

ANALYSIS OF THE MAIN CHARACTERISTICS OF ONLINE SHOPPING AND SHOPPERS IN ROMANIA

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ABSTRACT: *The appearance and expansion of the internet at a global level, as well as its use by an increasingly large number of individuals in the last three decades, has represented an opportunity for the retail industry. Entrepreneurs which had foreseen the potential of online sales have innovated this market, creating conditions and finding ways to attract and make loyal consumers. Their research, as well as studies made by other specialists, have sought to determine the main characteristics of consumers which choose this method to the detriment of in-store shopping or other forms of commerce without shops. Cultural mores, age, studies, easy adaptation to new technologies are just one part of the factors which influence the decision to buy online. As such, this paper explores the principal characteristics of online consumers in Romania. The analysis seeks to position Romania regarding this topic among the other EU nations, as well as with regards to the European mean, and also to capture the evolution of online commerce in the preceding years.*

KEY WORDS: *Internet, online shopping, online shoppers, e-commerce market, retail industry, technologies.*

JEL CLASSIFICATIONS: *L81, O14.*

1. INTRODUCTION

Online shopping has been a growing phenomenon worldwide since it first started in 1994, especially in countries with well-developed infrastructure for Internet marketing activities. The constant development of advanced technologies (Nițescu, 2016) such as navigation software and search engines has facilitated smoother surfing on the Internet, so that more and more people have found it easier and more convenient to become members of the Internet community.

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People have started buying more and more types of goods and services on the Internet. With the growing trend of buying online, a growing number of companies have found it advantageous to adapt to the new trend and offer consumers the convenience of shopping online (Kau, et al., 2003).

More than that, “the operation and success of powerhouses such as Alibaba, TenCent, Amazon and Groupon etc have set as an example for corporates to shift the model of their business from brick-and-mortar to brick-and-click” (Lim, et al., 2016).

With a relatively recent history, compared to other forms of selling, online shopping has proven its usefulness, for sellers, as well as for buyers during the COVID-19 pandemic. Lockdown measures such as stay-at-home orders, curfews, and capacity restrictions, together have significantly limited people’s ability to shop in-person.

Embracing digital technologies and bringing shops into homes are among the immediate impacts of the pandemic restrictions and lockdowns, with the majority of people reducing their frequency of going to stores, and adopting alternative shopping approaches such as curb side pick-up and home delivery.

However, numerous studies have shown that the preferred method of buying was through e-commerce, something that has led to a boom in online sales for online shopping platforms, retailers whose forms of selling were in-store as well as online, and also for retailers that managed to quickly adapt and enter the online market (Young, et al., 2022; Diaz-Gutierrez, et al., 2023). All other retailers saw dramatic losses in sales, a percentage of them going on to eventually exit the market.

That is why, together with the obvious increase in the importance of online sales, and the growing number of shoppers frequenting online stores, it is necessary for sellers to better understand the characteristics, preferences, uncertainties and risks of Internet surfers and shoppers.

In Romania, as numerous studies and reports show, the e-commerce market has developed quickly, today being one of the most important digital economies in the CEE region, reflected in its developing e-commerce market. The coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic accelerated growth across the e-commerce industry. As consumers ordered more products and services online, web sales of Romanian enterprises increased. Therefore, an increasing number of Romanian consumers have taken decision to shop online, their fears relating to this method of buying being considered risky having dissipated after their first online acquisition.

In this work are presented, at the beginning, the main aspects extracted from the academic literature regarding the concept of online shopping and of the online shopper. We have also realised a quick rundown of the evolution and future trends of e-commerce at a global level. The majority of our paper analyses the characteristics of online shoppers in Romania, as well as of the e-commerce market from the perspective of its dynamics in the recent period, as well as compared to the European mean or other EU member states.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1. Online shopping

“E-commerce improves communication and open economy at national and international level, changing business method and changing traditional markets to its new forms” (Mohammadpour et al., 2014). Currently we can all agree that e-shopping is one of the new purchase methods with great advantages. With each passing day, new e-commerce markets emerge and established markets reach new milestones.

“Even though there is no consensus on definition of e-commerce, there is general agreement among researchers that the main components of e-commerce include: website, email, intranet, extranet, LAN and wireless area network (WAN). Moreover, online shopping and e-commerce are also being used interchangeably” (Kidane & Sharma, 2016, March).

According to Skaržauskienė, et al. (2018), the e-commerce model has proven to be a dominant reality, and choosing an electronic business model allows firms “to increase business efficiency and create a new trade channel with easier and more targeted reach of the relevant consumer groups, also to set a foundation for new products and services” (Skaržauskienė, et al., 2018, June). However, at the same time, there are researchers who affirm that “the Internet as a shopping channel is competing with the long established in-store channel and that the former has not yet reached the “mainstream” status” (Soopramanien & Robertson, 2007).

Furthermore, numerous studies have focused on the factors that influence the online purchasing decision or on the behavioural typologies that lead consumers to choose this method. From this point of view, there are researchers which consider that online shopping “becomes an alternative for consumers since it is more comfortable than conventional shopping which usually attributed with anxious, crowded, traffic jam, limited time, parking space, etc.” (Kidane & Sharma, 2016, March). Baubonienė & Gulevičiūtė (2015) have analysed the advantages of e-commerce compared with traditional commerce, and have established that the factors which encourage consumers to shop online are “security, fast delivery, comparable price, convenience, cheaper prices and a wider choice”. Another study focusing on factors affecting customers’ purchasing decision through online shopping identified “trust, satisfaction, return policy, cash on delivery, after sale service, cash back warranty, business reputation, social and individual attitude” (Kidane & Sharma, 2016, March), as being important for the shopper, albeit to different degrees. Luo et al. (2012) conducted research that investigated the role of three online retailer characteristics influencing customer satisfaction, namely customer service, website design, and pricing. The authors’ conclusions show a direct effect regarding the purchasing decision in the case of the first and third characteristics, even though customer satisfaction must be put in another context. As such, “the nature of the online products (search versus experience) and retailers (well recognized versus lesser known) should be taken into account when retailers develop their online competitive strategy” (Luo, et al., 2012).

Thus, recent studies assess those online businesses “who can quickly grasp and understand the consumer behaviour and factors influencing their shopping habits, will

have an opportunity to attract more consumers, establish their position on the market and increase revenue” (Skaržauskienė, et al., 2018, June).

2.2. Online shoppers

The emergence and then widespread use of the Internet has allowed, among other multiple opportunities, the possibility of conducting online businesses (Dobre-Baron, 2015), on different platforms where consumers can buy and pay for goods and services online. This, as we all know, has recently become a trend. But, as Kidane & Sharma (2016, March) point out, “since the market is comprised of many different people and cultures, with diverse viewpoints, e-commerce businesses are being challenged by the reality of complex behavior of consumers”. Therefore, many studies have focused on identifying, analyzing and explaining the factors affecting customers’ purchasing decision through e-commerce (online shopping) taking into account several aspects of online shoppers’ behaviour.

First of all, the decision to shop online depends on consumers’ attitudes and personal preferences. Thus, there are consumers who perceive purchasing goods online to be relaxing or more efficient, but also consumers who prefer the experience of shopping in stores (Dobre-Baron & Nițescu, 2017). There are also authors who consider that another important factor in the decision to purchase online is the attitude of consumers towards technology, namely “individuals who have a positive attitude towards technology are also more likely to shop online” (Young, et al., 2022). Also, past experiences of online shopping are not a factor to be neglected. People with positive experiences of online purchases will be confident to repeat them, while those with negative experiences will most often abandon them and return to physical stores.

We have previously mentioned some of the advantages of e-commerce. From the shopper's perspective these are multitudinous and refer to the reduction of time spent choosing the product, the possibility of purchasing alternative products, but also the ease with which goods and services can be purchased from anywhere, due to the geographical extension of online shopping. Furthermore, as pointed out by Jusoh & Ling (2012), “online shopping is more environmentally friendly compared to purchase in store because consumers can just fulfil his desires just with a click of mouse without going out from house by taking any transportation”.

On the other hand, a number of disadvantages for users associated with the risk of online commerce have also been identified, “such as the possibility of credit card fraud, the inability to touch or feel something before buying it and the problems with returning products that fail to meet expectations” (Kau, et al., 2003). The same study emphasizes the case “when the product is technologically complex, ego-related or the price is high”.

A detailed inquiry regarding the typology of online shoppers was conducted by Kau et al. (2003), which resulted in their classification into six groups (clusters), taking into account their psychographics, demographics, as well as their shopping behaviour and level of satisfaction with their online shopping experience. These are:

- *On-off shopper*. On-off shoppers are those who like to surf the Internet and collect online information but prefer to shop offline. They enjoy looking for advertisements, are frequent users of bookmarks, and use the same search

engine on a regular basis. They are experienced in surfing and often look out for best deals. Demographically, a person in this segment is likely to be single and in the younger age group of 15 to 24 years. An offline on-off shopper is equally likely to be a male or female.

- *Comparison shopper.* Comparison shoppers are those who compare product features, prices and brands before making purchase decisions. They also actively look out for promotional offers. In terms of age, this group has a slightly higher percentage of persons in the age group of 25-29 years, and the gender distribution is very similar to the precedent group.
- *Traditional shopper.* Traditional shoppers are those who buy from brick-and-mortar store. They do not surf the Internet for comparative information, neither do they look for bargains over the Internet. Although they may come from all different age groups, a higher proportion of this group of shoppers is around 40 to 49 years old.
- *Dual shopper.* Dual shoppers are more likely to be single, male and in the younger age group of 15 to 24 years. They like to compare brands and product features. They also rely on the Internet for information gathering. However, they are not particularly deal prone.
- *e-Laggard.* An e-Laggard is slightly more likely to be a female and in the older age group of 35 years and above. They have lower interest in seeking information from the Internet. Only few percent of the e-Laggards could be considered to possess a high level of navigation expertise, the second lowest group after the traditional shoppers.
- *Information surfer.* An information surfer is more likely to be married. They love banner ads and click on them often. An information surfer also looks out for promotional offers. They have good navigation expertise and online purchasing experience.

However, it is not just the academic medium which analyses the typology of the online consumers, but also the practitioners interested in segmenting them based on their motivation and need, which can help the online seller improve their marketing and sales strategy. Such a typology has been realised by the specialists of the BigCommerce platform and has been structured in eight types of online shoppers, thusly (BigCommerce, 2023):

(1) *Casual Shoppers* - are just there for the experience. For this group of customers, online shopping is more of a hobby than a need. They aren't looking for any specific product; they simply enjoy browsing and adding items to their cart and wish list. Sometimes referred to as the "wanderers," these customers compose a significant amount of store traffic. They are less likely to purchase, abandon their cart at checkout or return products. Casual shoppers spend a lot of time on the website but often make small purchases that produce little revenue. They don't feel loyal to any one brand or make frequent purchases.

(2) *Impulse Buyers* - the shoppers who buy now and think later. These customers are emotional shoppers. Impulse buyers are less concerned with researching the best product. They buy goods because they feel like doing so on the spot or a deal appeals to them. Driven by popular trends and social norms, impulse shoppers change

their minds very quickly. Emotions are fleeting, however, and if they have too much time to second-think their purchase during an extensive checkout process or find that shipping costs are too expensive, it may deter them from completing their order. These volatile shoppers spend a lot of money and make decisions quickly, which can be profitable.

(3) *Bargain Hunters* - the top priority for these users (also called “discount shoppers”) is to save money and get the best price. These shoppers are always searching for the lowest price and are willing to explore as many stores as possible to find a discount. These shoppers add the lowest value to online stores. The bargain hunter isn't loyal to any one brand. They opt for low prices from less reputable sites over quality products. Bargain shoppers often rely on browser extensions to compare products and alert them to discounts. They are willing to wait for price cuts or close-out sales to save even a few dollars.

(4) *Research-Oriented Shoppers* - are shoppers who want to make sure they're shopping smart. They take the time to learn as much as possible about a product from multiple brands to make the best purchasing decision. From consumer feedback to product information and articles, they are willing to spend as much time as they need to avoid purchasing mistakes or product returns. They shop in markets with high price points, like technology, cars and appliances, but also in lower-ticket categories like beauty products or apparel.

(5) *Brand-Loyal Shoppers* - loyal customers are a business's bread and butter. They value customer service, brand validation and personalized experiences that make them feel like VIPs. It can take years to convert consumers into loyal shoppers. However, they are the key to longevity. They are the smallest group but contribute the most revenue. They desire exclusive experiences that are the most unique to the fashion, beauty and luxury goods industries. Loyal shoppers act as brand ambassadors. They like sharing their positive customer experiences and influencing others to buy the products. But an unsatisfactory customer experience, untimely shipping or decreased product quality or availability is a turn-off for them.

(6) *Need-Based Shoppers* - are necessity driven. They desire a particular product that will solve a problem and improve well-being. These shoppers take their time researching and comparing products to consider every factor. Need-based buyers want to be confident in their purchase so they won't be the first to buy a product. Once they decide and are satisfied with the product and delivery, need-based shoppers connect with the brand. They are willing to spend more money on a trusted product and efficient processes.

(7) *Ready-to-Purchase Shoppers* - these shoppers are ready to make a purchase instantly. They are motivated by needs, trends or deals, and for them, what matter most is saving time. They want to purchase and receive their product fast and without hassle. Ready-to-buy shoppers don't require excessive customer nurturing; they will likely buy from the first store that meets their expectations.

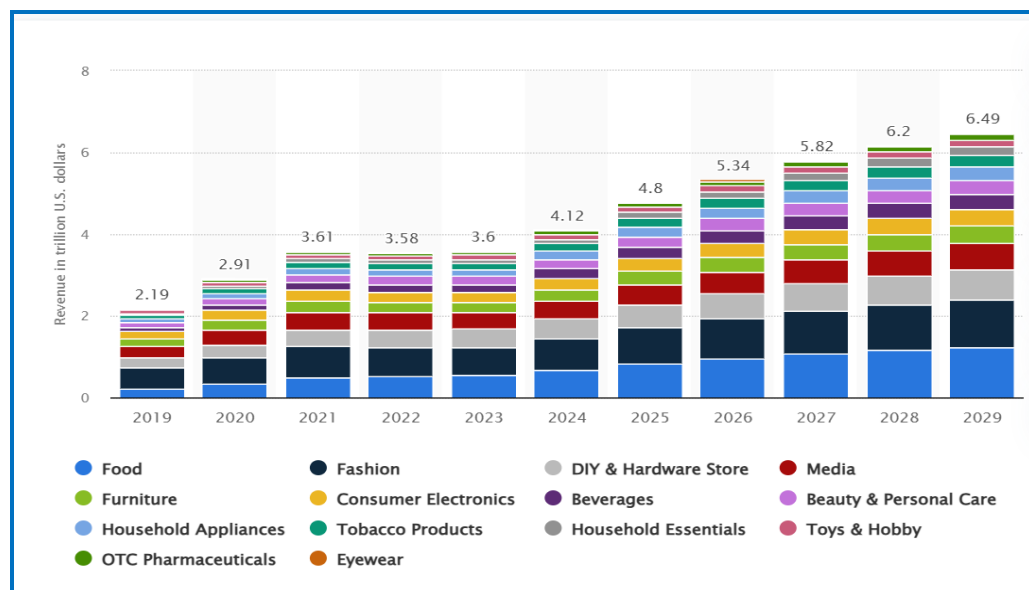
(8) *Trend-Following Shoppers* - some shoppers want validation before purchasing a product, but trend-following shoppers want to be first to set the tone. The trendy shopper is all about novelty. They seek authentic, renowned brands such as Louis Vuitton and Tesla. They are willing to pay for access to exclusive products

others can't afford. Trend-following shoppers care less about the price point and are more invested in the brand.

In other words, understanding the typology and characteristics of online shoppers is essential for those online shopping platforms wishing to make their customers loyal and maximize their profits.

3. A BRIEF OVERVIEW OF GLOBAL DEVELOPMENTS AND TRENDS IN ONLINE SHOPPING

As has been previously mentioned, internet access is increasingly easier at a global level, leading to an increase in the number of users, presently reaching, according to statistics, five million globally. Consequently, the number of people making the decision to purchase goods and services online is rising. In 2024, retail e-commerce revenues are estimated by the global data platform Statista (2024a) to exceed 4.1 trillion U.S. dollars worldwide, and this figure is expected to reach new heights in the coming years (Figure 1). As can be observed, values registered for 2019-2023, as well as those forecasted for 2024-2029, capture the cumulative global income of the 14 retail e-commerce markets in which it is segmented. Figures show that the biggest shares of the total revenue are, in descending order, Food, Fashion, and DIY and Hardware Store, over the entire period under analysis.

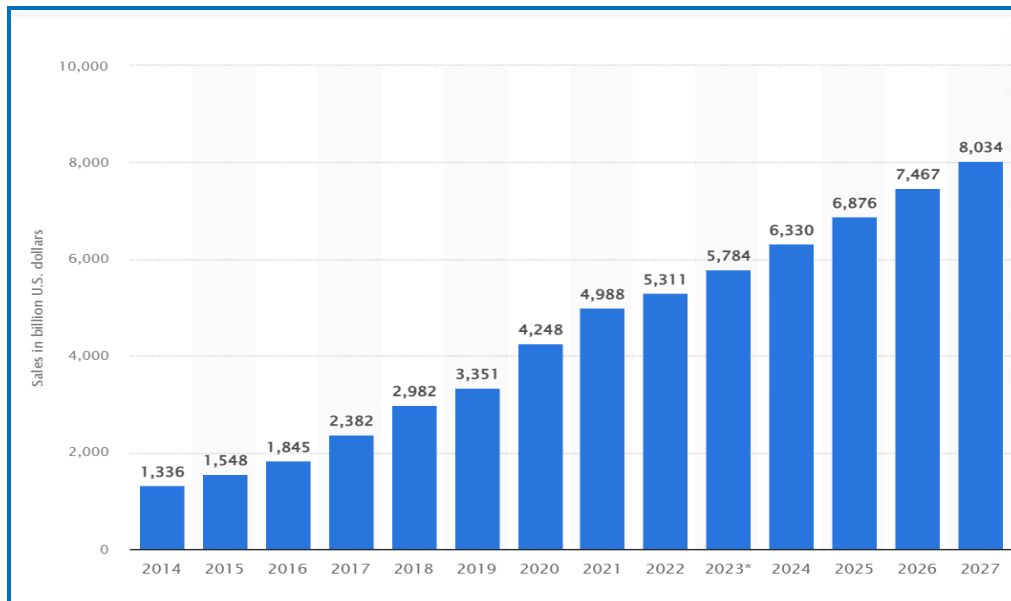


Source: Statista Search Department (2024a)

Figure 1. Retail e-commerce revenue worldwide from 2019 to 2029, by segment (trillion U.S. dollars)

In 2023, global retail e-commerce sales (goods and services) reached an estimated 5.8 trillion U.S. dollars. Projections realised by Statista (Statista Search

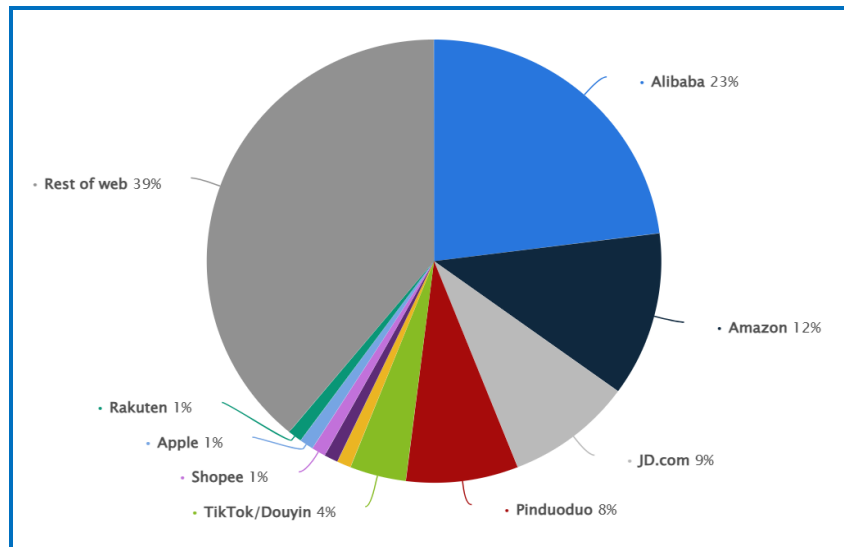
Department, 2024b) indicate a 39 percent growth in this figure over the coming years, with expectations to surpass eight trillion dollars by 2027 (Figure 2). Internet sales have played an increasingly significant role in retailing. In 2023, e-commerce accounted for over 19 percent of retail sales worldwide. Forecasts indicate that by 2027, the online segment will make up close to a quarter of total global retail sales (Statista Search Department, 2024b).



Source: Statista Search Department (2024b)

Figure 2. Global retail e-commerce sales 2014-2027 (billion U.S. dollars)

Furthermore, as of 2023, online marketplaces account for the largest share of online purchases worldwide. Leading the global ranking of online marketplaces in terms of traffic is Amazon, which offers e-retail, computing services, consumer electronics, and digital content, registered 6.1 billion direct visits to its .com website in December 2023. In terms of gross merchandise value (GMV), Amazon leads Chinese competitors Pinduoduo and Taobao. Taobao is operated by the Alibaba Group, the leading online commerce provider in Asia. Pinduoduo is the company behind the hugely successful Temu (Statista Search Department, 2024c). However, concurrently, Alibaba was the top company worldwide in terms of gross merchandise volume (GMV) share across the web (Figure 3). The Chinese e-retail giant which provides consumers business-to-business (B2B), consumer-to-consumer (C2C), and business-to-consumer (B2C) e-commerce accounted for a total of 23 percent of the overall online GMV in 2022. Amazon ranked second, accounting for 12 percent of the overall online GMV (Statista Search Department, 2024d).



Source: Statista Search Department, 2024d

Figure 3. Global e-commerce market share of leading e-retailers 2022 (%)

From the analysis of Statista experts can also be seen that one of the most visible trends in the world of e-commerce is the unprecedented usage of mobile devices. At the start of 2024, smartphones accounted for nearly 80 percent of all retail website visits worldwide, and in turn, also generated the majority of online orders compared to desktops and tablets. As the adoption of mobile devices is progressing at a rapid pace, especially in regions that lack other digital infrastructure, mobile integration will continue to shape the shopping experience of the future. M-commerce is particularly popular in Asia, with countries like China or South Korea generating over 70 percent of their total online sales via mobile devices (Statista Search Department, 2024c).

4. ONLINE SHOPPING AND SHOPPERS IN ROMANIA

In an article which presents the results for e-commerce in 2023, a topic of the annual ICT (information and communication technology) survey on the use of information technology by households and individuals in the European Union (EU), Eurostat experts have shown, as can be seen in Table 1, that 92% of the surveyed individuals used internet and 70% bought or ordered products or services online in the 12 months preceding the survey (Eurostat, 2024). In Romania's case, the share of internet users is equal with the EU mean, but that of online shoppers is only 50%. This figure places Romania at the bottom of the European ranking, ahead however of Bulgaria, which registered 45%.

It is important to highlight that in the Eurostat methodology "e-commerce is defined as the purchase of goods or services over the internet (e-commerce, e-shopping) for private use via any device (desktop, portable, tablet computer, mobile

phone) from enterprises (e.g. stores, travel agencies) and private individuals. Purchases refer to ordering goods or services for which payment is required, but the payment does not have to be done online” (Eurostat, 2024).

Table 1. Internet use and online purchases, 2023 (% of individuals aged 16 to 74)

	Proportion of individuals who:	
	Used internet within the last 12 months	Purchased online within the last 12 months
EU	92	70
Belgium	95	75
Bulgaria	84	45
Czechia	93	78
Denmark	99	89
Germany	93	77
Estonia	94	73
Ireland	93	87
Greece	86	58
Spain	96	69
France	94	77
Croatia	84	59
Italy	88	51
Cyprus	91	57
Latvia	93	62
Lithuania	89	61
Luxembourg	99	80
Hungary	92	70
Malta	92	68
Netherlands	99	92
Austria	96	72
Poland	88	64
Portugal	86	55
Romania	92	50
Slovenia	91	66
Slovakia	89	77
Finland	98	79
Sweden	98	89

Source: Eurostat (2024) *E-commerce statistics for individuals*

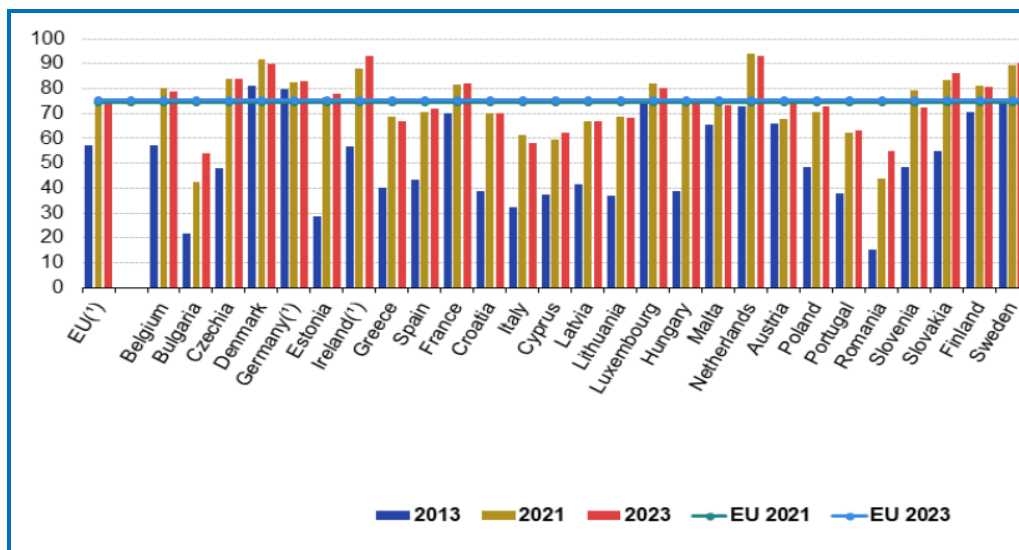
Using as a denominator the total number of individuals who used the internet in the last three months before the survey, Eurostat analysis revealed that the proportion of online shoppers reached 75% in 2023, from 57% in 2013 (Figure 4). The highest shares of online customers were declared by the Netherlands (93%), Sweden (91%) and Denmark (90%), while the lowest shares were reported by Italy (58%), Romania (55%) and Bulgaria (54%). While the EU as whole recorded an increase of 18 pp between 2013 and 2023, in Romania the growth was 40%.

E-commerce was boosted by the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020 and 2021; however, in some Member States, the shares of e-shoppers in 2023 were below the levels reached in 2021 at the end of the COVID-19 pandemic.

In Romania the e-commerce business is one of the industries which has expanded the fastest and has experienced development even in the context of the pandemic. E-commerce demonstrated that it had become even more deeply ingrained in the economy and society during the peak of the COVID-19 epidemic, when it was, for many people, the primary source of supplies, with a 13% growth in Europe in 2021, to EUR 718 billion. The e-commerce market in Romania grew by 13–15% in 2022 instead of 10% in 2021, resulting in a more extensive consumer base. Romania’s e-

commerce market has grown yearly, and the industry insiders' optimism is sincere. From this angle, the outbreak was advantageous, and the evolution is expected to continue at its current pace (Tuya Digital, 2023).

In 2023, the Romanian e-commerce sector seems to have gained traction again, supported by an increase of consumers, especially in rural areas. The development of the logistics infrastructure of couriers and of internet coverage makes online shopping accessible to many more customers. Out of the urban internet users, almost 74% ordered at least once online, while in the rural area the percentage is a bit over 61%. Each year this gap between the urban and rural areas keeps getting smaller and smaller, and this drives Romanian e-commerce sales (<https://balkanecommerce.com/the-romanian-e-commerce-sector-has-seen-constant-growth/>).

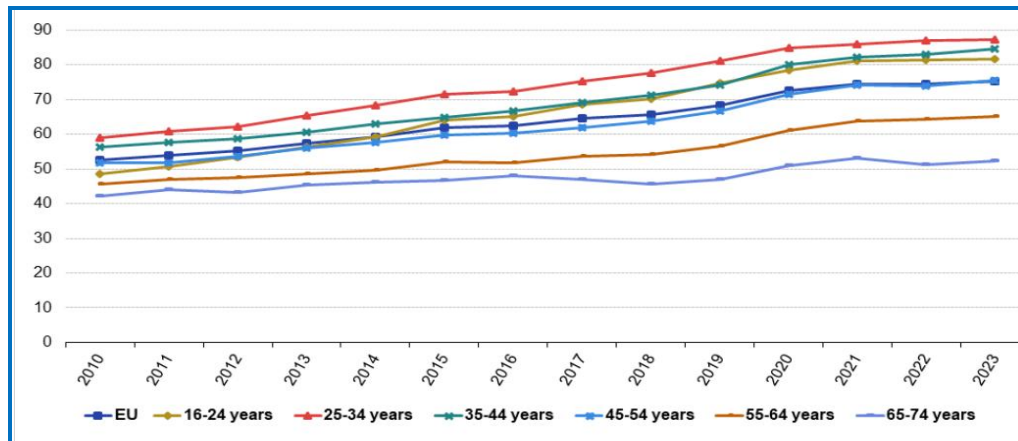


Source: Eurostat, 2024

Figure 4. Internet users who bought or ordered goods or services for private use in the previous 12 months (% of individuals who used the internet in the previous 12 months)

As can be seen in Figure 5, since 2015, among online customers, a clear generational divide can be observed between age groups. The shares of the age groups 16-24 years, 25-34 years, and 35-44 years were over the EU average while the age groups 55-64 years and 65-74 years were below the average. In 2023, 87% of the individuals aged 25-34 years who used the internet in the 12 months prior to the survey bought or ordered goods or services on the internet for their personal needs. This is an increase of 1 pp compared with 2021, in which e-shopping was particularly boosted by the COVID-19 pandemic lockdowns. The proportion of the 35-44 years age group followed with a rate of 85%, an increase of 3 pp compared with 2021. In 2023, 82% of the individuals aged 16-24 years bought or ordered goods or services, a growth of 1 pp compared with 2021; whilst the individuals aged 45-54 years were at 76% in 2023, a share slightly over the EU average in 2023, and 1 pp over the proportion of e-shoppers

of this age group in 2021. The share of the two remaining older age groups (55-64 years and 65-74 years) were below the EU average with 65% and 52% respectively in 2023 (Eurostat, 2024).



Source: Eurostat, 2024

Figure 5. Internet users who bought or ordered goods or services for private use in the previous 12 months by age group, EU, 2010-2023 (% of individuals who used internet in the previous 12 months)

In Romania, the largest segment of online shoppers is made up of the younger generations, between 25-35 of age. Various studies have indicated that “these generations are known to be tech-savvy, service oriented and speed driven. Large part of e-commerce is backed by this generation that prefers to shop online”. This is also due to the fact that the online shopping cycle takes place on phones, Romanians essentially having skipped the desktop, although sometimes finishing their purchase on a computer. This is also the reason why the proportion of other age groups in the total online shoppers is lower, but also because these individuals display heightened attention when buying online. The main aspects refer to: certification / proof of quality; guaranteed refunds; a local phone number answered by a native speaker; fast delivery and online order tracking; free shipping etc.






In 2023, 44% of EU online shoppers bought or ordered “clothes (including sportswear), shoes and accessories”, up from 42% in 2022. The second most popular items purchased by the online customers in 2023 were products from “restaurants, fast-food or catering services” (19% in the EU as a whole). The “cosmetic and beauty products” group was the third most purchased, with a rate of 18% of EU online shoppers in 2023.

In the last three years, Romanians have increased their luxury product shopping by 50%, and among the most popular products can be found luxury clothing, footwear, watches, and perfumes, where the average order value is 2,200 lei. The beauty/healthcare category is very popular in Romania (64%).

Regarding the distribution of purchases by seller origin at the EU level in 2023: in the last 3 months prior to the survey, 53% of e-shoppers bought or ordered

goods and services from a domestic seller; 21% from a seller from other EU countries; 13% from a seller from the rest of the world; and 10% from a seller from an unknown country.

In Romania, emag.ro remains in the top of online shoppers' preferences – it is the most frequented E-commerce and Shopping website, followed by olx.ro in second place and publi24.ro in third as the leaders of online sales (Figure 6). According to the research, over one-third of Romanians prefer to shop online from retailers in China (27%), EU member states (23%), and the United States. Furthermore, AliExpress is the second most popular overseas platform among Romanians behind Temu (Tuya Digital, 2023).

Rank ⓘ	Website ⓘ	Category ⓘ
1	 emag.ro	Ecommerce & Shopping > Marketplace
2	 olx.ro	Ecommerce & Shopping > Classifieds
3	 publi24.ro	Ecommerce & Shopping > Classifieds
4	 temu.com	Ecommerce & Shopping > Marketplace
5	 aliexpress.com	Ecommerce & Shopping > Marketplace

Source: <https://www.similarweb.com/top-websites/romania/e-commerce-and-shopping/>

Figure 6. Most Visited E-commerce & Shopping Websites in Romania in 2023

According to eMAG officials, online stores in Romania offer around 15 million unique products, in contrast to Germany's vast selection of over 100 million. This indicates that the Romanian market is full of opportunities. International retailers are already starting to see this potential, especially in the fashion industry. Moreover, consumers are seeking delayed or instalment payment options (eLogy, 2023).

5. CONCLUSIONS

The benefits of e-commerce are well known: access to a very wide range of products (domestic and cross-border markets), easier price comparison, shopping in the comfort of one's own home, access to other consumers' views on the products covered, etc. These different benefits continued to boost e-commerce in 2023. On the other side, the improvement of the general health situation followed by a return to in-person shopping has constrained the growth of online shopping in 2023 (Eurostat 2024).

In the case of Romania, e-commerce grows by 30% annually and is expected to continue growing significantly until 2025 and beyond. Given the changes caused by the pandemic, online shopping in Eastern and Southeastern Europe will hold a higher share in total retail sales in the coming years, while Romania will experience the fastest dynamics in this regard (Growww Digital, 2023).

Thus, in 2020 we witnessed a level of growth in Romanian e-commerce which had previously been predicted to take multiple years. At that time Romania was already a country with great internet penetration (66% of all Romanian households having a fixed internet connection). During that period, many shoppers in Romania became online shoppers for the very first time. People were spending more time online and were closer to online shopping. They made the first online payment and realized how simple, fast, and safe the whole process was. From an e-commerce perspective, the local banks have also invested in their mobile applications, to offer their clients a better online experience, which also contributes to bringing more customers online. The info of over 1 million cards was saved through PayU. And over 300,000 new cards made a first online payment just in the first months of 2020, and only from one of the top local banks (PayU, 2021).

After the pandemic, Romanian e-shoppers started using cards more often for online payments. This reached a peak on Black Friday 2023, when, according to eMAG, Romania's largest online retailer, 7 out of 10 customers chose this payment method. Today, the growth of the Romanian e-commerce ecosystem is helped by courier businesses, like Cargus and Sameday, which offer quality services and deliver cross-border, and by marketplaces, which offer infrastructure and know-how, so that anyone can start selling today without needing a large investment in a website or logistic facilities.

Romanian consumers have become more comfortable with online shopping, and they increasingly prefer the convenience and variety offered by e-commerce platforms. Common purchases include clothing, electronics, cosmetics, and household goods. Online payment methods are becoming more popular, including credit/debit card payments, digital wallets (e.g., PayPal), and cash-on-delivery. Trust in online payment systems and security measures have contributed to this shift. Romania has implemented various regulations to facilitate e-commerce, including consumer protection laws, data protection regulations, and electronic signature laws (International Trade Administration, 2024).

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