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**THE NEW CONSUMER: MOBILE, ALWAYS
CONNECTED AND SOCIAL – THE USER JOURNEY
PERSPECTIVE**

**NOWY KONSUMENT: MOBILNY, ZAANGAŻOWANY
SPOŁECZNOŚCIOWO I ZAWSZE *ONLINE* –
PERSPEKTYWA DECYZJI ZAKUPOWYCH**

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Summary: In this article the author provides an analysis of contemporary consumers with a strong emphasis on the rapidly changing business landscape and mobile technologies. The main purpose is to present how modern technology has shaped the consumers, the decision-making process and finally their behaviour along the purchase journey. The ICT revolution has once and for all reshaped the business landscape and one of its most visible changes was the rise of the Information Economy and the Mobile Society. The use of mobile technology in today's economy has caused many changes and a transformation in contemporary business models. The ubiquitous mobile technology has reshaped irrevocably the relationship between entities on the market and created a new type of consumer – the mobile consumer. The purpose of the article is to present this new type of consumers from the perspective of their journey to obtain more information which they need to include in their purchase decisions.

Keywords: mobile communication, consumer behaviour, consumer journey, mobile consumer, purchase decision.

Streszczenie: W artykule autor dokonuje analizy współczesnego konsumenta w perspektywie szybko i gwałtownie dokonujących się zmian w ekosystemie biznesowym. Głównym celem podjętych rozważań jest zaprezentowanie, jak gwałtowny rozwój technologii ICT, szczególnie w obszarze technologii mobilnych i społecznych, wpływa na konsumenta, podejmowane przez niego decyzje oraz zachowania zakupowe.

Słowa kluczowe: technologie mobilne, media społecznościowe, zachowania konsumentów, mobilny konsument, decyzje zakupowe.

1. Introduction

Mobile technology is one of the fastest growing and most influential phenomena whose presence can be observed in nearly every aspect of the economy or social life. The rapid and even aggressive diffusion of the above mentioned technology has catalysed many business solutions offering, at the same time, unfettered access to information no matter the time and localization. We are witnessing the rise of the permanently connected user whose approach towards information is characterized by their ever-present hunger for more. The growing awareness of consumer rights and the increasingly transparent market as well as global competition has allowed consumers to take more important purchase decisions fully consciously, on the basis of the analysis and assessment of the alternatives [Łysik et al. 2014a]. In this fast-changing mobile business landscape, access to information, from the user's point of view, this situation opens a plethora of possibilities to successfully finalize the given activity.

The fast-paced development of new technologies and also the phenomenon of globalization have significantly influenced how we perceive consumer profiles. The above factors have also changed the patterns of contemporary consumer behaviour. Nowadays, consumers depart step by step from the typical pattern of passive receptors of purchased goods and services, and evolve into active cocreators of information, products and services. They not only make conscious and deliberate choices of goods and services as well as the time, place and manner of purchase, but also play an active role in product design and marketing campaigns [Łysik et al. 2014a]. What influences most behavioural patterns and ultimately decision process among consumers is, to name just a few:

- opinions of other consumers, friends and influencers;
- mobile 24/7 access to information that increases and enhances the decision making process;
- mobile payments with their easy – use character and seamless experience;
- mobile technology implemented in the process of purchase at practically every step.

It is clear that mobile devices are having a profound impact not only on how we communicate on a daily basis, but also on how we interact and engage with individuals and organizations of all types [Rowles 2017].

This article is an attempt to describe the issue of the raise of a new type of consumer from the perspective of his or her journey of searching for information, emphasizing the factors of mostly mobile provenience.

The descriptive method used in the article is the result of literature analysis and the practical experience of the author. This article is the first of a series, an introduction to the subject, with the next focusing on research that will be conducted among consumers and business entities.

2. The diffusion of mobile technology

The intensified communication process in today's world led to visible changes in the economy and its informational needs. The mutual exchange of information among the players on the market has gained in importance due to globalization, the localization issue, and the fast-paced technological development. The unceasing exchange of information is a very demanding process whose effects are visible in the dynamic development of the economy. Information is in great demand and has become the most important commodity nowadays – gaining a new status for both organizations and society. This intense ICT development has also influenced the quality of delivered information by increasing its topicality and pace of delivery. Nowadays consumers have the possibility to access information as they require, and we can observe that they are no longer tied to their desktops. This implicit freedom that consumers have obtained in accessing information and creating value and has also extended the time of potential interaction. According to many researchers the most influential factors which help mobile technology in spreading among customers are [Mort, Drennan 2005; Barnes et al. 2005]:

- gaining access to information which is up to date, there is no longer information asymmetry as we can observe information democratization;
- lower production costs, granted by the technological revolution, products/services delivered on the market are easier to deliver to the end consumer and at the same time more customized to meet individual requirements;
- access to less biased market research, the personal character of mobile technology allows gathering real time information about consumers based on their actual behaviour;
- shift from accessing only local markets to a global economy, digital channels, yet at the same time, thanks to the personal character of mobile technology, consumers may be accessed in a personalized way;
- shift from mass markets to the personal, one 2 one relation;
- shift from “on time” to “right now” mobile technology allows communication no matter what localization and time, and at the same time with the never seen before customization of the information.

The other aspect which has decided that nowadays we can observe the creation of this new phenomenon, i.e. mobile communication, is the immanent characteristic of mobile/handheld devices which will be listed further in the article. Consumers have gained access to a wide array of tools at their fingertips. Below in Figure 1 we can observe the market trend in the proliferation of mobile phone subscriptions, according to the report we can observe the growth in mobile subscriptions starting in 2012 at the level of 6300 million, reaching 9300 million in 2019.

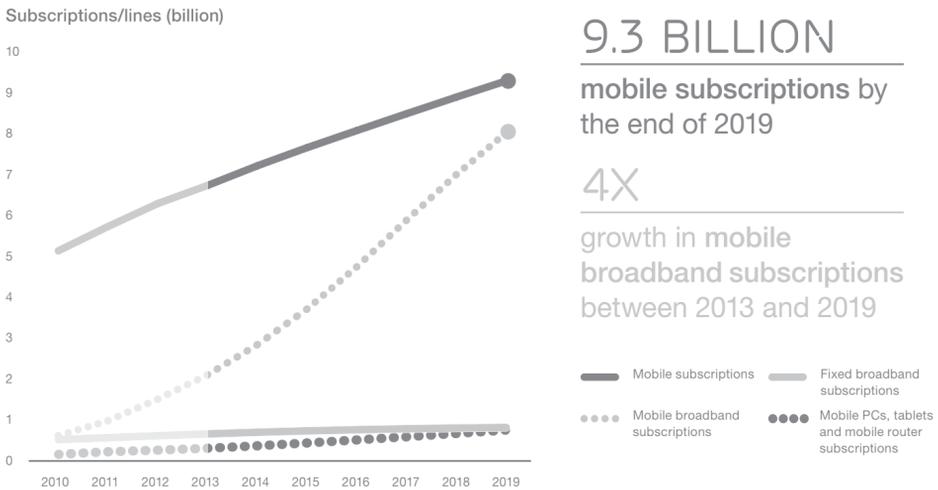


Fig. 1. Global mobile subscriptions

Source: [Ericsson Mobility Report... 2013].

The report also shows how rapidly our consumption of information is growing; for example in 2012 monthly data traffic per smartphone was 450 MB, in 2013 600 MB and in 2019 it was predicted to reach the level of 2200 MB.

According to researchers and agencies, **mobile** is a phenomenon worth observing since our consumer habits are radically changing, namely:

- up to 70% of internet traffic is observed on mobile devices, and this may rise to 80% by 2019 [Karaian];
- in 2017 around 95% of Facebook users accessed social networks via a mobile device [McLeod];
- 51% of consumers declare that they use mobile devices to look for products and brands [BrightEdge 2018 Mid-Year...];
- 89% of consumer having a positive experience on a mobile will recommend a brand or a product [Customer Journey Mapping...].

Our consumption of information is growing exponentially as we have changed our search and consumption habits – we are no longer consuming information as a three-course meal, thanks to mobile technology we can eat all around town, no matter where and whenever we feel hungry.

3. Contemporary mobile consumer

Consumers nowadays are no longer passive buyers and their purchase behaviours switched to that of an active prosumer whose decisions are fully conscious. What,

where, and how, are the most important words in the arsenal of the decision-making process among consumers. Mobile technology has allowed consumers greater freedom in solutions/products/services to choose from. The other aspect is the easy access to the experience shared by other consumers granted by the omnipresent social networks that can be accessed 24/7. Worth noticing is that consumers are nowadays influencing the nature of products and the way they are developed and customized. As early as in the 1980s, A. Toffler anticipated that the boundary between the producer and the consumer will gradually become blurred [Toffler 1997]. Prosumers create developed, active consumer communities, within the framework of which they share information about the products, jointly work on the projects, exchange hints regarding products, exchange tools or improvements made [Tapscott, Williams 2008].

Prosumerism has become an important phenomenon due to the mix of mobile technology and online social technologies which provided a wide range of tools and means of communication, allowing consumers to “gather” around a given product or service. Depending on the actual situational context, consumers participate actively sharing their experience via different communication platforms – no matter where and when. Mobile technology has ensured connectedness among consumers which can be observed in greater number of social consumer communities and the greater engagement of members.

Virtual consumer communities also match the idea of virtual communities defined by H. Rheingold as social aggregations, emerging from the networks in which sufficiently many people hold public discussions long enough, with a relevant dose of human feelings to enable the creation of personal relations among them in cyberspace [Rheingold 2000].

The development of mobile communication technologies contributed to further evolution towards mobile communities, differing from typical on-line communities with the following features [Łysik et al. 2014b]:

- access to mobile communities may be obtained with the use of mobile equipment, which gives the possibility of holding spontaneous and constant communication,
- mobile community platforms offer extended communication possibilities owing to the use of mobile 3rd and 4th generation networks, simultaneously ensuring common access irrespective of the time and place and immediate reactivity thanks to mobile data transmission,
- the use of personally traceable and certified equipment,
- user location owing to the use of geolocation technologies e.g. GPS,
- mobile communities demonstrate separate behaviour patterns with respect to “traditional” communities.

As already stated, mobile devices are among those most used by contemporary consumers and they also have the highest estimated number of daily interactions. Moreover, they are used frequently as the primary tool for starting the consumer journey – the smartphone has now become the go-to advisor and assistant to every

consumer and the gateway to the opinions of other users. With this small yet powerful device consumers can, among other activities, gain insights from other users like:

- watch a video review, manual, guide of a product or service,
- read and add comments,
- find and navigate to the nearest store, bank or restaurant depending on actual need,
- share opinions, photos, rate a product or service.

The presented trends show that great emphasis is put on the mobile technologies surrounding the consumer to a bigger and bigger extent. Smartphones, tablets or wearables belonging to a given consumer, after being synchronized, will deliver more and more valuable, customized information and their effective use may allow better adjustment of the offered product to individual expectations on the one hand, and offer completely new possibilities in conducting marketing actions on the other hand.

4. ICT revolution and its role in reshaping consumer behaviour

ICT technologies, since the internet revolution, have influenced and changed the functioning of almost every company by supporting its fundamental areas of existence. Along with the increased availability and decreasing prices, new technologies have paved their way into the consumer's hands. As many studies show, the contemporary consumer is mostly a mobile consumer treating his/her mobile device very personally, like a butler or a lifeline which is attached to the hip – never before seen in this way. Many analyses and research results demonstrate that a mobile consumer is the present trend in describing consumer behaviour [McLeod; *The Curious Consumer...*]:

- 68% of smartphone users check their phone within 15 minutes after waking up,
- 30% of smartphone users are anxious when they do not have their phone with them,
- we check our phone around 150 times a day,
- mobile sessions last around 70 seconds but there are dozens and dozens of them – a speed-dating analogy,
- worldwide, more people own a cell phone than a toothbrush,
- 89% of people are likely to recommend a brand after a positive brand experience on a mobile,
- 46% of people say they would not purchase from a brand again if they had an interruptive mobile experience,
- 80% of smartphone users are more likely to purchase from companies with mobile sites or apps that help them easily answer their questions,
- over 40% of online transactions are now done on a mobile.

Intensified technological progress in recent years has had a significant influence on society which has become the main beneficiary of those changes in communication. Freed from desktop computers and slow-cable Internet, we can observe the rise of a connected society. We can observe mobile technology acquiring new areas like: m-education, m-commerce, m-administration, m-health to name a few. The center of this mobile society is information which can be accessed anytime and anywhere – mobile information.

The development of the mobile society has become an important social phenomenon, and as such, has brought a number of distinctive changes in purchase behaviour. This has led to changes in purchase decisions and the consumer journey as a whole.

Mobile websites or applications have enabled consumers to share opinions, reviews and product tests without the need to leave home, at the same time giving them the possibility of familiarizing themselves with a lot of information coming from various sources. Mobile solutions allowing the conversion, collection and sending of data have had a significant impact on further changes in consumer behaviours [Lysik et al. 2014a]. Owing to the use of mobile devices, consumers perform a number of activities, unavailable previously, supporting their decision-making processes. Today, the consumers may e.g. scan the bar code with the use of the camera installed in the mobile device and quickly compare the price of the same product in various stores. They may also use dedicated mobile applications enabling access to the extended reality – a system joining the real world with a computer generated one. For instance, the Trip Advisor City Guides Catalog application allows for downloading an interactive city guide and then virtual sightseeing in accordance with the plan suggested by other users, with the use of GPS or quickly locating the nearest catering outlets or hotels assessed by the members of the mobile consumer community. Another significant issue is the service of geolocation offered by mobile devices, owing to which consumers searching for specific information, e.g. about a restaurant, will be provided with personalized search results, narrowed to the area where the consumer currently is.

Mobile is not a channel like social media, outdoor advertising or search; it is something that impacts on all of the other marketing channels, both online and offline. It is a fundamental shift in human behaviour that we need to understand, and we need to adjust how we operate accordingly [Rowles 2017].

New technologies allow the consumers to become more conscious of their decisions and the products and service markets become more transparent. The consumer is currently the centre of attention of marketers and it is the consumer that marketing communication must be adjusted to so that he/she can come across our product or service at a convenient time, when he/she is searching for information and wherever he/she is looking for it.

5. Consumer journey perspective

How companies engage customers in these digital channels matters profoundly – not just because of the immediate opportunities to convert interest into sales but because two-thirds of the decisions customers make are informed by the quality of their experiences all along their journey, according to research [Dahlström, Edelman 2018]. If the mobile consumer is to be managed properly along the consumer journey, companies need to change the approach and focus on:

- advanced analysis of structured and unstructured data to build a 360-degree model of their consumers,
- put more emphasis on the end-user experience along the whole consumer journey by tailoring seamless interaction,
- build a touchpoints strategy to be ready to contact consumers in exactly the right time in the right manner.

McKinsey states in the concept *The Consumer Decision Journey* [Court et al. 2009] that if marketing had only one goal, it would be reaching the moments which have the biggest impact on the sales-related decisions of consumers. The contemporary decision-making process of a consumer, based on the B. Solis model [Solis 2013], consists of four stages:

- a stimulus in the form of an advertisement on TV, radio, press, in other printed forms or on the Internet;
- Zero Moment of Truth (ZMOT), the moment in which consumers are already aware of their needs and they start the process of seeking information on a given product or the service, the purchase of which they are considering;
- the First Moment of Truth (FMOT), the decision-making process right before the purchase where the factors determining sales could be such components as the quality of packaging, the list of components or the manner of their presentation at the sales outlet;
- the Second Moment of Truth (SMOT), the post-purchase experience of a consumer who is – or is not – satisfied with the product or service purchased.

In reality, this journey is often more like a sightseeing tour with stops, exploration, and discussion along the way – all moments when one needs to convince people to pick your brand and stick with it instead of switching to a competitor [*The Curious Consumer...*]. It is primarily the mobile technology that has influenced both consumer behaviour and, as a result, the shape of the consumer journey. Mapping this journey to extract the exact moments, touchpoints, can lead to the better understanding of the consumer and the role of mobile technology in the decision process. Among the most important activities to be undertaken for a seamless decision and purchase process there are:

- identification of consumer goals – this might help in finding and then focusing on what are the factors driving the consumer decision process;

- identification of the appropriate channels of communication or interaction, including the technology being used by consumers with a strong emphasis on mobile channels – because that is where the mobile consumer is;
- recognize the negative experience of consumers during their purchase journey, with a strong focus on the technological limitations, user experience and also consumer emotions during this action;
- research on how competitive products and journeys are designed, when comparisons and benchmarks can help identifying weak spots;
- visualization of the consumer journey to make it technology and consumer-taste-proof.

Across the entire consumer journey process there are multiple touchpoints, many of them are digital, which are opportunities to engage consumers and persuade them to undertake the desired action. It is crucial to create a full consumer portrait instead of just a series of snapshots without any relevance. A well-mapped consumer journey can help to understand in a better way the consumer's intent (just browsing or buying), and the context (location, device, time). This can ultimately lead to the creation of the persona of a user, and a representation of the goals and behaviour of a hypothesized group of users/buyers. A better understanding of the consumer leads to a more tailored approach towards their needs and also speeds up the process of eliminating obstacles.

Taking into consideration mobile consumers, some of the factors that can influence their decision-making process and enhance the mobile consumer journey are the aspects listed below:

- Understanding the consumers context, whether they are in a buying mode or maybe just browsing for more information – correct identification will be a trigger to activate certain activities either to enhance buying or ensuring more information, thus lengthening the journey.
- Voice-search revolutionises the mobile experience; the factors that drive this phenomenon are the users, the present generation of mobile users are advanced and willing to simplify the search process. On the other hand, voice-recognition apps have been on the market for more than eight years and nowadays are AI-supported. The increasing ownership of wearables with voice-search as a core feature is also a significant result.
- The change of the language to meet the requirements of mobile devices and at the same addressing the new generation of users. The way of communicating via a mobile screen differs from the traditional model and focuses on a universal form that transcends cultural and geographical barriers.
- Personal character of communication, with an observable growth in the use of Instant Messaging such as Facebook Messenger. Consumers expect a closer and more personal relations and interactions that can lead to sharing content that is genuinely relevant and valuable which can lead to higher engagement and the chance to convert a transaction.

- The personal touch during the consumer journey is becoming more and more important. Contemporary mobile users are seeking contact with a person before making a purchase. It is essential to include a personal aspect along the journey to make it more relevant for contemporary, highly mobile users.
- Mobile payment for a better shopping experience. Most consumers are at home with mobile technology and seek a seamless experience while conducting research and making payment, therefore including mobile payment is crucial in creating better shopping experiences for consumers.

An important fact is that mobile is just a part of the consumer journey, growing to be one of the most important ones but still merely a piece of the puzzle. During the journey of the consumer, multiple screens need to be considered.

6. Conclusion

We no longer merely live in a connected world, our pursuit of information has created a hyper-connected world of complicated relations but at the same time people have obtained technology-based solutions enabling them fast and accurate communication. In this article the author attempted to demonstrate how the consumer has evolved from a simple consumer of goods to a mobile, connected prosumer. The fast-paced ICT revolution has had a significant role in the creation of a mobile consumer who is curious and is researching everything, no matter how minor that choice might seem. Connectedness observed today unlocks, among consumers, control and choice to an extent never seen before. In observing consumers' attitude towards the search during their purchase journey, we can state that they use it throughout the whole process. With the use of mobile devices the consumer journey has gained a whole plethora of touchpoints during which the consumer is liable to change his/her decision and may be convinced to a behaviour he/she has not considered before. Mapping the consumer's journey may seem a very demanding and complicated process but it can repay in changing the decision process of the consumer in the expected way.

The mobile consumer shows a completely new approach towards market and cannot be neglected by companies since this phenomenon has a significant impact on the market and the whole process of decision-making. Nowadays not only big players can impact on the consumers journey, with the ubiquity of mobile devices and unfettered access to the wealth of information, every single market entity can outperform other competitors. We are moving from mass marketing, focused on averages, to massive customization focused on individuals, and that is why focusing on the consumer journey can be beneficial – it is all about being there when and where consumers are expecting assistance and help.

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