

# Retail consumer opportunism: realities of consumer behaviour in the digital economy conditions

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**Abstract** — The article examines the main trends in the development of economic and managerial theories (such as the attitudinal concept, behavioural economy and paternalism), necessitating the introduction of the definition of “retail customer opportunism”, research on drivers of its manifestations, as well as the characteristics of customers-opportunists consumer behaviour. The existing approaches to the deviant behaviour of consumers, from the seller’s point of view, are indicated; the forms of manifestation of opportunism of the retail customer are described. The criteria for the classification of this phenomenon, the differences and the possibility of applying the theory of opportunistic reactions amidst digitalization are summarized.

**Keywords** — digitalization, retail customer opportunism, incorrect consumer behaviour, consumer extremism, behavioural economy, purchasing decisions.

## I. INTRODUCTION

The development of the attitudinal concept of marketing made for a transition to a new trend in the perception of consumers - a subjective one. In its turn, the refusal to treat consumers as the only objects of marketing influence updated the need to study the deep motives of consumer behaviour, including its incorrect forms, which may be a signal of customer dissatisfaction.

This trend is also related to the development of theories of the behavioural economy [1,2,3,4], by which the psychological motives prevail in the actions and reactions of market agents, and accordingly, the consumer becomes a person whose economic behaviour requires adjustments.

Another aspect emphasizing the relevance of a comprehensive, interdisciplinary study of the topics of consumer behaviour, namely its negative manifestations, is associated with the existence, development and widespread dissemination of the consumer society. We believe that deviant consumer behaviour is the consequence of this trend.

At the same time, for companies, the key to success in competition is not so much the attraction as, to a greater extent, customer retention. In this case, incorrect behaviour allows to track the signal of dissatisfaction in time and adjust the marketing influence. Thus, the updated scheme of the

"black box" by F. Kotler that includes deviant behaviour is shown in Figure 1. (Entrance, "black box" of consumer consciousness, purchase decision, retail customer opportunism)

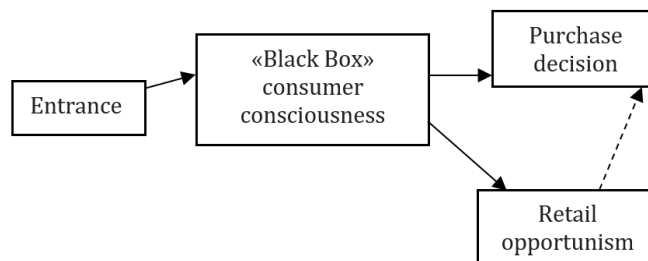


Fig. 1. The process of making a purchase decision

## II. MATERIAL

Existing approaches to deviant behaviour in marketing have a number of significant limitations and are grouped, in our opinion, as follows:

Approach from the definition of the "consumer extremism" perspective [6]. Its limitation is that it does not consider pre-contractual forms of incorrect behaviour.

The perception from the consumerism manifestation perspective does not take into account the mass character of such reactions and avoidant consumer behaviour.

The definition of "customer misbehaviour" [7] is limited to the scope of services. In addition, this definition determines the consideration of the phenomenon as strictly negative and only requiring suppression;

Studies related to the concept of "economic opportunism" are divided into two groups: the transaction costs approach [8,9,10,11,12,13], which excludes from consideration the behavioural and psychological aspects, and the behavioral approach [14,15,16]. In the context of which the authors analyze the opportunistic reactions in general without clarifying the specifics for the B2C market and its consumers.

The methodological base of the research which combines both the analysis of theoretical sources and the collection of empirical data is presented in Table 1.

### III. RESULT AND DISCUSSIONS

In order to level these restrictions, we propose the definition of "retail customer opportunism" which means any actions of a retail customer, aimed at changing the transaction conditions set by the seller in order to redistribute the benefits in their favor, determined by either dissatisfaction leading to conflict (both interpersonal and intrapersonal), or the effect of "Eastern Bazaar" (getting benefits for its own sake).

The results of our theoretical and empirical researches (the methodological basis is presented in Table 1) allow us to identify the following drivers of the opportunistic reactions of the retail customer which conventionally can be divided into three groups.

Three groups of drivers of retail customer opportunistic behaviour:

**Social:** a contagion of incorrect behaviour; the trend to increase conspicuous consumption, both in the world and in Russian society; the existence of the phenomenon of consumer society. It should be noted, that these factors contribute to the development of opportunism and give moral permission to a particular consumer to look for ways to redistribute wealth in their favour including incorrect ones. Under the influence of these factors a person, as a rule, finds himself/herself in intrapersonal conflict condition: on the one hand, society dictates what and how to consume, on the other hand, limited resources do not allow to increase the intensity of the consumption at the pace that is necessary to maintain the status of a "successful person". Examples of other consumer's incorrect behaviour in the conditions of this conflict are imagined to the customer as the option of its resolution.

The following group of drivers is conventionally marked as interaction / mutual relations drivers - the possibility of manifestations of the retail customer opportunism. In their turn, they are subdivided into determined by personnel or by the specifics of the transaction. The first subgroup includes the low-qualified staff working in the retail store sales area and the so-called "reversed halo effect" (a negative image of the seller presented in the media). The subgroup of drivers that describe the specifics of the transaction and allow retail customer opportunism to emerge include: universality of the contract, time limitation for the transaction settlement, the company's desire to preserve the reputation in the absence of such customer need, the asymmetry in the awareness of the contractor (the customer usually appears in a retail store as a stranger, "dark horse" whose reactions and motives are unknown to the seller).

The third group contains psychological (intra-personal) reasons, these include: the effect of discounting, reinforcing the desire to get a good here and now; hedonism as a desire to receive pleasure at any cost, but if it is impossible to satisfy this desire, a person openly shows aggression. Adherents of humanitarian knowledge mark that the principles of the hedonism doctrine did not become obsolete, but instead increased in modern society [17,18,19,20]. Characterological personality traits (does a person allow himself to deceive,

manipulate, steal or manifest other incorrect forms of behaviour; individual education traits?).

For a more detailed understanding of the retail customer opportunism problem and the search for possible ways to overcome it, we propose the classification of this phenomenon according to the following criteria:

1. Form criterion: falsification of a product defect in order to return the goods that cannot be exchanged and returned; placing the price tags from cheaper thing to the more expensive one; influencing on the seller through reviews (both positive and negative) on sites and among friends in order to receive discounts; promising to appeal to higher authorities; refunding after the expiration of the period established by the state; returning of the used goods; the intentional creation of an easily correctable spoilage in order to receive a substantial discount for products; fraud during sales and special offers for the purchase of two or more goods; the acquisition of an inexpensive product to conceal the theft of an expensive one; direct theft; refusal to pay after the rendering of service (for services of the low price range).

2. Motivation criterion: dissatisfaction and desire to get satisfaction by changing the terms of the transaction; the effect of "eastern bazaar" (getting additional benefits for its own sake).

3. Consumer behaviour criterion, which, in its turn, can be divided into the following subgroups:

- a) according to the intensity of the manifestation of opportunistic reactions: positive and latent opportunists;
- b) according to the degree of manifestation: latent, explicit;
- c) according to the type of awareness: rational, emotional;
- d) according to the way of achieving the result: deception, manipulation, explicit aggression;
- e) according to the interest in further relations: repeated two-way communications, one-way communication;
- e) according to the frequency of manifestation of opportunistic behaviour in relation to a particular seller: single, repeated;

4. According to the environment of manifestations of opportunistic behaviour: online or offline;

5. According to the seller attitude to the manifestation of opportunistic behaviour. creative or destructive.

TABLE I. MARKETING RESEARCH RESULTS

| No. | Stages and methods of work   | Toolset structure  | Dates                        | Study result  |
|-----|--|--|------------------------------|---|
| 1   | Traditional analysis   | Protocol   | December 2016 to the present | Theoretical approaches to related definitions, as well as topics laid in the research hypotheses, are studied   |
| 2   | Content analysis of the 6 specialized Internet sources   | Protocol, content analysis matrix  | February 2017                | Possible options of customer opportunistic behaviour in the offline and online environment are detected and structured.   |
| 3   | An inquiry by the method of the deep interview with middle managers of retail stores.  | Standardized interview, 7 questions (closed, open)   | March 2017                   | Particular examples of the manifestation of retail customer opportunism are detected, data on the relevance of the problem for store managers are obtained.                                     |
| 4   | Inquiry by the method of seller and manager questionnaire in order to detect the relevance of the problem of opportunism for retail stores   | 16 questions (closed, open, scale)   | August 2017                  | Confirmation of the relevance of the previously detected forms of retail customer opportunism   |
| 5   | Inquiry by the method of the B2C market customers questionnaire in order to determine the tasks, that they consider important for themselves when going to the store                   | 16 questions (closed, open, half-closed, scale)  | August 2017                  | Confirmation of the hypothesis of customer dissatisfaction from visiting retail stores  |
| 6   | An inquiry by the method of standardized interview of managers to determine the tasks that they consider important for customers, the fixation of these tasks in the service standards | 9 questions (closed, open, scale)  | August 2017                  | A discrepancy between the requests of customers and their (requests) perception among managers is detected, as well as the unrecorded requested tasks by the customers in the service standards |
| 7   | An inquiry by the method of sellers questionnaire in order to determine the tasks that they consider significant to customers  | 16 questions (closed, open, half-closed, scale)  | August 2017                  | A discrepancy between customers' requests and their (requests) perception among sellers is detected   |
| 8   | An inquiry by the method of the B2C market customers questionnaire in order to determine the degree of manifestation of opportunistic consumer reactions                               | 27 questions (closed - 3, half-closed - 15, open - 3 and scale - 3, 3 about the respondent), | November - December 2017     | Marketing characteristics of customers in the B2C market is clarified, the relevance of the studied issues is confirmed   |

Table 1 was compiled by the authors. These researches used the statistical data from the Internet resources for searching vacancies and job seekers, materials of sites representing customer reviews about stores and methods of cheating sellers by customers, SeoSite data on the global GDP growth from 1970 to 2016, the data from Rosstat, research data from Stanford Research Institute, Comcon-2, GfK, Nielsen, McKinsy, Yandex.Market, ROMIR companies, statistics on turnover of retail employees, published in the Russian newspaper, sociological research data, conducted under the RFBR project, as well as empirical data, obtained in the course of the authors' own research

#### IV. CONCLUSION

We believe that this classification allows to carry out detailing of the “retail customer opportunism” phenomenon. It should be noted that the classification was obtained and verified as a result of the previously mentioned theoretical and empirical researches (Table 1).

At the same time, it should be noted that for the online environment such qualifying characteristics as manifestation, awareness and frequency of manifestation are not applicable since the online environment has a number of its own specific features, in particular:

- the great time delay between action and feedback both in the seller-customer direction and in the opposite direction, which reduces the probability of emotional, affective reactions;

- an online environment imposes restrictions on the possibility of performing “hidden” actions making any operation explicit for the contractor;

- any action, performed in an online environment, can only have a result when such behaviour is shown once, since the online environment provides the ability to archive contractor operations which allows to access past transaction experience and respond differently to repetitive actions.

- direct dependence on the online toolset are used.

It should be noted, that digitalization of the economy in general and the retail market in particular will lead to an increase in the anonymity of agents excluding the effect of presence which reduces risks of deviant / opportunistic reactions. It appears from the foregoing, that the relevance of “the retail customer opportunism” phenomenon will increase.

It is necessary to point the need to introduce the definition of the retail customer opportunism into marketing theory and practice. So, the results of an inquiry of the B2C market customers, conducted in 2018, show the specificity of consumer behavior of customers who show opportunism, and therefore, the need to develop a special algorithm of working with them, both in order to reduce transaction costs and to realize the desire to preserve and retain customers.

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