

Consumer Rights in Digital Economy. Case Study of Romanian e-commerce Usage

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Abstract. *Current economy or digital economy is driven by modern information and new technologies, which offer to organizations or to the public access to almost any type of information, regardless of its form of existence, storage type or geographical location. These tools encourage the development of new activities, services and products.*

All developed countries have issued and implemented government policies supporting: the evolution and the adoption of new technology, the national information infrastructure consolidation, the training and the attraction of new technology experts, the adult education, and the cooperation with the private sector to encourage investment in this new economic branch, and promoting government projects to demonstrate the benefits for the current society services. This work aims to highlight the pattern of trade activities using the convenience of the Internet – e-commerce, with emphasis on legal regulations in regard to currently available services. Also the present study summarizes existing legislation, for electronic commerce, at national and international level.

A case study was performed to highlight the current state of Romanian e-commerce activity, regarding the applicability of existing legislation, the frequency of electronic commerce usage, the usefulness of the service and the selection of the most frequently purchased products online. The research emphasizes on the existing legislation, its applicability and the degree in which the users are informed about it.

Keywords: e-commerce; Internet economy; Internet; electronic market; online consumer.

JEL Codes: L81, O30.

REL Codes: 5I, 18D.

1. Introduction

The continuously changing electronic technology and the complexity of this new type of society, that uses electronic communication devices, have continuously increased the volume and the diversity of activities and services developed.

According to Doukidis and others (2004), today's society is characterized by the boom in the usage of electronic support for communication in all areas of life, and the resulting fundamental changes in organizations and society.

The development of the computer networks in the entire world, through the Internet, has enabled electronic trade, which offers a large range of services, reducing the time and additional costs related to transportation. One of the major advantages of electronic trading process is given by the fact that it can be ran anytime and anywhere, bypassing the time and space barriers of data availability (Pocatilu, Boja, 2009).

It is safe to say that commerce was one of the first areas to undergo transformation through the use of new technologies, which are facilitating trading through the Internet. More and more commercial operations are done today using modern payment technologies. Electronic commerce and new technologies in general, can generate significant cost savings and can facilitate access to internal and external markets.

What is the foundation of the electronic commerce? First important thing is vendor's presence on the Internet and then the availability of online products and services offerings. It is also important to talk about the vendor's website accessibility to customers (actual or potential). The core of the e-commerce activity is represented, of course, by the products or services offered for sale, whose intrinsic qualities are enhanced with specific features resulted from their presence online, like:

1. Clear and concise product description, with suggestive images;
2. Try before you buy options (for example, when buying a book - the possibility of browsing its table of contents or some of its relevant pages);
3. The option to compare, online, the desired product to similar products;
4. Online reviews of customers that either purchased the specific product or dealt with that online vendor;
5. Home delivery;
6. Online payment.

Although modern e-commerce solutions offer potential customers different ways to analyze the characteristics of the product/service being offered, none of them compares to actually seeing the real product on the shelf,

with the visual, olfactory or tactile sensations that this triggers. This is why, at least for now, customers are somewhat reticent of purchasing those products sold online, whose characteristics may be deceiving or impossible to tell while viewed digitally (e.g. clothing, shoes, whose color might look different on the monitor, and it also impossible to tell just by looking at the pictures and reading about their size if they are going to fit well or not), but they prefer purchasing those products for which the perception of the characteristics is not being altered by just viewing the product online and reading about its description and features, those products for which the chance of "dislike" is very slight. In this category fall electronics, domestic appliances, clearly identifiable products like paper, office supplies, tickets, movies and music albums, digitized products, etc.

The electronic commerce usage has increased in recent years at the same time with the increased development and diversity of communication networks. Electronic commerce is depending on communications network infrastructure and it expanded with them, leading to electronic business (e-business) appearance.

Related to customers, the e-commerce site has two great advantages resulted from the increased number of stores available: on one hand it reduces the time spent purchasing goods and on the other hand it is increasing the freedom of choice.

For companies, we distinguish four major advantages using electronic commerce:

1. It is a quick and easy way to advertise;
2. It reduces costs;
3. It significantly increases the speed of internal and external communication;
4. It strengthens the relationships with customers that are interested in their products.

In general, the online sale is a multi-step process and it is governed by the legal regulations enforced at that time (Figure 1).

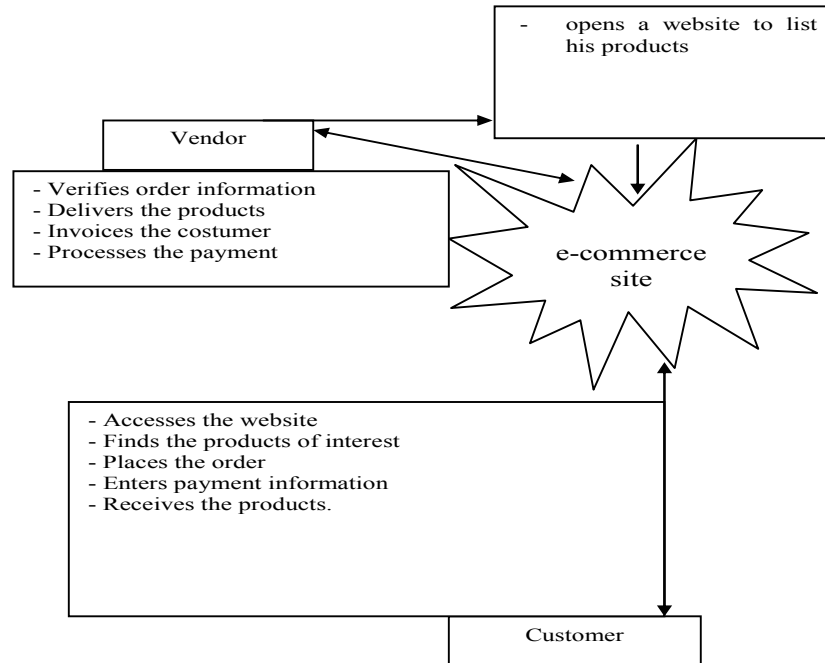


Figure 1. E-commerce

Enforcing legal regulations for electronic commerce is justified when its, very fast, dynamic leads to the development of a significant size market.

According to recent studies published in the European Commission (August 2009), the Information Society in Romania is still in its early stages, but it is showing an accelerated trend of development and modernization.

There is a remarkable progress in eProcurement (public procurement in particular), supported using the Electronic Procurement System - SEAP, where the share held by electronic auctions in recent years increased from 2% to 12%.

Some progress is being noticed in the e-government area - the Agency for Information Society Services (ASSI) reported as of October 2009 over 11,000 registered companies in the National Electronic System - SEN that access, online, various public services.

An equally significant progress was the *e-Romania* portal launching in June 2009, which aims to become the single point of contact for all Romanian institutions, at national and local territories. *e-Romania* is structured in over 10 fields of interest: health, environment, transportation, agriculture, law, education, culture, religion, associations, tourism and sport. Besides the goals of transparency and ease of deployment of national and local government business portal, *e-Romania* has the potential to reduce the cost of administrative

services by up to 70% through the implementation of 12 online services for citizens (payment of taxes, job search, social benefits, personal documents issuance, vehicle registration, obtaining building permits, home address change notice, police reports, public library access, registration in the public system of higher education, access health services) and 8 online services for corporate (social contributions, taxes, Value Added Tax – VAT, registration of new companies, statistical data transmission, customs declaration, environmental permits, public procurement).

In terms of communication infrastructure (broadband), Romania registers visible, but slow, progress with only 11.7% penetration rate. National Strategy for Broadband Infrastructure Development predicts an aggressive growth targeting a 40% penetration rate among households in 2010 and 80% by 2015. Furthermore, over 80% of existing customers have access to broadband high-speed (+2 MB/s).

When it comes to business services and electronic commerce, their use and penetration rate is still low. Even though its development on a large scale is a priority for the Romanian Government, the information technology and communication sector (IT&C) contributes only with 3.6% to GDP and with 1.5 % to labor utilization, but was responsible for 5.3% of total exports.

2. Legal aspects of internet trading

With the study of electronic commerce the issue of consumer protection comes automatically. Ensuring consumer protection on the web, where the trading takes place, assumes the existence of new issues, particularly important in terms of security and consumer safety (Surcel, Dinu, 2007).

According to the “intangible” model of transactions progress in the Internet, B2C (Business to Consumer)/B2B (Business to Business) relations can lead to disputes and commercial litigation in particular where:

1. Customer pays for the goods ordered, but the supplier does not deliver them;
2. Customer pays for the goods ordered, but the supplier does not deliver those ordered, or the amount requested, or goods arrive damaged to destination;
3. Customer pays for the goods ordered but payment is not received on time;
4. Supplier delivers the goods ordered, but the customer refuses to pay; and
5. Supplier delivers the goods but it appears that the recipient has not placed any order.

These are the most common cases of dispute in both B2C and B2B relations, but they are not limited to IT & C mediated trading, such situations can occur in any commercial transaction in which the trading is managed by a third party (postal service for instance) and there are laws which protect, in context, both customers and suppliers. What is specific to internet commerce unlike regular stores is that customers and suppliers may be located in different countries and the Web server may be located in a third. In these cases a dispute should be resolved as determined by the place and jurisdiction under which the actual commercial transaction took place. Most laws state that electronic commerce transactions conducted over the Internet fall under the jurisdiction of the country in which the supplier is located.

In 2000 the European Union published a series of recommendations to ensure the usage common commercial infrastructure, at least in the EU:

1. Terms and Conditions – Commercial terms and conditions must be shown to users before initiating any transactions on the Internet;
2. Equal status – electronic contracts are equal in terms of commercial and legal effects, with their printed form. They can be used in court, along with elements of electronic authentication (electronic signature);
3. Location – the geographic location of others is independent of web server's location hosting the transaction; and
4. Single Market – the dealer can offer Internet trading services across the EU, provided they comply with trade laws and regulations in force in its country of origin.

Another category of disputes arising from electronic commerce refers to the content or type of goods traded, especially on online auction sites. Internet allows any type of “property” sale, be they illegal, immoral or simply nonexistent. Case studies of countries with experience in this field make reference to transactions in which the subject property was either property on the moon, guns, drugs, human organs or unborn children. Unlimited access of people with or without discernment, good or bad intentions – in this type of transactions can also lead to business bankruptcy for sellers of goods, especially if they do not specify a minimum purchase price.

In the last few years a series of tests have been performed, regarding the definition, disclosure, acceptance and use of general standards applicable to online trading, none of which has been general enough to be widely adopted. Using well-defined commercial standards could limit the potential of fraud in online trading, while ensuring security and the conditions mentioned above. The difficulty of defining such standards, however, lies in the speed of change of technology and media (speed that doesn't allow enough time to develop a

standard) especially in transactions of complex nature and diversity that run from one market to another, from one company to another.

So far standards have been developed on how to process electronic payment transactions. There are also security standards, the quality of services on some verticals (banking, government, public administration). But there isn't an accepted standard to regulate the commercial transactions procedures and the way they progress. Large companies, in general, have made various attempts to impose a specific trading methodology with partners (in particular suppliers of products and services).

3. European Union directives regarding Internet transactions

The most common form of laws and regulations issued by the European Union is through directives, instructions given to the member states that specify the nature and content of laws that each nation should individually adopt. The directives specify the objectives that each state should achieve, without imposing the actual manner of deployment and accomplishment; the particular regulations and norms are left to the decision of each individual nation.

The E-commerce Directive, adopted in year 2000, establishes that the Information Society services (defined in the Directive 98/48/EC) have to respect the principles of free movement of services within the Community; they can be delivered anywhere in the European Union's space, however respecting the laws of the originating member state. The document establishes the regulatory framework for:

1. Defining the location of electronic commerce services operators;
2. Obligations of the operators to ensure the transparency of their activities;
3. Requirements related to the transparency of commercial communications;
4. Validity of electronic contracts in all member states;
5. Legal accountability of organizations that mediate information over the Internet; and
6. Online settlement of litigations.

The Directive covers all e-business forms, including B2C and B2B, clearly referring to online newspapers and magazines, public databases, online professional services (provided by lawyers, accountants, medical doctors etc.), financial and insurance services, marketing and online advertising. The Directive does not apply when one of the entities involved in supplying or consuming the online services is not part of the European Union. In this case, the Directive recommends the usage of regulations issued by international

entities such as the World Trade Organization (WTO), Organization for Economic and Commercial Development (OECD) or United Nations Commission on International Trade Law (UNCITRAL).

Regarding the electronic commerce – selling goods and services over the Internet – the European Union issued in 1997 *The Distance Selling Directive*, as an add-on to *The E-Commerce Directive* and laws of each member state. The Directive specifies that the supplier has to provide the consumer with clear and precise information regarding:

1. The supplier's identity and address;
2. The characteristics and prices of products and services sold;
3. Transportation's cost and duration;
4. Details regarding the possibility of returning the products;
5. General conditions related to the commercial transaction;
6. Payments and delivery methods; and
7. Valid period of the offer or price, when it is the case

A special directive was also created for regulating the principles of electronic signatures – *The EC Framework Directive for Electronic Signatures*; in essence, it outlines the validity and legal effects of electronic signatures and the liberty of certification authorities.

The Electronic Money Directive establishes that approved institutions may issue electronic money at European Union's level based on the license obtained in one of the member states.

To ensure privacy and confidentiality, the European Union issued *The Data Protection Directive*, aimed to sustain the free movement of data and information within the Union, under the condition of protection of the individuals' fundamental rights and liberties. The Directive guarantees the confidentiality of electronic messages and forbids any kind of interception; the Directive also guarantees that personal information may be collected and used only in specific, well explained and justified situations.

In regards to the *intellectual property*, EU defined a set of directives that regulates: legal protection of computer programs; legal protection of databases; industrial property protection: trademarks, industrial designs, Internet domain names, etc; rights related to leasing and loan; cable and satellite broadcasting.

4. Current legislation regarding Internet transactions

Starting in July 2007, The United States Congress ratified a set of basic principles regarding e-commerce, comprised in the *A Framework for Global Electronic Commerce* report. The report defines the strategy of the American Administration in relation to the official support given to Internet-conducted

businesses and to strengthening the confidence of consumers in using electronic networks for commercial activities. The report establishes five basic principles which governments should take into consideration when developing the national legislative framework for electronic commerce:

1. Private sector should be the main engine for e-commerce development;
2. Governments should not impose unnecessary restrictive measures over electronic commerce activities;
3. Governments implication should be limited to developing the necessary legislation needed for the deployment of electronic commerce activities;
4. Acknowledge the unique qualities and benefits of the Internet; and
5. Worldwide encouragement of the Internet-based electronic commerce.

Besides the five principles mentioned above, the report contains a set of nine recommendations needed for developing key e-commerce related activities: Taxes and Duties, Electronic Payment Systems, Single Commercial Code of Conduct for Electronic Businesses, Protecting the Intellectual Property, Confidentiality, Security, IT&C Infrastructure, Accessing Content, and Technological Standards.

In 2001, the Science and Technology Committee from the US Chamber of Representatives elaborated the law proposal known under the name of *The Electronic Commerce Enhancement Act of 2001*. The law stipulates the necessity of promoting the electronic commerce; in this respect it invites the National Institute of Standards and Technologies – NIST to develop a detailed plan aimed to encourage the implementation of e-business technologies by small and medium enterprises. The document outlines the need to identify practical measures that should be taken to increase the e-commerce interoperability and standardization of electronic order processing and payment.

Currently there is no worldwide common point of view on the subject of the legislative framework needed for settling the e-commerce related activities and policies; United States of America fairly regulates while the European Union prefer developing a complex long-term legislative framework, with various flavors at countries-level (Roşca et al., 2006).

From many points of view, the electronic commerce transactions or, at a wider level, the e-business relationships are not radically different from the contractual terms encountered in the physical space; the international set of law and regulations are applied similarly in the real economy and in the virtual one. In the particular case of the European Union and United States there is also the need of harmonizing the union or federal laws to the individual regulations defined at country or state level. While in the United States the regulations adopted at state level outgrown the amount of laws ratified at federal level, in

the European Union the situation is reversed; the legislative principles adopted at Union level exceeded the amount of regulations defined at individual country level, and are in the process of being applied to member and candidate states.

Comparing to the American legislation, the European rules regarding electronic commerce are quite complex. This complexity is mostly due to the big number of independent nations that make up the European Union, the cultural and legislative diversity of the member states.

At the beginning of year 2000, during the European Council meeting at Lisbon, the head of states from the Group of 15 have declared as one of their major objectives that Europe should become “*the most competitive and dynamic knowledge-based economy based in the world*”. As a result, in June 2000 the first version of the *eEurope* Action Plan has been launched. At that moment, the *eEurope* initiative’s main purpose was to connect online, as soon as possible, each European citizen, school and organization, establishing three major action items: 1. *Cheaper, quicker and safer Internet*; 2. *Invest in people and skills*; 3. *Stimulating the Internet usage*.

At the beginning of year 2001 the European Union started to elaborate a legislative framework designed especially for the candidate countries, known as the “*eEurope+ 2003 Action Plan*”, together with the *eEurope2005* – “*An information society for all*” strategy. The *eEurope+* actions referred to the three main objectives of *eEurope*, adding a fourth one – *the acceleration of finalizing the infrastructure needed for the Information Society*.

The *eEurope2005* plan focused on extending the previous connectivity objectives in those directions so that Internet would support an increase in economic productivity, quality and accessibility to information services for all European citizens, based on a safe broadband communication infrastructure. The initiative established the main objectives needed to be achieved in 2005: *modernize public services, develop a dynamic electronic business environment, develop a safe information infrastructure, provide access to inexpensive broadband services, identify, measure and deploy best practices and experiences*.

In 2005 the *eEurope2005* plan has come to an end, and the European Commission started to elaborate the development strategy for 2006-2010: *i2010 – A European information society for growth and employment*. *i2010* currently represents the regulatory framework for the development of the information society and media in the European Union, promoting the positive contribution that IT&C can make to economy, society and personal quality of life. The main objectives of the *i2010* strategy are: 1. *Creating a single European information space meant to develop the media and informational services market based on open competition*; 2. *Promoting the innovation and investment in research*;

3. *Facilitating wider inclusion, better public services and quality of life through IT&C* (http://ec.europa.eu/information_society/eeurope/i2010/index_en.htm).

From the digital consumer rights perspective, one of the most interesting programs included in i2010 is the *eYouGuide to your rights online*, launched in May 2009. (EYOUNGUIDE). The program's approach is a very practical one, offering a simple online assistance tool (Frequently Asked Questions) referring to the rights of consumers in the digital space:

1. *Protecting privacy*: tips and precautions citizens should take in order to prevent misuse of the personal information online: Internet services and email, advises related to uploading personal information online, confidentiality of email and internet phone calls, shopping online, online payment safety;

2. *Being informed*: what citizens should know when dealing with online sellers and service providers, obligations of the Internet services providers, information that should be expected when shopping online.

3. *Terms & conditions*: what citizens should know about the consumer contracts, unfair terms and delivery of goods bought online, importance of the terms and conditions specified on the online shopping sites, rights and obligations in respect with delivering goods purchased online;

4. *Advertising & offers*: illegal offers, advertisements and other unfair commercial practices online consumers should be aware of (spam, illegal fees and taxes, promotions addressed to children);

5. *Safety & Security*: concerns about the security of consumer's computer, Internet connection or safety of online payments. Risks of using social networks and uploading personal data on various web sites;

6. *Copyright and Intellectual Property Rights*: what consumers should know about their rights and obligations related to music files, movies, CDs and DVDs and books online. Legal information related to downloading and using films, music, recording video and audio streams, uploading music on file-sharing networks;

7. *Protecting minors*: how to protect children from harmful online content, controlling children access to video games, specific sites;

8. *Disabled, older people*: access to and use of online services for older people and people with disabilities;

9. *Who's liable?*: how to find who is responsible for illegal online content and for faulty goods sold or advertised on the internet; and

10. *Taking action, redress*: enforcing consumer rights – how and where consumers can report abuses, illegal taxes, make claims related to the overall Internet services quality.

Romania's legislation is aligned to the European framework, enforcing it with several national laws applied to IT&C and digital economy:

1. *Laws regarding electronic commerce* (Law of Electronic Commerce No. 365/2002 modified by the Law No. 121/2006, Law No. 51/2003 regarding the juridical regime of contracts concluded at distance);

2. *Laws regarding authoring rights* (Law No. 8/1996, Methodology regarding use of musical products over the Internet)

3. *Laws regarding the electronic signature* (Law of electronic signature No. 455/2001, Law regarding the electronic archiving of documents 135/2007, Law regarding the recording of commercial operations through electronic means No. 260/2007, Decision regarding the procedure of checking and approval of information systems used for issuing electronic No. 888/2008);

4. *Laws regarding electronic payments* (National Bank's Regulation from 2006 regarding issuing and using electronic payments and Order of Communications Information Systems Ministry No. 389/2007 related to the approval of distant payments using Internet Banking, Home Banking or Mobile Banking applications);

5. *Laws regarding online advertising* (Law No. 140/2000 regarding the advertising, Law No. 365/2002 for electronic commerce, Law No. 506/2004 regarding the processing and usage of personal data and protection of private life);

6. *Laws regarding the private life* (Law No. 677/2001 for protecting the individual in relation with the usage and circulation of personal data, Law No. 506/2004 regarding the processing and usage of personal data and protection of private life, Law No. 298/2008 related to the preservation and archiving of information generated or processed by electronic communication providers). In this area, it is interesting to outline the fact that in October 2009 the Constitutional Court of Romania decided that the dispositions specified in the Law No. 298/2008 related to the preservation and archiving of information generated or processed by electronic communication providers, together with the Law No. 506/2004 related to processing and usage of personal information are un-constitutional, by limiting several fundamental rights of the individuals related to the private, family and intimate life, the secrecy of correspondence, the right to free expression, in a manner that contravenes to article 53 of the Romanian Constitution. This decision created a precedent at the European Union's level, given also the fact that the same type of discussions related to the respect to the private life occurred in other countries (Bulgaria, Czech Republic or Germany).

7. *Laws regarding informational criminality* (Law No. 64/2004 for ratifying the European Council's Convention related to informational criminality);

8. *Laws regarding pornography over the Internet* (Law No. 196/2003 for the prevention and fight against pornography); and

9. *Laws regarding electronic communications* (Law No. 304/2003 for the universal service and consumer rights related to the usage of electronic networks and communications, various regulations and norms related to the interconnections of public electronic networks, postal services, etc).

5. Case study about e-commerce usage

We have conducted a survey using the support of an e-commerce site in order to analyze the impact of the electronic commerce in our country. In this case study we have tried to record the opinions of the e-commerce users, be they good or bad. Our goal was to render the most interesting ideas that came from the results of that survey.

We have set up a 12 questions form for this analysis. The first eight questions were addressing the subject's opinion on e-commerce. The questions dealt with both quantitative and qualitative issues. The last two questions were added in order to define the profile of the subject, and two open questions were appended at the end.

The subjects of the survey were selected from the current visitors of an e-commerce website (circa 4,000/ week). Given the uneven distribution of the visitors during one day, as well as during a week, the observation was made during a week in order to record all the aspects related to sample of visitors. An algorithm was created to help our attempt to get the real structure of the group of visitors. Thus, each 40th visitor was asked to reply to the survey. Number 40 was chosen to be able a sample of 100 responders.

The answers were collected online, through a server side application and they were stored in a database. Following the collection, the data was processed through an application server side which returned statistical reports.

According to the replies, it was noticed that a large number of the e-commerce users had higher education and training, most of them having university degrees (78%), while 19.98% had secondary education and the rest of 2.02% stands for other categories.

According to Table 1 younger users prefer e-commerce when shopping for goods and services.

Table 1

Age structure

Age	Percentage
14..20	8.16
20..35	71.42
35..60	4.08
60 <	6.12

The advantages of using Internet are relatively well known. Over 67.34% of the users find the e-commerce service accessible, easy to use and efficient. Most of them admitted the utility of this service in general and the users emphasized in their answer to the open questions the ease of using e-commerce from different locations, without the need to be present at a specific location. Users also highlighted the feature of comparing prices of identical products, but offered by different e-commerce sites so that eventually they will be buying at the best price.

Another important aspect is the frequency with which a user returns to the Internet in to buy a new product, so that an appropriate informational structure can be defined for the providers of such services. There could be noticed that the users return several times per month for a new acquisition via the Internet (Table 2).

Table 2

Usage frequency in e-commerce

Usage Frequency	Percentage
Several times a month	40.81
Several times a quarter	30.83
Several times a year	18.36

The answers at the fifth question should trigger some alerts. When asked whether they will choose to return to e-commerce websites, the large majority responded that they intend to continue using this service. An issue was noticed in the case of the large number of subjects who are not decided (24.48%) and who will not buy on-line (4.08%). This is caused by the large number of vendors that are not providing quality services, which is the result of not using the e-commerce services at a large scale, because of the existing legislation related to the online consumer protection, but also because the existing Romanian communication infrastructure, which, although is progressing, the results are showing very slow.

The large amount (74%) of those who have used the e-commerce based on the recommendation of a friend emphasizes the fact that the individuals are reluctant to changes and this is also shown by the relatively small number of the

people who use the new electronic technologies, according to the survey of ANC (National Agency for Communications) in 2008.

The questionnaire shows that in Romania the primarily sold products via e-commerce are IT products (more than 20% of total products sold via e-commerce), while the main carrier remains the Romanian Post or other forms of courier services (Table 3). Next, after the IT products, there are virtual bookshops, photo, electronic devices and mobile phones.

Table 3

Structure on products

Products	Percent of total online sales (%)
IT products	22
Books	17.5
Photo	16
Electronic products	13.4
Telephones	12.1
Other	19

The payment of the products bought on-line is still made at delivery, in cash, both because few virtual shops offer the option to pay on-line via credit card, and also because of the limited trust shown by the Romanian citizens in the electronic payment systems via Internet. In 90% of the cases, the payment is made offline, at delivery, refund, postal mandate, and only in 10% of the case the order is made entirely online (including electronic payment).

The most popular method to place orders online is the “shopping cart” in 70% of the cases, followed by telephone order (12.1%), online form (10%), e-mail order (6.7%) and electronic bids (1.2%).

Other relevant aspects of our survey are derived from the open answer questions. The most often proposals coming from the buyers refer to the payment options and to increase the interactivity degree. There is also a concern related to the increase of the security and safety of the transactions; with more of the answers being related especially to the legal aspects of Internet transactions. There are also some technical suggestions, such as using mobile devices for online purchases. New accessibility opportunities are resulting from the exponential growth of mobile technology in recent years, increasing availability of network infrastructures, advances in wireless technologies and popularity of handheld devices (Boja, Bătăgan, 2009).

The general picture of the e-commerce usage shows a large number of users who consider that this service has a certain utility for their own activities and these are at the same times those who make recommendations to other persons.

Many of the people that find electronic commerce useful have listed in their answers to the opened question a number of disadvantages:

1. insufficient information on current legislation (such as 10 days to return the product);
2. failure of existing legislation on electronic commerce;
3. insufficient advertising;
4. lack trust in the provided services;
5. there is a cumbersome system of placing an order;
6. lack of search functionalities; and
7. accessibility and communication difficulties.

Having the possibility to use distance communication technology, the e-commerce could be considered a real solution for those who have no time to go to shopping, or those who are in a different location than products sold, or who can't to go because some other personal issue.

6. Conclusions

According to our study, individuals are willing to use e-commerce services, leading to reduced costs and use of the available funds with increasing positive returns, to significant decrease in corruption, and to a new operations process for companies. A study commissioned by ANC and realized by RomCard to evaluate e-commerce market in Romania in 2008 shows that the number of online stores in Romania will continue to increase by 50% annually in the 2009-2011 period, reaching up to 3,000 stores that will carry functional activities of commerce via Internet (<http://www.izzisale.ro/Studiu-eCommerce-ANC.pdf>).

The e-commerce has an ascending growth rate, ending the first half of 2009 with 570,000 transactions and a total volume of 43.5 million euro, up 68% from the same period last year, according to RomCard. And forecasts for 2010 are optimistic, the development in electronic commerce, ePayment and RomCard are estimated to lead to a 30% increase in online credit card transactions.

It is estimated, however, that the multiplication of electronic commerce transactions in Romania will follow the western model of development by 2009, with the increasing number of Internet users, broadband infrastructure and general improvement of living standards and purchasing power. Thus, market analysts estimate that the Romanian market of electronic commerce will triple in the next annual period.

In conclusion, internationally Romanian consumer has started to diversify their needs and requirements, seeking not only a product, but a set of services

associated with it, too. The offer became more diversified, the number of companies operating in the online business has grown, and their need to retain customers has become increasingly important.

The electronic commerce development depends on the evolution and overall quality of telecommunication networks and the equipments that are connecting to it. In many countries the state of telecommunication systems can not yet develop advanced digital networks. It is recommended that their government gets involved to encourage competition in the IT and telecommunications market, to reduce import duties, and to reduce tax levels for companies and services in the area.

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