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Effects of e-Commerce Functioning on Customer's Need Satisfaction

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Summary. Online sales are at present one of the most dynamically developing forms of sales in business. Despite consumers' concerns, the sector is thriving and there is no indication that its growth rate will decrease any time soon. The purpose of the article is to present the effect of e-commerce operations on customer's need satisfaction. The research materials used in the study comprise data derived from a questionnaire/interview regarding the scope of customer online shopping. Research demonstrated that the majority did online shopping several times per year. Most respondents said that they had been driven by large product range and the ability to shop without leaving home, at any given time. The vast majority of respondents believed that online shopping largely or greatly affected customer's need satisfaction. We can conclude that due to competitive prices, a multitude of special offers and a broader product range, online shops are attracting more and more customers, whereas the confidence of consumers in internet shopping is steadily growing.

Introduction

Modern global economies require ongoing effort to support new challenges. Clearly, one of such challenges is the operation of companies providing online services.

E-commerce functioning is a response to the problems and demands of the contemporary world. The late 20th century features dynamic growth of instruments and technologies allowing rapid information exchange. E-commerce is probably not a serious threat to traditional trade, in its first phase of development at least. However, there are now plenty of customers willing to buy online and, unarguably, their number will grow (Szewczyk, 2006, p. 62).

Nowadays, we are witnessing a gradual stabilisation of e-commerce, accompanied by a formation of a group of market leaders and a focus on professional management of online shops and the like. To attain this aim, companies started to apply deliberate strategies of development and to select suitable online marketing tools (Teneta-Skwiercz, Sarnowska, 2016, p. 309).

The purpose of the article is to present the effect of e-commerce operations on customer need satisfaction. The research materials used in the study comprise data derived from a questionnaire/interview regarding the scope of customer online shopping.

E-commerce development in Poland

E-commerce (or electronic commerce) is a process involving the sale and purchase of products and services – in other words, the process of concluding business deals – via electronic means and the internet. Traditional tools, such as fax or phone, are also conducive to the process. The whole course of presenting and selecting offers or tenders, placing and taking orders, concluding and maintaining agreements and related document processing, has been transferred to the electronic platform. Purchased goods and services can be delivered either electronically or traditionally. Present-day e-commerce employs not only the internet, but also EDI, telephony, cable and satellite television, Intra- and Extranet, e-cards, etc (Gregor, Stawiszyński, 2002, p. 79).

According to the World Trade Organization (WTO), e-commerce means production, advertising activities, sale and distribution of goods with the use of ICT networks. E-commerce may be also understood as a process, which consists in business transactions conducted via the internet or other methods, such as telephone or fax.

E-commerce is strongly correlated with online shopping. When the branch was booming, internet distribution channels were created, allowing customers to reach products and services. This, however, did not mean physical access, but rather mobile technology and online transactions (Antonowicz, 2016, p. 6). Figure 1 demonstrates a classic diagram for online shopping.

According to *Rzeczpospolita* (a Polish newspaper), the value of the e-commerce market in the year 2015 in Poland was estimated at PLN 30–33 billion. It is comparable to the pharmaceutical market, which in 2015 was estimated at PLN 30 billion. According to Genius company, which conducted the research, the

Polish e-commerce market between 2014 and 2015 increased by 20%. This tendency is said to continue this year and in the years to come, whereas the value of the e-commerce market in Poland should double in the next few years. The dynamic growth of the Polish internet trade clearly translates into its share in the total general trade turnover, which in 2014 was ca. 4.5%. Previous estimates indicated that e-commerce was gaining value seven times faster than the traditional trade in a comparable period. We can see that customers spend more and more money online, with the method of online shopping being convenient and superior to traditional shopping (Golatoski, 2016).

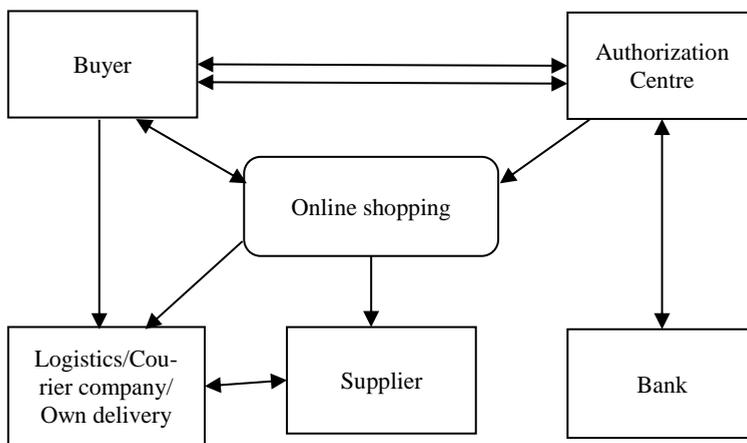


Figure 1. Classic diagram for online shopping

Source: Antonowicz, 2016, p. 6.

According to the e-commerce Report published by Interaktywnie.com, the e-commerce market exceeded PLN 30 billion in 2015. Experts claim that the Polish electronic commerce market growth dynamics in 2016 surpassed PLN 36 billion. This state of affairs is, without doubt, an effect of activities of commercial networks operating in the e-commerce area. We can say that it is actually the big retail chains and their online activities which build trust among Polish consumers. Experts project that the growth rate of the Polish e-commerce sector in the year 2020 will amount to approximately 10% of the value of retail. Every year we can observe an increase in the number of internet users, which is reflected in the raise of the number of online consumers and sellers. Assuming that such growth will continue at the level of ca. 15–20%, the value of the Polish electronic commerce market in 2017 will be around PLN 36–37 billion. Hence, we can also predict that thanks to the new Polish programme entitled 500+, the value of e-commerce will more likely be close to PLN 40 billion. Experts believe that resources originating from the state programme will inject funds to the economy, for people

aged 25–40. People at this age have little free time and significant needs regarding consumer goods at the same time, which makes them frequent online shoppers (Chochołowski, 2016, pp. 10–11).

According to the report entitled “E-commerce w Polsce 2016”, developed by Genius at the request of the Chamber of Electronic Economy (IGE), there are 25.8 million internet users in Poland, with a total Polish population of 38.5 million. The largest group is composed of 34-year-olds, secondary school or university graduates, residing mainly in cities, and declaring good financial standing. Those who buy online pay particular attention to the price of products, which is often compared with that at traditional shops. Online customers like comfort and what is of importance to them is the ability to shop from home at any time, 24/7. The goods which are most popular among online shoppers are clothing, home appliances, home electronics, books, hardware and software, footwear and mobile devices, such as smartphones, mobile phones or tablets (Sass-Staniszevska, Binert, 2016, pp. 8–10.)

Without doubt, e-commerce is one of the most crucial economic motors of the European Union member states. It is observed that year by year the number of new companies and consumers availing themselves of the internet network to purchase goods is growing. Nowadays, we can say that e-commerce is undergoing a natural evolution, as it favours European market integration and seeks ways to minimise barriers and obstacles in this regard. It is a great opportunity for Polish companies to become globally important, which includes the need to compete effectively on foreign markets. Before that, however, it is crucial to get an insight into the principles of their operation, their characteristic features and some useful facts (Kruszewska, 2016).

E-consumers have various needs, which can be directly satisfied when the goods and services acquired on the market are consumed. The said goods or services may be manufactured in households or obtained as part of benefits and services, and as such they will be referred to as consumption goods and services. In the mind of an e-consumer, the sources of needs are some regrettable tensions, the reduction of which will be of great satisfaction to him/her. The difference between a desire and a true need is the main driving force for consumption (Jaciow, Wolny, Stolecka-Makowska, 2013, pp. 11–12).

Conditions which an e-consumer should meet in order to satisfy his/her needs are as follows (Jaciow, Wolny, Stolecka-Makowska, 2013, pp. 11–12):

- a) a feeling that a given good or product, resultant from e-consumer development, is not in his/her possession;
- b) acquisition of information regarding a product which is about to enter the market; in such a case, an e-consumer broadens his/her knowledge regarding the product of interest to him/her;

- c) generation of more and more needs, related to the finding of a given product online;
- d) changes in the financial situation, which – to some extent – guarantee that an e-consumer is able to buy a product he/she had not had before or which had been too expensive for him/her to buy;
- e) changes in expectations regarding products, which may result from e-consumer's past experience with product use; e-consumer chooses quality, for example.

Time, or more precisely, shortage of time, largely affects e-commerce development. Internet offers fast, convenient and safe shopping. Therefore, e-consumers can satisfy variable needs from the comforts of their own houses, which saves, most importantly, time and money. Online companies quite often offer goods and services at competitive prices because they have no costs related to conducting standard activities, such as rental fees or employee wages. Consumers are under no obligation to conform to specific opening hours, e.g. those of a standard shop, and can buy at any time. Entrepreneurs who believe in development can meet the ever growing demands of the present-day consumer owing to latest technologies (Sass-Staniszevska, Binert, 2016, pp. 9–10).

Electronic consumers and their needs have a serious impact on the way e-commerce is developing, for they constitute a separate and simultaneously latest market segment. The following consumers' characteristics may be identified as crucial for branch development (Jaciow, Wolny, Stolecka-Makowska, 2013, pp. 12–13):

- a) convenience, i.e. the ability to buy seven days a week, 24 hours a day, and product delivery at a convenient time;
- b) individualism of every consumer expressed by his/her anonymity, which is associated with specific opportunities of online shopping;
- c) time-saving effect, which means the ability to devote a specific amount of time to online shopping; electronic consumers have a complete control over the time devoted to seeking information and ordering goods;
- d) respect for value, which involves finding best offer and online shops, considering the optimal satisfaction of e-consumer's needs;
- e) tendency to pay more for the same product elsewhere, provided that shopping safety is ensured or the delivery time is shortened;
- f) ability to modify one's offer so that the product is suited to customer's needs.

Materials and methods

Research was conducted with the application of a research tool – the questionnaire (survey). With the help of the web portal www.ankietka.pl, an electronic

survey was generated by the researcher, and then forwarded to a group of respondents thanks to a specially assigned link. The survey was made available via a social network. The respondents were informed on the purpose of the research and instructed on how to complete it. The questions included in the survey were construed in such way that abundant data regarding the effect of e-commerce development on consumer needs satisfaction could be provided. The survey was completed by 60 people. It comprised two parts: the first part was statistical data, the second focused on the main issue under analysis. Questions which were presented to the respondent were to show how popular e-trade was, if it was safe, and if consumers were satisfied. While majority of the questions in the survey were closed, single-choice selection questions, many key questions had a multiple-choice selection option.

Research results and analysis

Overview of respondents

63% of respondents were women, whereas 37% – men. The largest group were individuals aged 25 to 34, university or college graduates, residing in cities, with a monthly income per person of over PLN 1,200, most willing to express their opinions regarding online shopping.

Analysis of own research

The study was addressed to people using the internet and online transactions. Not everyone shops online every day. Frequently, these are one-time situations, e.g. when you cannot find a given good in traditional shops or if the difference in the price is big. The frequency of online shopping is presented in Figure 2.

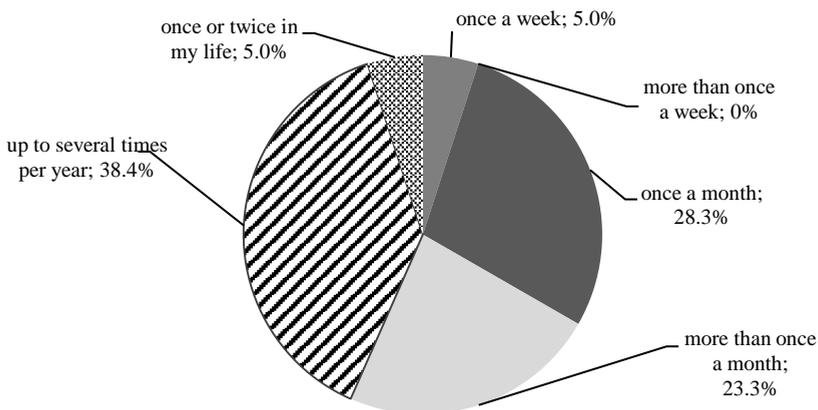


Figure 2. Respondents' frequency of online shopping

Source: own research.

Research demonstrates that 3.4% of respondents shop online up to several times per year. 28.3% of respondents buy online once per month. 23.3% of study participants shop online more than once per month.

The key feature attributed to online shopping was low price. It was selected by approximately 80% of respondents (Fig. 3).

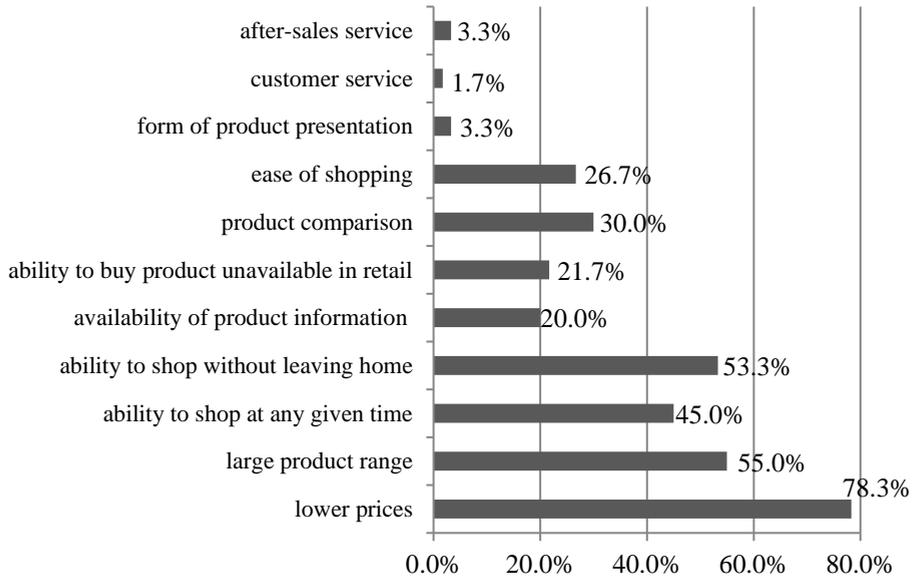


Figure 3. Factors which persuade respondents to shop online

Source: own research.

The second most dominant characteristic was a large product range, next the ability to shop without leaving home and the ability to shop at any given time. The following factors turned out to be of little importance: after-sales service, the form of product presentation, or customer service. This question had an option of choosing more than one answer (multiple-choice selection).

Studies indicate that by far the most popular were goods in the following categories: clothing, goods for children, house and garden products, books, automotive products (Fig. 4). This may be related to their low availability in traditional shops. In addition, they can be often found online at much lower prices than in traditional stores. Many products are simply unavailable in traditional shops, or the product range is limited. What is more, online shopping provides an opportunity to prepare an original, unique surprise for family and friends.

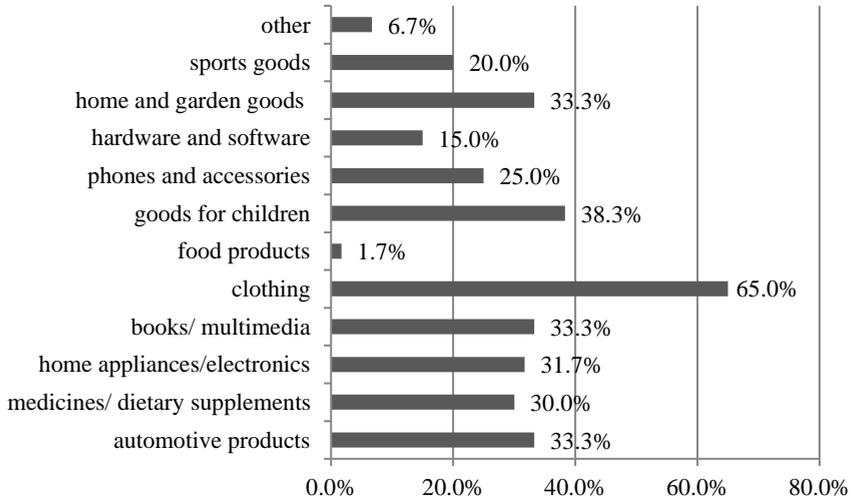


Figure 4. Groups of products bought online by respondents

Source: own research.

Goods' safety is critical when shopping online. Research shows that online shopping is safe: 73% of respondents believed so (Fig. 5). On the other hand, 21.7% of the study subjects had no opinion regarding the subject. This may indicate that although consumers are not fully convinced by online shopping yet, they generally believe in its safety.

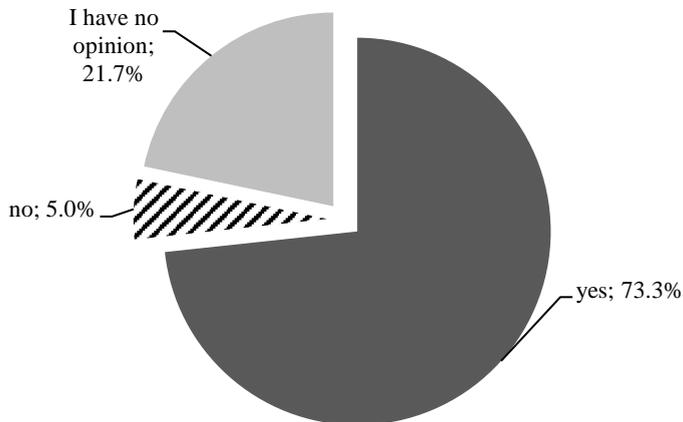


Figure 5. Respondents' opinions regarding online shopping safety

Source: own research.

Figure 6 shows findings concerning respondent satisfaction with the ability to shop online. A comparative scale was employed, with (1) representing a lack of satisfaction and (5) – great satisfaction. The analysis of study results demonstrated that 46.6% of the study subjects were satisfied (4) with shopping online, whereas 45% were very satisfied (5). 6.7% of respondents expressed a moderate satisfaction (3), whereas the smallest number, i.e. 1.7%, was satisfied at a low level (2). None of the respondents was fully dissatisfied with shopping online.

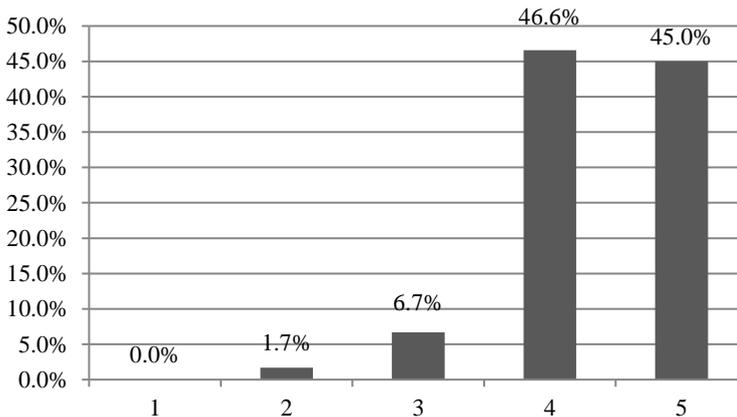


Figure 6. Respondent satisfaction with the ability to shop online

Source: own research.

Figure 7 shows respondents' opinions regarding an increase in population's life quality thanks to online shopping. A comparative scale was applied, with (1) representing no life quality improvement and (5) – great improvement in the quality of life of the population. The analysis demonstrated that 38.3% of the respondents believed that the quality of life largely improved (4) thanks to online shopping and 26.7% thought that the standards of life of the population improved greatly (5). Next, 28.3% reckoned that life quality improved moderately (3), whereas 5% of the persons surveyed believed that improvement was low (2). The smallest group (1.7%) expressed that there was no improvement in life quality of the population as a consequence of online shopping.

Figure 8 shows respondents' opinions regarding an increase in their own life quality thanks to online shopping. A comparative scale was used, with (1) representing no life quality improvement and (5) – great improvement in the quality of respondent's life. Research analysis showed that the largest group of respondents, i.e. 48.3%, believed that the quality of their lives largely improved (4) thanks to online shopping and 20% thought that it improved greatly (5). 21.7% advocated that their life quality improved moderately (3), whereas 5% of the persons

surveyed believed that improvement was low (2). The same number of respondents said that they saw no improvement of the quality of their lives as a consequence of online shopping (1).

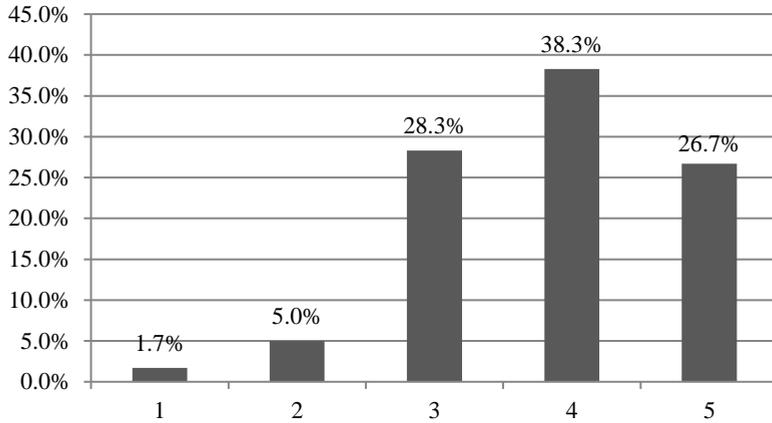


Figure 7. Respondents' opinions on life quality improvement of the population as a consequence of online shopping

Source: own research.

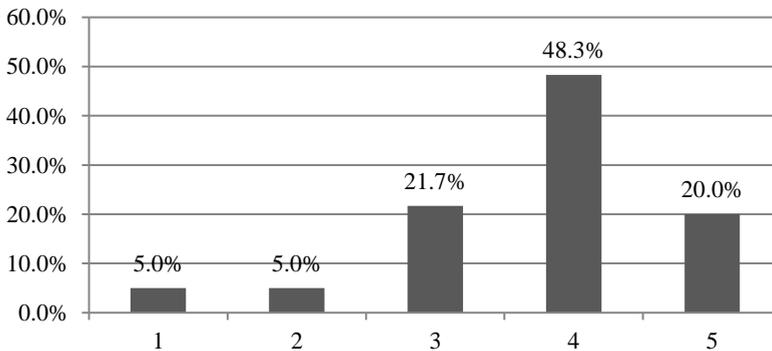


Figure 8. Respondents' opinions on their personal life quality improvement as a consequence of online shopping

Source: own research.

Figure 9 shows that most respondents, i.e. 83.3%, believe that online shopping has an impact on customer's need satisfaction. On the other hand, 15% of the study subjects has no personal opinion regarding the subject matter.

Figure 10 shows the level of impact of online shopping on the satisfaction of customer needs. A comparative scale was employed, with (1) representing no

impact of online shopping on customer need satisfaction, and (5) indicating a great impact of online shopping on need satisfaction.

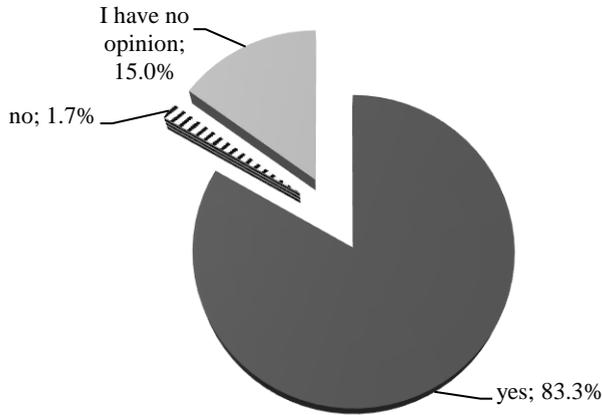


Figure 9. Respondents' opinion on the effect of online shopping on customer's need satisfaction

Source: own research.

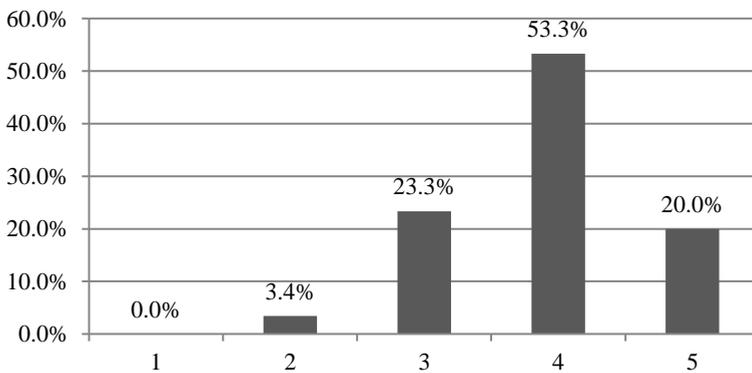


Figure 10. The level of impact of online shopping on customer's need satisfaction

Source: own research.

The analysis of the survey revealed that most respondents, i.e. 53.3%, considered online shopping as having a large impact (4) on customer's need satisfaction, whereas 20% believed that the impact was great (5). 23.3% reckoned that this impact was moderate (3), whereas 5% of the persons surveyed believed that the impact was low (2).

Conclusions

All in all, research data regarding online shopping indicate that despite consumers' fears, the study sector is blooming and there is no indication that its growth rate will decrease any time soon. More and more people are shopping online. As far as the frequency of online shopping is concerned, the majority claims that they shop online several times per year. Most respondents say that they are driven by a large product range and the ability to shop without leaving home, at any given time. In line with the study group, goods which are most popular among online shoppers include clothing, goods for children, home and garden goods, automotive products, books and multimedia. The majority of respondents reckons that online shopping is safe. Respondents are mostly either satisfied or very satisfied with the ability to shop online. Most of those surveyed think that online shopping improved life quality of the population and, consequently, that of their own. The vast majority of respondents believe that online shopping largely or greatly affects customer need satisfaction. Thus, we can conclude that due to competitive prices, many special offers, and broader product range, online shops are attracting more and more customers.

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Funkcjonowanie e-commerce w Polsce a zaspokojenie potrzeb konsumenta

Słowa kluczowe: e-commerce, konsument, zadowolenie klienta

Streszczenie. Internetowa forma sprzedaży jest jedną z najbardziej rozwijającą się formą sprzedaży w biznesie. Mimo obaw konsumentów branża ta przeżywa nadal swój rozkwit i nie zapowiada się, aby zwolniła tempo w swoim rozwoju. Celem artykułu było przedstawienie funkcjonowania e-commerce a zaspokojenie potrzeb konsumenta. Materiałem badawczym wykorzystanym w artykule były dane pochodzące z kwestionariusza wywiadu dotyczące zakresu korzystania przez klientów z handlu internetowego. Badania wykazały, że najwięcej osób opowiedziało się za tym, że przez internet robi zakupy do kilku razy w roku. Najwięcej osób stwierdziło, że skłaniają ich do tego niższe ceny, duży wybór produktów, a także możliwość dokonywania zakupów bez wychodzenia z domu w dowolnie wybranym momencie. Przeważająca liczba respondentów stwierdziła, że robienie zakupów za pośrednictwem internetu ma wpływ na zaspokajanie potrzeb konsumentów w dużym i bardzo dużym stopniu. Można stwierdzić, że dzięki konkurencyjnym cenom, licznym promocjom i większej ofercie produktowej sklepy internetowe zyskują większą liczbę konsumentów; rośnie również zaufanie konsumentów do zakupów w internecie.

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