2011].

Social e-shopping is based on combining e-shopping with social networking. This phenomenon becomes widespread with the increased popularity of social networking sites, such as LinkedIn, Facebook, Twitter etc. T.-P. Liang and E. Turban note, that social media technologies not only provide a new platform for entrepreneurs to innovate but also raise a variety of new issues for e-commerce researchers that require the development of new theories. This could become one of the most challenging research arenas in the coming decades [Liang, Turban, 2011].

**Findings.** Under current economic conditions information is transformed into one of the most important productive resources. This trend contributes to the rapid development of information and communication technologies, an increase in the number of Internet users and stimulates the development of the e-commerce market. In contemporary sociological discourse, there is a gradual departure from the analysis of consumer behaviour within the objectivist paradigm, and this stimulates the search for new approaches that would explain e-consumer choices and purchasing. Studying social characteristics of consumption in e-commerce, scientists focus on such aspects as factors affecting consumption, consumers' attitudes toward online shopping, their intention to shop on the Internet, customer experience in online shopping, e-satisfaction level, trust in electronic commerce, customer loyalty in e-commerce, impact of social influence in e-commerce decision making, customers' adoption of new technologies, etc. It is emphasized the importance of the social context of e-commerce and the emergence of such new phenomena in e-trade as social commerce. Coverage the wider social context of e-commerce, in our opinion, is an important research task and a challenge for the modern sociology.

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## ЕЛЕКТРОННА КОМЕРЦІЯ ТА СОЦІАЛЬНІ ОСОБЛИВОСТІ СПОЖИВАННЯ В ІНФОРМАЦІЙНОМУ СУСПІЛЬСТВІ

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У статті електронну комерцію проаналізовано у її нерозривному взаємозв'язку з інформаційним суспільством. Зазначено, що еволюційні процеси становлення інформаційного суспільства, проникнувши у сферу обміну товарами і послугами, зумовили виникнення нового виду економічної діяльності – електронної комерції. Стрімкий розвиток інформаційно-комунікаційних технологій та збільшення чисельності користувачів мережі Інтернет породжує нові явища й феномени, серед яких вагомим місцем посідає онлайн-споживач (е-споживач) і його поведінка. Сьогодні при розгляді даної проблематики науковці фокусуються на таких аспектах, як фактори споживання, ставлення до онлайн-покупок, споживчі наміри покупців в Інтернеті, роль споживчого досвіду у здійсненні онлайн-покупок в майбутньому, задоволеність споживачів якістю наданих послуг, довіра до системи електронної комерції, лояльність споживачів, соціальний вплив і споживчі рішення, прийняття нових технологій споживачами, особливості соціальної комерції тощо. Для соціологічного дискурсу важливим є врахування значно ширшого соціального контексту електронної комерції та розгляд сучасного споживача як активного актора (суб'єкта), що творить нові форми соціоекономічної діяльності й активно впливає на своє найближче середовище.

*Ключові слова:* електронна комерція, інформаційне суспільство, онлайн-споживач, споживання, фактори споживання, соціальна комерція.

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