

Contemporary Communication Model of Consumer Behaviour of Generation C

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Abstract

Fast network communication has been manifested in recent years as an indispensable result of constant network connectivity, a common characteristic of Generation C. Through this network communication, which is particularly popular on social networks, members of this generation share and seek various experiences and information. As modern society is highly consumerist, this kind of communication is very often based on buying and using certain products, which gives its participants the role of (potential) consumers. As mentioned above, there are severe changes in the process of making consumer decisions, especially in evaluating alternatives. Fast network communication and the exchange of experiences raised consumer expectations to a higher level and influenced consumer standards and caution, but still. However, at first, it can be seen here that the modern consumer of Generation C is more educated, informed and cautious; impulsive buying, under the influence of online "hype", could be more frequent than ever. The paper aims to determine if searching for information on social media while evaluating alternatives among Generation C members affects realising impulsive purchases. Modern, connected consumers of Generation C are characterised by a specific communication model of consumer behaviour and the effects of consumer behaviour that such a model produces.

Keywords: generation C; consumer behavior; communication; social networks

JEL classification: M30

Paper type: Research article

Received: 16 March 2023

Accepted: 28 August May 2023

DOI: 10.54820/entrenova-2023-0030

Introduction

Social networks have enabled fast online communication, which makes it difficult for modern society to imagine everyday life. This kind of communication, which is the product of networked users of modern technologies, also irreversibly changes its stakeholders, makes them more informed than ever before, and changes the way, speed and ease of information. As a place for communication, information, and education, but also for sharing content in various formats, a social network like Facebook can have a significant impact on the formation of opinions, attitudes, and ultimately on the behaviour of its users. The aforementioned comes to the fore, especially when Facebook users are seen as consumers, that is, when talking about their buying behaviour, especially impulsive ones.

A study conducted by Khokhar et al. (2019) showed that "customer feedback and recommendations play an important role in increasing impulsive buying behaviour". In the same study, they state that "from a life cycle perspective, a customer goes through several stages, from awareness to engagement, action to loyalty, advocacy". They add that "social media play a role in each of these stages, providing relevant information that affects these stages". Shaker et al. (2017) defined "impulse" purchase as "unplanned purchase or spontaneous purchase". Furthermore, in the continuation of the definitions, they add, "when a consumer sees a new product, well familiar products or product samples, at surprisingly low prices, tends to show impulsive behaviour." Ortiz Alvarado et al. (2020), in their study proved that "positive and negative emotions can trigger impulsive buying behaviour", s the fact that "negative emotions are stronger and more likely to trigger such an impulse", noting that "such behaviour might not be present out the use of Facebook" because in their study they noticed that "impulsive behaviour increased in the Facebook environment". Given that Facebook has long been recognised by brands as a platform for marketing strategies, in this paper, a special focus will be placed on researching the influence of information through Facebook on the behaviour of its users, members of the networked generation C, during the consumer phase of evaluating alternatives. Therefore, the effects of the information model of networked consumers on the realisation of their impulsive purchases will be investigated.

The objective of the study is to investigate whether engaging in information search on social media platforms during the process of analysing alternatives has an impact on the occurrence of impulsive purchases among individuals belonging to Generation C. Generation C refers to contemporary customers who are highly connected and exhibit a distinct communication model of consumer behaviour, which in turn has distinctive consequences on consumer behaviour.

Literature review

Generation C networked consumers

Members of the networked generation C are in daily contact with the latest technologies, which make them constantly available, keep them up to date on the latest news, provide them with the necessary information, and often, in the decision-making process, in addition to the possibilities that such technologies provide, they evaluate alternatives. According to Gök et al. (2021), members of Generation C are "unlike other generations, defined by behaviour and lifestyle, not by date of birth". The same author also states that generation C can be defined as "a generation s developed digital literacy skills", i.e. as "people who actively use social media platforms, own a blog, share various content such as writing, photos, music and videos, and are active and creative." Kusá et al. (2020), state that the constant

connection of members of Generation C s the Internet makes this sub-segment "an easily accessible target audience".

The claim mentioned above is particularly evident in social networks, which in recent years have opened up to users of modern technologies an incredibly fast and easy possibility to connect through online communication. Chaffey et al. (2019), for social networks or communities, state that such sites or their parts are aimed at enabling community interactions between different consumers (C2C model), and as typical examples of such interactions, they state comments, messages, rating and tagging content in specific categories on Facebook, Instagram, LinkedIn, Snapchat and Twitter. Thomas et al. (2023), for marketing on social networks, state that it is "a technique that allows people and organisations to advertise their websites, goods or services through online social networks, as well as connecting and engaging a much larger population." As stated by Đuričanin et al. (2021), "In the context of marketing, social media and social networks represent an important marketing tool, especially in the area of advertising, because social networks have changed and accelerated communication between consumers, as well as communication between companies and consumers. According to Lovrić et al. (2022), social networks "enable consumers to actively and quickly spread information about products and services, exchange experiences, and thus can additionally strengthen the effects of a company's marketing communication."

Ud-Daula (2022) states that companies are taking advantage of the growing trend of consumer dependence on social media when shopping. Vranešević (2019) found in their research that the largest percentage of respondents, in Croatia 60.1% and in Serbia 58.6%, both "use and consider social networks as a source of relevant information". According to Kang (2020), "For many consumers, searching for online product information (OPI) has become an essential first step in the process of purchasing a product or service, whether they end up buying online or in a traditional store." Chen et al. (2022), conclude that "in the e-commerce market, online comments make online shopping easier for consumers; on the other hand, consumers are increasingly dependent on information from reviews, in order to evaluate the quality of the product and made a purchase decision.

Consequently, studies on the impact of online reviews on consumer behaviour have important theoretical and practical significance implications." According to Gök et al. (2021), "as consumers of today and the future, Generation C individuals go through the following stages before purchasing a product or brand: before making a purchase decision, consumers research on the Internet, about the product, which they are needed, review product features, read online reviews, and compare prices, terms, and warranties. They learn how to use the product if there are YouTube videos about it. To decide which brand to buy, they exchange ideas with their friends on social networks." According to Vuković et al. (2021), "What is interesting about Generation C is that this generation, communicating with each other in online communities, tends to create hype for a certain product by itself. This is a generation that looks for new content every day, a generation whose decisions are based on online content.

Many brands recognised this and focused their marketing activities on content marketing." Redine et al. (2022) (according to Ampadu, 2022; Chen, Lu, 2019) state that "reviews online can trigger the impulse to buy while browsing". Chun-Der Chen et al., (according to Wu et al., 2019) (2021), state that "impulse buying online is viewed as a state of desire, which consumers experience when they encounter items in a virtual shopping environment. It is often described as the result of complex personal hedonistic values, which often appear suddenly in an overwhelming state of mind".

Araujo (2015) states that "consumers are increasingly using social network sites (SNSs) to engage in brand-related activities". According to AL-Haddad et al. (2019), "decision-making is a psychological construct that determines purchasing behaviour.

This means that, although the decision cannot be "seen" from the visible behaviour, we can conclude that the decision has been made. These decisions can be made using social media." Kotler et al. (2017), in their book "Principles of Marketing", describe how the decision process itself affects consumer behaviour; "the decision-making process, from need recognition, information seeking, and alternative evaluation to purchase decision and post-purchase behaviour, begins long before the actual purchase decision and continues long after." Furthermore, Kotler et al. (2017) state that despite the higher level of curiosity and knowledge of today's customers, they do not have control over what they want to buy. In the phase of evaluation of alternatives, that is, as stated by Miklošič (2015), in the phase of purchase evaluation, "references of other users are intensively used. If other users are not satisfied with the product, the discrepancy between expectations and reality increases dramatically, and vice versa." Saleem et al. (2017) state that social networks, such as Facebook and Twitter, "are very popular among consumers, in order to expand the experience of the products and services they consume". In the context of electronic word of mouth, the same authors point out that "customers are very interested in reading negative and positive reviews", such as the experiences of other users. For such positive and negative comments sent by other users, they state that they influence the intention to purchase fashion products in potential customers. According to Milanović Glavan et al. (2022), positive feedback is public and can be an incentive to other potential and existing customers. Negative feedback emphasises areas in which improvement is needed." Yang et al. (2019) claim that "sharing opinions about products and services" and "helping other consumers" as the primary motivation for writing reviews on the Internet to make better purchasing decisions".

Facebook as the network that enabled the engagement of networked consumers

According to Thomas et al. (2023), "Facebook initially started as a social media platform, which was used to connect strangers or to friends via the Internet. However, over time, it has gained importance as a large market for business worldwide." According to Balawardhana (2022), "Facebook continues to grow as the strongest social network (SNS) in the entire industry due to its advanced features (the use of Web 2.0), market dominance (strong financial position) and due to its popularity among different age groups, especially among the young audience". Wajid et al. (2022) state for Facebook advertising that "it enables people or customers the possibility of direct inclusion in ads on their network pages, encouraging them to "like" and "share" and even to view if someone else, or one of their peers enjoyed or shared the same ads."

Luarn et al. (2015) mention that "Facebook not only makes information more accessible but also provides objective and real data for examining user behaviour". Đurica et al. (2013) state that Facebook is "the most advanced form of direct marketing, which allows users to reach the target market for free or with minimal investment. Because of its local and global character, advanced applications and unstoppable growth, Facebook has enormous marketing potential. Through it, users publish the message they want to convey to others in different ways." A study conducted by AL-Haddad et al. (2022) in order to investigate the effects of electronic word of mouth (e-WOM) on the purchase intention of Jordanian consumers via Facebook showed that electronic word of mouth (e-WOM) "significantly affects the purchase intention of Jordanian consumers via Facebook". The results of research by

Kountouridou et al. (2019) showed that a promotional message on the Facebook page increases consumer interaction with the brand by 36%, while such interaction positively affects consumer engagement with the brand in 46% of cases. Furthermore, the engagement of consumers of the brand on Facebook has a huge impact on their attitude towards the brand (53%), and approximately 47% of purchase intentions were influenced by the consumer's attitude towards the brand. Saddique et al. (2017) state that "comments and reviews play a vital role as feedback for companies. Moreover, comments and reviews influence other users of social networks. Research on the example of the wedding industry conducted by Lupa-Wójcik et al. (2020) showed that "the content of The Facebook group has a large reach and encourages high involvement of their participants". Haikel-Elsabeh et al. (2018) state that "the central challenge in establishing a Facebook brand page and using it effectively, in order to achieve the company's marketing goals, lies in encouraging consumer engagement".

Methodology

The goal of the research is to point to a contemporary, connected group of consumers whose perception of the relevance of using Facebook in the consumer phase of evaluating alternatives differs from the perception of other generations who do not belong to this continuously networked group. The main presumption is that the perception of the use of Facebook by consumers belonging to Generation C differs from the perception of consumers who do not belong to Generation C.

For the purposes of proving the mentioned hypotheses, quantitative research was carried out using a survey. The survey was conducted on the Internet (Google Forms), and it was distributed through social media and email. The research was conducted on 426 respondents in the Republic of Croatia. The final sample of 343 respondents was formed after identifying and selecting those respondents who were determined to be generation C consumers, i.e. according to a criterion that primarily included confirmed information that they are part of a group on social networks and share the same interests, opinion and activities like the other members of that group. Inactive users on social networks, i.e. 54 respondents, were excluded from further analysis of the research results, given that they are inactive users, or more precisely, the so-called "spectator profiles" who read blogs and listen to podcasts but do not actively participate in communication on social networks.

Results

Table 1 shows the socio-demographic structure of respondents of Generation C and occasional users of social networks on Facebook, which indicates the fact that six respondents did not answer their gender. In comparison, 418 respondents answered the question of education and marital status, i.e. 8 respondents did not answer about the level of their education and their marital status. According to the results of the chi-square test shown in Table 2, members of generation C do not depend on the variables gender ($\chi^2 = 0.192$, $df = 1$, $p = 0.662$) and education ($\chi^2 = 1.076$, $df = 2$, $p = 0.584$). In Table 2, you can read the statistically significant dependence according to the marital status variable. Intensive use of social networks, those respondents who write blogs and comment to a greater extent belong to the group of respondents who sought marital status ($\chi^2 = 18.691$, $df = 1$, $p < 0.001$). The data shown in Table 2 points to the fact that a typical representative of Generation C is a female person who intensively uses social networks, and from the aspect of activities on social networks, it can be claimed that 61.86% of Generation C is female. According to what has been stated, it can be concluded that the respondents who do not have a marital status

perceive Facebook as a way to break up their free time; they often use Facebook as they like to identify themselves on Facebook as friends made on social networks

Table 1

Socio-demographic structure of respondents of Generation C and occasional users of social networks on Facebook

	Variable	Category of members of generation C			Test statistics
			Intensively	Periodically	
		n	66	18	
Gender	Male	% share Gender	78,57	21,43	$\chi^2 = 0,192$
		% share of generations C	19,24	5,25	df = 1,
	Female	n	212	47	p = 0,662
		% share Gender	81,85	18,15	
		% share of generations C	61,81	13,7	
Education	High school	n	132	34	
		% udio Obrazovanje	79,5	20,5	
	College or higher education	% share of generations C	38,6	44,7	$\chi^2 = 1,076$
		n	155	32	df = 2,
		% udio Obrazovanje	82,9	17,1	p = 0,584
		% share of generations C	45,3	42,1	
Marriage status	Yes	n	55	10	
		% udio Obrazovanje	84,6	15,4	
	No	% share of generations C	16,1	13,2	
		n	80	165	
		% Marriage status	69	31	$\chi^2 = 18,691$
		% share of generations C	23,3	48	df = 1,
		n	263	178	p < 0,001
		% Marriage status	87,1	12,9	
		% share of generations C	76,7	52	

Source: Author's work

Table 2 shows the intensity of community use on the social network Facebook. It is evident that the majority of respondents, 141 or 41,11% of them, are intensive users of information exchange on one network, while 118 respondents, or 34.40%, use more than three or three information exchange communities.

Table 2

Three clusters of intensive use of multiple networks - results of the k-means clustering procedure based on criterion variables (v1b – entertainment content and v1c – product brand members)

Clusters of intensive use of social networks	Number of respondents (n)	%
An intensive member of a community	141	41,11%
It uses two communities intensively	84	24,49%
Three or more communities intensively use it	118	34,40%
	343	100%

Source: Author's work

The Least Significant Difference (LSD) post hoc test was applied to evaluate the interests of members of Generation C across two distinct variables: entertainment

content and brand affinity (Table 3). The analysis included data from three clusters of Generation C, comprising a total sample of 339 participants.

For the variable related to entertainment content (v1b), the analysis revealed significant differences between the clusters. Cluster 1, with 146 members, reported a mean interest level of 2.28 (SD = 0.786), which is notably lower compared to Cluster 2 (mean = 4.36, SD = 0.482, n = 84) and Cluster 3 (mean = 4.41, SD = 0.723, n = 109). The ANOVA test yielded an F-value of 375.706, indicating a highly significant difference ($p < 0.001$) among the clusters, thus suggesting varied preferences for entertainment content within Generation C.

Regarding the variable associated with product brand membership (v1c), the findings also demonstrated significant distinctions among the clusters. Cluster 1 again showed the lowest mean score of 2.14 (SD = 0.855), whereas Cluster 3 displayed a significantly higher interest (mean = 4.37, SD = 0.484). Cluster 2 had a relatively moderate interest level (mean = 2.43, SD = 0.699). The F-value for this analysis was 328.85, with the results being statistically significant ($p < 0.001$), indicating that brand affiliation is perceived differently across the clusters.

Table 3
Post hoc LSD test Interests of members of Generation C

Criterion variable	Gene-ration C cluster	N	Mean	Std. Dev.	Test statistics
(v1b – entertainment content)	1	146	2,28	,786	F = 375,706 p < 0,001**
	2	84	4,36	,482	
	3	109	4,41	,723	
	In Total	339	3,48	1,258	
(v1c – product brand members)	1	146	2,14	,855	F = 328,85 p < 0,001**
	2	84	2,43	,699	
	3	109	4,37	,484	
	In Total		2,93	1,226	

Source: Author's work

Notes: * The post hoc LSD test showed that all three clusters of members of generation C differ from each other according to both variables

** Statistically significant difference at the significance level of 1

Analysing the research results, it can be concluded that 71% of respondents spend more than 3 hours a day using social networks and developing communication with the group they belong to and whose activities they follow. 4 respondents did not express a clear choice of communication. Either they chose all of the listed social networks, or they did not select any, so their answers will not be taken into account in the further analysis. Most of the respondents in Generation C, 91% of them, have an open profile on social networks. The majority of respondents (87%) have an open profile on Instagram, and slightly fewer of them (83.5%) have an open profile on Facebook. In comparison, 47.8% of respondents have an open profile on YouTube, and 31.3 % of respondents are on Snapchat. 10.4% of respondents have an open profile on Twitter, 6.1% of respondents have one on LinkedIn, and 2.6% have an open profile on a Blog. As many as 80.3% of respondents check posts on social networks several times a day, 17.1% of respondents check posts two to three times a day, and only 2.6% of respondents rarely check posts on social networks. Content on social networks is published almost daily, two to three times a week by 59% of respondents; 21.4% of respondents publish once a week, and 16.2% every few days. Only 3.4% of respondents post content on social networks every day. Out of the total number of

respondents, most respondents indicated that they use social networks for entertainment. In comparison, 48.5% of respondents indicated that they use social networks for information. 43.4% of respondents use social networks to communicate. In comparison, 30.3% of respondents use social networks to share experiences, while 37.8% of respondents use social networks for shopping, and 11% use social networks for other purposes. Out of the total number of respondents, 66.9% wanted a certain product or service they came across on a social network, 24.6% sometimes wanted a certain product or service, and (8.5%) did not want a specific product or service they came across on a social network. Out of the total number of respondents, as many as 62.7% of the respondents were prompted to buy by a post or ad on social networks, while 28.8% of the respondents were not prompted to buy by a post or ad on social networks. 8.5% of respondents do not know whether ads or posts on social networks prompted them to buy.

The first cluster (1) is called Entertainment content because the members of generation C classified in that cluster rate their tendency to follow corporate announcements of various manufacturers of product brands, both domestic ($\bar{x}1 = 2.28$) and foreign ($\bar{x}2 = 2.14$), low scores. The second cluster shows high interest in corporate announcements by producers of world-famous brands ($\bar{x}1 = 4.36$) and a lack of interest in Croatian brand producers ($\bar{x}2 = 2.43$). Members of the third cluster are interested in corporate announcements in all their forms, namely entertainment content ($\bar{x}1 = 4.41$) with a minimum score of 2 and a maximum of 5, i.e. domestic brand manufacturers ($\bar{x}2 = 4.37$) s a minimum score of 4 and a maximum of 5.

Table 4
Clusters according to impulse buying

Generation C clusters	N	Arith. middle	Stan. deviation	Clusters	p
Fun content	151	14,31	23,54	(2)	0,005*
Members of Generation C of world-renowned manufacturers	83	27,42	43,35	(1)	0,005*
Members of Generation C of domestic producers	112	24,13	33,35	(1)	0,020*

Source: Author's work

The ANOVA results indicate the existence of a statistically significant difference between the number of impulsive purchases (in the last 12 months) and the belonging of Generation C to a certain cluster (Table 4). The respondents of the first cluster (entertainment content) are on average the least inclined to impulsive buying ($\bar{x}= 14.31$), and the respondents of the second ($\bar{x}= 27.42$) cluster (respondents who follow the announcements of world-famous product brands and lead a certain lifestyle) and the third ($\bar{x}= 24.13$) cluster (members of generation C follow the content of domestic producers and group into the group of consumers inclined to buy green products) have on average the same number of impulsive purchases. There is no statistically significant difference between their tendencies to impulsive purchases ($p = 0.502$).

An insight into the data on the representation of digital social networks in the world and in Croatia, i.e. on their potential reach when transmitting messages by social networks and by searching for information and making a decision on product selection, leads to a conclusion about the potential of using digital social networks in the promotion of products and services today, and in networking, and word-of-mouth marketing. Users of digital social networks share their specific characteristics. It is clear that today, companies face different types of customers and portals from different potential consumers who are networked in a community of the same interests,

activities and actions and the need to redefine their role in meeting their needs. Social networks are, therefore, for the purpose of directing messages from producers to members of Generation C as precisely as possible in a digital environment characterised by a large offer of content and the fragmented attention of potential consumers; it is crucial to define the characteristics of generation C. Defining generation C according to the common characteristics of their members allows the producer to shape messages and communication so that they are adapted to them and thereby increases the potential of generating interest among members of Generation C. Members of Generation C use social media to receive and forward information, comment and communicate with friends; they are free to express their views and have a potentially great influence on their online friends, thus on the formation of views on certain products (services). Further segmentation on digital social networks takes place on several levels. Certain levels of segmentation take place according to the characteristics of Facebook as a communication platform (formation of groups, pages and events). However, they are not sufficient to describe Generation C in more detail. The research results describe Generation C as a generation that spends more time on Facebook. They are engaged in, exchange content, have the same interests and activities, tend to cultivate a similar or the same lifestyle, and consume the same products.

Conclusion

The results of this research point to the exceptional importance of observing the communication model of consumer behaviour of Generation C, which is a product of modern online communication on social media. Facebook, as one of the most popular social networks today, represents a kind of centre, a gathering square of the networked generation, which no longer perceives fast multimedia communication as something special and modern, but as a necessary and everyday need. This way of communication, which previous generations considered desirable, is considered a necessity, and this generation approaches it routinely and thinks about the benefits or negative effects it reflects.

Recommendations for further research are reflected in the research; whether there is the same perception of the relevance of Facebook as a place for information for different types of products, i.e. whether there are deviations in the perception and attitudes of consumers, it is also advisable to investigate the result of impulsive buying for different types of products, i.e. whether some types of products are more often the subject of impulsive purchases made as a result of consumer information via Facebook.

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