MARKETING OF SCIENTIFIC AND RESEARCH ORGANIZATIONS, 2024, Vol. 51, Issue 1, p. 21–52
pISSN 2353-8503
eISSN 2353-8414

FINAL PURCHASERS' COOPERATION WITH OFFERORS IN ONLINE AND OFFLINE ENVIRONMENTS

WSPÓŁPRACA NABYWCÓW FINALNYCH Z OFERENTAMI W ŚRODOWISKU INTERNETOWYM I POZAINTERNETOWYM

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DOI: 10.2478/minib-2024-0002

ABSTRACT

Purpose: The aim of this study is to determine final purchasers' preferred environment of cooperation with offerors. The study also sought to determine the significance of this environment in relation to (1) advantages perceived in online and offline environments as places for this cooperation and (2) the type of services final purchasers would like to co-create.
Methodology: The results of the world literature review indicate cognitive and research gaps in the aspects mentioned. To reduce these gaps, empirical studies were carried out. The data were subjected to quantitative analysis using statistical analysis and statistical testing.
Findings: The results indicated that most respondents preferred a parallel use of online and offline environments for cooperation with offerors. The preferred environment of cooperation was a feature differentiating, in a statistically significant way, each of the analysed advantages of online and offline environments as places of cooperation with offerors. The preferred environment of cooperation differentiated only responses relating to cultural services.
Originality: The approach presented is original. Final purchasers' preferences concerning the environment of cooperation with offerors have been studied for the first time in the proposed context.

Key words: final purchaser, offeror, cooperation, online environment, offline environment

ABSTRAKT

Cel: Celem artykułu jest określenie preferowanego przez nabywców finalnych środowiska współpracy z oferentami. W artykule podjęto także próbę określenia znaczenia tego środowiska w odniesieniu do: 1/ postrzeganych zalet środowiska online i offline jako miejsca tej współpracy; 2/ rodzaju usług, które nabywcy finalni chcieliby współtworzyć.
Metodologia: Wyniki przeglądu literatury światowej wskazują na istnienie luki poznawczej i badawczej w zakresie wymienionych aspektów. W celu zmniejszenia tych luk przeprowadzono badania empiryczne. Dane poddano analizie ilościowej z wykorzystaniem metod analizy statystycznej i testów statystycznych.
Wyniki: Stwierdzono, że większość respondentów preferowała równoległe wykorzystanie środowiska online i offline do współpracy z oferentami. Cechą różnicującą w sposób istotny statystycznie każdą z analizowanych zalet środowiska online i offline jako miejsca współpracy z oferentami było preferowane środowisko współpracy. Preferowane środowisko współpracy różnicowało jedynie odpowiedzi dotyczące usług kulturalnych.
Oryginalność: Zaprezentowane podejście jest oryginalne. Po raz pierwszy w zaproponowanym kontekście zbadano preferencje nabywców finalnych dotyczące środowiska współpracy z oferentami.

Słowa kluczowe: nabywca finalny, oferent, współpraca, środowisko online, środowisko offline

JEL: M3

Type of the work: research article

Article History
Received: October 11, 2023 | **Revised:** January 30, 2024 | **Accepted:** February 06, 2024

Introduction

The contemporary consumer market can be treated as the complex system of relationships connecting its participants (Giesler & Fischer, 2017). Relationships between final purchasers and offerors of material and non-material products, including services, are of particular importance from the point of view of the efficient functioning of this market. These relationships are subject to dynamic changes, which have been especially visible in the last few decades. Previously, they were based on the paradigm of participation in the market by final purchasers as entities showing primarily purchasing activity (O'Hern & Rindfleisch, 2010). Thus, the separation of market roles fulfilled by offerors and final purchasers was clearly noticeable. Offerors played the role of suppliers, and purchasers acted as recipients of the offer, prepared without their participation.

The change in the paradigm of separating the two market roles into the paradigm of the interpenetration of the roles was based on the concept of joint value creation (Prahalad & Ramaswamy, 2002), the assumptions of which underpinned the change in the perspective of thinking and acting of both offerors (Bolton, 2004) and final purchasers. The representatives of both parties noticed the advantage of the approach based on cooperation over the approach based on taking separate actions. The awareness that mutual support leads to the achievement of a number of benefits (Windasari et al., 2021) that would not be available without cooperation has become the starting point for the implementation of a new mental, behavioural and social model of relationships between offerors and final purchasers. They started to play the role of co-creators of a marketing offer (Luonila & Jyrämä, 2020).

For such cooperation to proceed in an optimal way, a marketing approach should be applied. The starting point for cooperation should be identifying the preferences of final purchasers as its future participants. One of the key aspects of this cooperation is to define the environment in which it should take place and what elements of the offer purchasers would like to actively co-create.

The results of the world literature review, which are presented later, indicate that issues concerning the interaction environment between offerors and final purchasers have not been considered in the context of advantages of online and offline environments or with regard to co-creation of services so far. Thus, one can speak of cognitive and research gaps in this area. Therefore, this article attempts to solve the following research problem: what cooperation environment is preferred by final purchasers in the context of advantages related to online and offline environments as well as in the context of types of services which they would like to co-create?

The aim of this study is to identify what environment of cooperation with offerors do final purchasers prefer and how important this environment is in relation to advantages perceived in online and offline environments as places of such cooperation, as well as in relation to the types of services final purchasers would like to co-create with offerors. The article is structured to achieve this aim. In the second, theoretical, section, the results of the world literature review are presented, allowing to formulate research hypotheses.

The third and fourth sections present the methodology of empirical research and their results, respectively. In the later section, an academic discussion is carried out. Next, conclusions, theoretical and practical implications, limitations of the research conducted and directions for future research are presented.

Literature review

Changes that take place in the contemporary consumer market are extremely dynamic, leading to changes in the theory and practice of marketing (O'Hern & Rindfleisch, 2010). However, certain phenomena can be considered relatively more and more established. These include cooperation between offerors and final purchasers, based on Prahalad and Ramaswamy's (2002) concept of 'value co-creation', and the 'service-dominant logic of marketing' by Lusch and Vargo (2006), which, according to other researchers (Brodie et al., 2019), is evolving towards market metatheory based on value co-creation. So the co-creation theory is the starting point for studies presented in this article. Focusing on value co-creation has allowed for changing the perspective—from an offeror-centric perspective to a final purchaser-centric perspective (Hansen, 2019) which is the basic assumption of these studies.

In the literature, many terms are used, e.g. co-ideation, co-design, co-testing, co-launching, co-production (Chatterjee et al., 2021; Oertzen et al., 2018), which are more or less correctly treated as synonyms of 'co-creation'. It should be underlined that co-creation is closely related with cooperation. Xie et al. (2016) write that value co-creation is a cooperative phenomenon, and in the opinions of some researchers (Hsieh et al., 2013), 'cooperation' has the same meaning as 'co-creation'. Due to ambiguity in terminology, it should therefore be specified how co-creation will be understood in this article. It is defined as the cooperation between market entities (here final purchasers and offerors) that requires them to establish closer relationships, which leads to the integration of material and non-material resources (Fellesson & Salomonson, 2016; Leclercq et al., 2016) at their disposal. Cooperation as the key component of the mentioned definition is understood by the author as undertaking joint activities with other entities to achieve mutually beneficial effects. These activities relate to marketing and consist of creating various elements of a marketing offer.

The final purchaser is defined as a person who purchases a product (Baruk, 2019). This term is intentionally used instead of the term ‘consumer’. It is true that in the literature, as a rule, when considering joint value creation, the term ‘consumer’ is used, possibly using the term ‘customer’ as its synonym (Saarijärvi, 2012; Xie et al., 2016). However, the consumer is a person using a product, and the customer has a much broader meaning than the consumer or purchaser. This article is about cooperation of people buying products with offerors and these people’s preferences regarding the environment for such cooperation. Conversely, the offeror is used in this article as a term that refers to entities offering products to the consumer market, including manufacturers, retailers and service providers. The considerations presented in this article are based on a fundamental assumption of the marketing approach, which is adopting the final purchaser’s perspective.

As it has been mentioned before, interaction between final purchasers and offerors is based on the paradigm of joint value creation, which was developed several decades ago, and its assumptions directed the market development for the next few decades. In the considerations undertaken in relation to value co-creation, three main research trends can be identified (Galvagno & Dalli, 2014): ‘service science’, ‘innovation and technology management’ and ‘marketing and consumer research’. The approach proposed in this article fits into all of them. It refers both to final purchasers’ behaviour and their preferences relating to the cooperation environment, and it also applies to services that final purchasers would like to co-create with offerors.

Such cooperation may have a different subject, object, time and geographical scope. As for the subject scope, final purchasers can participate in cooperation with producers (Baruk, 2019), retailers (Schüler et al., 2020) and service providers (Neghina et al., 2017). As a rule, the literature discusses cooperation between final purchasers and service providers or manufacturers, which results from the fact that the paradigm of value co-creation was developed based on the concept of the ‘logics of service domination’ (Lusch & Vargo, 2006). As far as the object scope is concerned, cooperation may concern material products (Schüler et al., 2020), non-material products including services (Hamidi et al., 2020; Iglesias et al., 2020; Raza et al., 2020), non-product elements of a marketing offer including promotion, distribution and experiences (Prahalad &

Ramaswamy, 2004), as well as values such as image and brand (Mingnione & Leoni, 2020; Sarkar & Banerjee, 2019). In turn, when it comes to the time scope, joint creation of an offer may be a single undertaking or may take the form of long-term cooperation consisting of many months or even many years of active participation of final purchasers in creating a marketing offer of a particular offeror, even becoming a specific strategic resource (Saarijärvi, 2012). Final purchasers may also prefer establishing and strengthening cooperation with offerors from a given country and/or region, or engaging in joint activities with various offerors, regardless of their place of origin (Baruk, 2019).

Regardless of the scope of cooperation, however, its commencement and continuation always require a much greater involvement by the purchaser than the situation when the purchaser fulfils the traditionally understood role of the recipient. Cooperation with offerors is tantamount to undertaking non-purchase behaviour, including communication and creative behaviour (Dellaert, 2019), and thus with a much greater level of market activity (Rayna & Striukova, 2021; Veen et al., 2021). The effects of mentioned behaviour are treated as such valuable inputs that they determine the success of this cooperation (Xiao et al., 2020). Therefore, the final purchaser cooperating with offerors is called 'a working consumer' (Potra & Putra, 2021) or an active purchaser, as opposed to a passive purchaser (Grubor & Marić, 2015), who limits their market activity to purchasing products offered by offerors. Some authors believe that purchasers are even the key participants in the process of joint value creation with offerors (Agrawal & Rahman, 2015), determining its results.

The existence of cooperation between offerors and active purchasers requires both parties to change their approach to the market role they fulfil (Grubor & Marić, 2015), and the necessary condition of this is mental changes, allowing for a departure from the traditionally understood division of market roles. This is a particularly difficult challenge for offerors (Dellaert, 2019), especially considering that many of them still do not fully understand their purchasers (Hansen, 2019) or there is even no mutual trust between them (Ladwein et al., 2021). Meeting this challenge allows both parties to achieve much greater measurable and non-measurable benefits than the approach based on the disconnection of market roles.

One of the key issues regarding cooperation is choosing its form, scope and place. In terms of form, the cooperation may be undertaken with other final purchasers or with offerors (Sarasvuo et al., 2022). While the scope of cooperation indicates, inter alia, its subject, reflecting what is jointly created (product, brand, packaging, image, promotion instruments, etc.) (Saha et al., 2021). The place of cooperation is the environment for its conducting, which may be online or offline (Rayna and Striukova, 2021). Of course, there are weaker or stronger relationships between the mentioned aspects. For example, the growing role of Internet has led to the development of cooperation with other final purchasers in the form of, inter alia, co-creation with other purchasers or collaborative consumption (Hamari et al., 2015).

Taking into account the subject of this article, special attention should be paid to the environment of cooperation. The literature usually focuses on the joint creation of an online marketing offer, treating this environment as the only, or at least a priority, place for undertaking joint activities (such an approach is presented by Dellaert (2019), Brynjolfsson and McAfee (2014), and Saarijärvi (2012)). Moreover, the online environment and the technologies available due to it are treated by many authors as the main or even the sole reason why final purchasers can engage in cooperation with offerors (such an approach is presented by Dellaert (2019), Łaszkiewicz (2019) and Edelman (2015)). The development of Internet is considered to be the cause of increasing purchasers' ability to be more active as a purchaser (Klein & Sharma, 2022) and to cooperate with other entities (Kumar et al., 2016), including offerors. In the literature, the following advantages of cooperation in Internet are exposed (Dellaert, 2019; Fuller, 2010; Khrystoforova & Siemieniako, 2019): the speed of information flow, interactivity, lack of time and geographic barriers, possibility of transmitting information to many entities simultaneously, etc. In the opinions of some researchers (Rayna & Striukova, 2021), the use of digital technologies means that cooperation from a phenomenon under full control of offerors has turned into a phenomenon beyond such control. From the final purchaser's point of view, this can be counted as an advantage.

Despite the advantages mentioned, it is difficult to fully agree with the approach that Internet is the only or the best environment to co-create value during cooperation with offerors. Of course, Internet has significantly increased the range of available options for engaging in non-purchase behaviour, especially in communication, yet it is certainly not the only environment where final purchasers can undertake activities with offerors to jointly create a marketing offer. On the other hand, the possibility of offline cooperation is overlooked or underestimated, although most of the everyday activity of an average person still takes place in the real world. Only single studies (including the studies presented by Chepurna and Criado (2018)) are dedicated to barriers that make it difficult or even impossible for final purchasers to cooperate online. The approach exposing Internet as a cooperation environment obviously affects the most frequently analysed forms of mutual cooperation between purchasers and offerors as other researchers usually consider forms available on Internet (Xie et al., 2016). Therefore, one can talk about cognitive and research gaps regarding preferences of active purchasers relating to the environment for cooperation with offerors, and the importance of these preferences in terms of the type of service purchasers would like to create with offerors.

In the literature, cooperation is considered in a general (broad) approach or detailed (narrow) approach. In the case of the broad approach, the following aspects are analysed: advantages and disadvantages (Cova et al., 2011; Grönroos & Voima, 2013) of jointly creating an offer, the course of jointly creating an offer (Haro et al., 2014), etc. In the case of the narrow approach, cooperation is examined through the following prisms: the use of social media (Cao et al., 2020; Fondevila-Gascón et al., 2020; Rashid et al., 2019), incentives used by offerors to engage purchasers (Ind et al., 2020), factors motivating purchasers to cooperate (Agrawal & Rahman, 2015; Gebauer et al., 2012; Łaszkiewicz, 2019; Xiao et al., 2020) and factors discouraging such cooperation (Schüler et al., 2020), emotions accompanying cooperation with other entities (mainly with other purchasers (Mingione et al., 2020)), corporate social responsibility and trust towards an offeror (Iglesias et al., 2020), the joint creation of specific marketing attributes, including the brand (Mingnione & Leoni, 2020), and a new product (Guzel et al., 2021; Khrystoforova & Siemieniako, 2019). The majority of these studies exclusively concern online interaction on Internet, excluding the offline environment. It means that the both environments have not been analysed together so far, especially in the context proposed in this article.

The other researchers studied also aspects such as dependences between perceived individual benefits of creating the virtual product content with other entities (see Wang et al., 2013); dependences between perceived convenience of online shopping and intention to purchase products on Internet (Ghai & Tripathi, 2019); dependences between perceived convenience and purchase intention in new online channels applied by retailers (Zhu et al., 2018); dependences between perceived quality of individual benefit value and purchase intention in the case of online travel agencies (Talwar et al., 2020); and dependences between perceived individual benefits (social, confidence, special treatment) and the using of online or offline marketing channels by services providers (banks, insurance companies and travel agencies) (Gómez et al., 2017). As one can see, cited studies focused mainly on online environment as well as on the purchase intention, and on benefits achieved by given person individually.

To reduce the identified gaps, an attempt was made to verify the following research hypotheses:

H1: The cooperation environment preferred by final purchasers is a feature that differentiates their responses on advantages of the online environment of cooperation with offerors.

H2: The cooperation environment preferred by final purchasers is a feature that differentiates their responses on advantages of the offline environment of cooperation with offerors.

H3: The cooperation environment preferred by final purchasers is a feature that differentiates their responses on types of services that final purchasers would like to co-create.

Methods

Empirical research was conducted in the half of 2021 by means of the online survey method to collect primary data, using the CAWI technique. The research sample consisted of 1,196 respondents belonging to Polish adult final purchasers having experiences in online and offline purchase behaviours and other ones (communication, etc.). The sample size was calculated according to the Cochran formula (Glenn, 1992) based on general Poles' population of 38,652,000 in 2020 including 32,962,000 adult Poles (https://countrymeters.info/en/Poland#population_2020) taking into consideration 3% margin of error and 95% confidence level.

The research had a nationwide geographical coverage and was of a panel format. The sample was quota, and its socio-demographic features were maintained in a dispersion proportional to their distribution in the general population, with a deviation of no more than 10 respondents against the proportion of the distribution of the whole Polish population (defined based on data of the Statistics Poland).

The subject scope of the article includes four variables: (1) the preferred environment of cooperation of final purchasers with offerors, (2) advantages of the online environment for cooperation with offerors in the preparation of marketing offers, (3) advantages of the offline environment for cooperation with offerors in the preparation of marketing offers and (4) types of services that final purchasers would like to co-create with offerors.

During the research, respondents were presented with a set of seven advantages of the online environment and seven advantages of the offline environment as places of cooperation with offerors. The advantages were separated based on the results of the literature review (Khrystoforova & Siemieniako, 2019; Łaszkiewicz, 2019) and results of unstructured interviews preceding the survey. These interviews were conducted with 20 adult respondents representing Polish final purchasers. It allowed selecting the final set of advantages of the online environment and the final set of advantages of the offline environment as places of cooperation which were assessed by respondents during the main survey.

Each advantage had to be ranked by respondents on Likert scale, one of the fundamental psychometric tools in social sciences (Joshi et al., 2015). In this article, the 5-point scale is applied, where 5 indicates definitely yes, 4 rather yes, 3 neither yes nor no, 2 rather not and 1 definitely not. Using the Likert scale is a prerequisite for the application of average grade analysis.

Respondents were asked to assess their willingness to participate in the co-creation of seven types of services on the same scale. The list of these types of services was prepared using the classification of services by the Statistics Poland (https://stat.gov.pl/obszary-tematyczne/ceny-handel/wskazniki-cen/wskazniki-cen-towarow-i-uslug-konsumpcyjnych-w-lutym-2019-roku,2,88.html) and based on the results of unstructured interviews conducted prior to the survey.

The primary data gathered were analysed quantitatively. Three methods were used: average grade analysis, comparative analysis and cluster analysis, as well as the Kruskal–Wallis (KW) test. Statistical analysis of the primary data was conducted using IBM SPSS Statistics Ver. 25.

Research results

The majority of respondents would like to undertake activities aimed at preparing a marketing offer jointly with offerors in both analysed environments (Table 1).

Table 1. Environment preferred by respondents for participation in the preparation of marketing offers jointly with offerors (%)

Environment of cooperation	Indications (%)
Online	27.3
Offline	4.3
Both environments are equally suitable to cooperate with offerors	68.4

Source: own study.

In the case of the online environment, each of the analysed advantages was categorically displayed by more than half of the respondents (Table 2). Among them, three features were mentioned by over 80% of respondents, which indicates that they were assigned relatively the greatest importance. These features concerned the speed of communication and the lack of time and geographical barriers. This result is confirmed by the fact that these features obtained the highest values of average scores, which exceeded the value of 4.75. Relatively the lowest importance was attributed by respondents to 'the possibility for a purchaser to co-create non-material products'. It was the only feature with an average score below 4.50.

Table 2. Advantages of the online environment for cooperation with offerors in preparing marketing offers, as indicated by respondents

Advantages of the online environment for cooperation	Symbol	Indications (%)					Average score	Standard deviation
		5	4	3	2	1		
Possibility to quickly submit one's opinions to offerors	A	86.2	12.0	1.0	0.4	0.3	4.83	0.473
Possibility to quickly receive feedback from offerors	B	81.5	15.0	2.3	0.9	0.3	4.76	0.567
Possibility to submit one's opinions to offerors at any time and place	C	84.1	13.5	1.5	0.6	0.3	4.80	0.513

Cont. table 2

Advantages of the online environment for cooperation	Symbol	Indications (%)					Average score	Standard deviation
		1	2	3	4	5		
Possibility to learn about marketing offers from different offerors at the same time	D	77.3	19.0	2.5	0.8	0.5	4.72	0.599
Possibility to learn opinions of many other purchasers about a given offer and/or offeror	E	72.5	22.7	3.4	1.0	0.4	4.66	0.636
Possibility for a purchaser to co-create non-material products, e.g. soundtrack used in the advertisement of a given product	F	54.8	27.3	12.6	3.8	1.5	4.30	0.935
Possibility to share one's opinions with many other purchasers simultaneously	G	70.9	22.6	4.6	1.2	0.8	4.62	0.699

5 denotes definitely yes, 4 denotes rather yes, 3 denotes neither yes nor not, 2 denotes rather not and 1 denotes definitely not.
Source: own study.

Among the analysed advantages of the offline environment, four were mentioned by more than half of respondents (Table 3). Each of the advantages was mentioned by a total of at least 75.0% of respondents, but for none of them, the average score exceeded 4.40. Relatively the most important advantage for the respondents was 'the possibility to submit one's opinions to offerors in the form of personal communication, i.e. conversation with a particular employee'. Taking into account that almost 70.0% of respondents believed that both environments are equally useful as a place of cooperation, it can be concluded that respondents appreciated the lack of time and geographical limitations of the online environment, and the possibility of direct personal communication in the offline environment.

For each of the analysed features of online and offline environments, the value of the standard deviation did not exceed one-third of the average score, which means that the average values accurately reflect the obtained results (variance and standard deviation).

Table 3. Advantages of the offline environment as a place for cooperation with offerors in preparing marketing offers, as indicated by respondents

Advantages of the online environment for cooperation	Symbol	Indications (%)					Average score	Standard deviation
		1	2	3	4	5		
Possibility to submit one's opinions to offerors in a more detailed way than online	A	43.4	31.1	12.6	10.9	2.0	4.03	1.084
Possibility to submit one's opinions to offerors by people who do not like the Internet and prefer more traditional forms of communication	B	53.3	34.8	7.0	3.5	1.3	4.35	0.861
Possibility to submit one's opinions to offerors in the form of personal communication, i.e. conversation with a particular employee	C	57.4	29.9	8.0	3.3	1.4	4.39	0.874
Possibility of direct participation in the preparation of a marketing offer, e.g. at the offeror's premises	D	45.1	32.9	13.5	6.2	2.3	4.12	1.015
Possibility to recognise offeror's true intentions through his/her personal contact with a purchaser	E	57.4	27.3	9.6	3.9	1.7	4.35	0.926

Cont. table 3

Advantages of the online environment for cooperation	Symbol	Indications (%)					Average score	Standard deviation
		1	2	3	4	5		
Possibility to personally meet other purchasers participating in the creation of a marketing offer of a particular offeror	F	48.3	31.9	12.0	5.9	2.0	4.19	0.992
Possibility to submit one's opinions to offerors in situations when the Internet is not accessible	G	54.8	29.3	9.3	4.3	2.3	4.30	0.968

5 denotes definitely yes, 4 denotes rather yes, 3 denotes neither yes nor not, 2 denotes rather not and 1 denotes definitely not.

Source: own study.

Respondents were also asked a question about their willingness to co-create various types of services. The largest proportion of respondents would like to actively participate in the creation of three types of services (Table 4): tourist, cultural and gastronomic. Among the seven types of services analysed, they were the only ones explicitly indicated by over one-third of the respondents, obtaining average scores of almost 4.00. The relatively least willingness for co-creation was shown in the case of banking and transport services.

Table 4. Types of services that respondents would like to co-create with offerors

Advantages of the online environment for cooperation	Symbol	Indications (%)					Average score	Standard deviation
		5	4	3	2	1		
Banking (bank offers, etc.)	A	17.1	25.8	20.5	21.9	14.6	3.09	1.320
Tourist (offers from travel agencies, etc.)	B	38.2	37.5	13.0	7.0	4.2	3.99	1.082

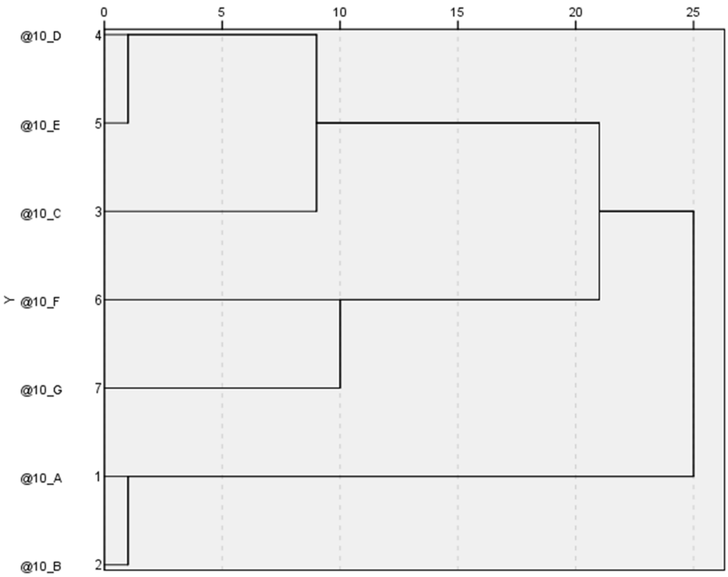
Cont. table 4

Advantages of the online environment for cooperation	Symbol	Indications (%)					Average score	Standard deviation
		5	4	3	2	1		
Cultural (offers from theatres, cinemas, orchestras, etc.)	C	40.1	33.2	15.7	6.7	4.3	3.98	1.103
Design concerning real estate (offers of offices designing houses, gardens, etc.)	D	38.8	36.3	13.3	6.9	4.7	3.98	1.105
Design concerning the Internet (offers of agencies designing websites, etc.)	E	25.3	30.2	22.0	14.4	8.1	3.50	1.238
Cultural (offers from theatres, cinemas, orchestras, etc.)	F	20.2	25.3	25.0	18.1	11.4	3.25	1.279
Cultural (offers from theatres, cinemas, orchestras, etc.)	G	16.7	24.7	25.7	20.4	12.5	3.13	1.268

5 denotes definitely yes, 4 denotes rather yes, 3 denotes neither yes nor not, 2 denotes rather not and 1 denotes definitely not.
Source: own study.

In the next research stage, the internal structure of the following was identified by using cluster analysis: (1) the advantages of both analysed environments as places of co-creation, and (2) the types of services that respondents would like to create with offerors. For the analysed advantages of the online environment, there were two clusters with the smallest distances (Figure 1): ‘possibility to quickly submit one’s opinions to offerors’ and ‘possibility to quickly receive feedback from offerors’ (clusters A–B); ‘possibility to learn about offers from different offerors at the same time’ and ‘possibility to learn opinions of many other purchasers about a given offer and/or offerors’ (clusters D–E). Both identified clusters were of a homogeneous nature in terms of their specificity.

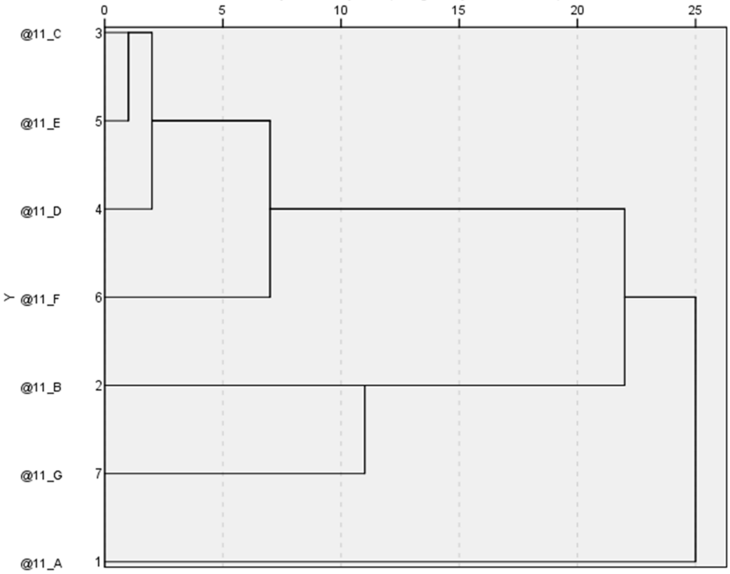
Figure 1. Dendrogram showing clusters of advantages of the online environment for cooperation with offerors. Letters as in Table 2.



Source: own study.

In the case of the advantages of the offline environment, the cluster with the smallest distance was included (Figure 2): 'possibility to submit one's opinions to offerors in the form of personal communication, i.e. conversation with a particular employee', and 'possibility to recognise offeror's true intentions through his/her personal contact with a purchaser', which were accompanied by the advantage of 'possibility of direct participation in the preparation of a marketing offer, e.g. at the offeror's premises'. The respondents who appreciated personal contact with the representatives of an offeror attached great importance to the possibility of participating in the creation of an offer with the offeror. The first of the aforementioned variables received the highest average score among the analysed advantages of the offline environment.

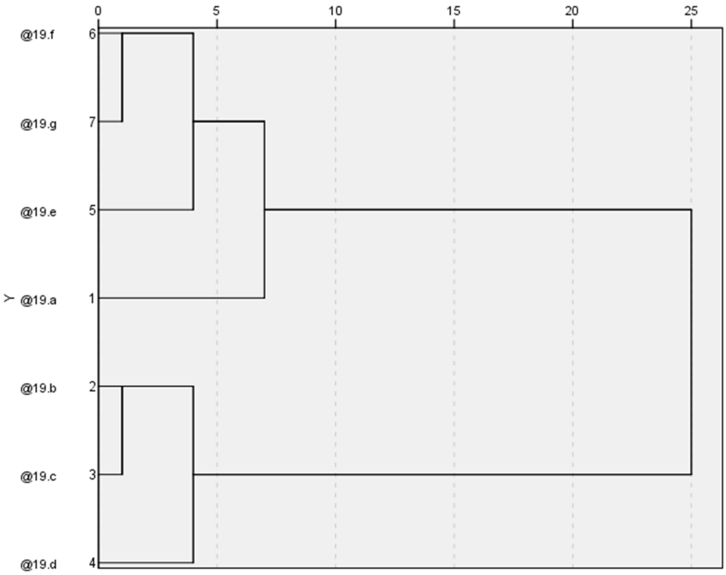
Figure 2. Dendrogram showing clusters of advantages of the offline environment as a place of cooperation with offerors. Letters as in Table 3.



Source: own study.

As for the types of services, the shortest distance was identified for the cluster created by cultural and tourist services accompanied by gastronomic services, and for design and transport services (Figure 3). So, respondents who would like to co-create cultural services showed readiness to co-create tourist and catering services at the same time. In turn, respondents willing to co-create design services would also like to co-create transport services. The first of the aforementioned clusters thus covered three types of services which obtained average scores with the highest values.

Figure 3. Dendrogram showing clusters of types of services respondents would like to co-create. Letters as in Table 4.



Source: own study.

In the next stage, it was checked whether the environment where respondents would like to participate in the co-creation is a differentiating feature of (1) the advantages perceived in online and offline domains, and (2) types of services that the respondents would like to contribute to. For this purpose, the KW test was performed. A statistically significant differentiation was observed for each of the analysed advantages of the online environment (Table 5) and for each of the advantages of the offline environment (Table 6). Thus, research hypotheses H1 and H2 turned out to be valid for respondents.

Table 5. Results of analysis of significance of differences between indicated advantages of the online environment for cooperation with offerors, taking into account the criterion of the preferred environment of such cooperation

Analysed variables	Preferred environment of cooperation with offerors	Average range	KW test value	Level of significance '*p*'
Possibility to quickly submit one's opinions to offerors	Online	612.25	74.050	**0.000**
	Offline	355.11		
	Both	608.18		
Possibility to quickly receive feedback from offerors	Online	615.24	37.817	**0.000**
	Offline	403.66		
	Both	603.96		
Possibility to submit one's opinions to offerors at any time and place	Online	607.72	26.681	**0.000**
	Offline	443.58		
	Both	604.47		
Possibility to learn about marketing offers from different offerors at the same time	Online	585.79	33.575	**0.000**
	Offline	408.37		
	Both	615.44		
Possibility to learn opinions of many other purchasers about a given offer and/or offeror	Online	609.27	34.786	**0.000**
	Offline	381.00		
	Both	607.75		
Possibility for a purchaser to co-create non-material products, e.g. soundtrack used in the advertisement of a given product	Online	605.01	16.808	**0.000**
	Offline	423.56		
	Both	606.80		
Possibility to share one's opinions with many other purchasers simultaneously	Online	598.50	30.088	**0.000**
	Offline	393.88		
	Both	611.26		

Source: own study. KW: Kruskal–Wallis. Bold values present values statistically significant.

Table 6. Results of analysis of significance of differences between indicated advantages of the offline environment as a place of cooperation with offerors, taking into account the criterion of the preferred environment of such cooperation

Analysed variables	Preferred environment of cooperation with offerors	Average range	KW test value	Level of significance '*p*'
Possibility to submit one's opinions to offerors in a more detailed way than online	Online	417.39	142.116	**0.000**
	Offline	733.24		
	Both	662.50		
Possibility to submit one's opinions to offerors by people who do not like the Internet and prefer more traditional forms of communication	Online	447.87	107.172	**0.000**
	Offline	696.05		
	Both	652.63		
Possibility to submit one's opinions to offerors in the form of personal communication, i.e. conversation with a particular employee	Online	429.44	138.459	**0.000**
	Offline	702.10		
	Both	659.62		
Possibility of direct participation in the preparation of a marketing offer, e.g. at the offeror's premises	Online	452.22	95.405	**0.000**
	Offline	724.82		
	Both	649.10		
Possibility to recognise offeror's true intentions through his/her personal contact with a purchaser	Online	436.68	125.358	**0.000**
	Offline	676.29		
	Both	658.34		
Possibility to personally meet other purchasers participating in the creation of a marketing offer of a particular offeror	Online	464.14	79.933	**0.000**
	Offline	636.67		
	Both	649.83		
Possibility to submit one's opinions to offerors in situations when the Internet is not accessible	Online	475.33	74.949	**0.000**
	Offline	557.53		
	Both	650.29		

Source: own study. KW: Kruskal–Wallis. Bold values present values statistically significant.

A statistically significant differentiation according to the aforementioned feature was identified only for cultural services (Table 7). For all other types of services, the value of the '*p*' significance level exceeded the limit of 0.05. The research hypothesis H3 for respondents is therefore valid only for cultural services.

Table 7. Results of analysis of significance of differences between indicated the types of services which respondents would like to co-create with offerors, taking into account the criterion of the preferred environment of such cooperation

Analysed variables	Preferred environment of cooperation with offerors	Average range	KW test value	Level of significance '*p*'
Banking (bank offers, etc.)	Online	574.65	2.335	0.311
	Offline	593.77		
	Both	608.33		
Tourist (offers from travel agencies, etc.)	Online	586.77	2.260	0.323
	Offline	545.65		
	Both	606.48		
Cultural (offers from theatres, cinemas, orchestras, etc.)	Online	574.00	7.071	**0.029**
	Offline	513.14		
	Both	613.62		
Gastronomy (offers of restaurants, cafes, etc.)	Online	588.02	2.446	0.294
	Offline	540.09		
	Both	606.33		
Design concerning real estate (offers of offices designing houses, gardens, etc.)	Online	593.91	0.111	0.946
	Offline	592.78		
	Both	600.69		

Analysed variables	Preferred environment of cooperation with offerors	Average range	KW test value	Level of significance '*p*'
Design concerning the Internet (offers of agencies designing websites, etc.)	Online	611.25	0.885	0.642
	Offline	571.20		
	Both	595.11		
Transport (offers of companies offering coach, air, rail transport, etc.)	Online	576.14	2.342	0.310
	Offline	579.32		
	Both	608.63		

Source: own study. KW: Kruskal–Wallis. Bold values present values statistically significant.

Discussion

In the literature, it is widely exposed that the development of Internet and information technology has significantly strengthened purchaser market power, simultaneously forcing companies to implement a purchaser-focused approach. This view, shared by Grönroos and Voima (2013), Xie et al. (2016) and Dellaert (2019), however, is not fully confirmed by the results of the research presented in this article. The results clearly indicate that almost 70% of respondents prefer the simultaneous use of online and offline environments as places of cooperation with offerors in the process of jointly creating a marketing offer. There is no doubt that the rise and development of Internet contributed to a significant enrichment of the range of forms of communication, influencing various behaviours of final purchasers, including purchase behaviour (Simonson & Rosen, 2014), and leading to an increase in final purchasers' market competences (Brynjolfsson & McAfee, 2014; Kumar et al., 2016). However, one cannot forget about the parallel offline actions taken. As can be seen from the research conducted, offline actions are still very important for final purchasers as co-creators of an offer, and, after all, the fundamental assumption of marketing is invariably to meet purchaser expectations, which should also be taken into account in the case of preferences regarding the cooperation environment.

According to respondents, the key advantage of the offline environment as a place of cooperation with offerors is the transfer of opinions through face-to-face contact, which indicates the importance attached to personal relationships that cannot be established online. This result is consistent with the view presented by Spencer (2017). As can be seen, he rightly accuses the enthusiasts of digital technologies (Brynjolfsson & McAfee, 2014) of ignoring the power of interpersonal relationships that can only be established and strengthened in the real world.

Other authors point out that many companies use strategies based on economic or social incentives to encourage purchasers to jointly create value (Pan, 2020) online. As results from the research indicate, the 'possibility for a purchaser to co-create non-material products' as an advantage of the online network took the last position among the analysed advantages. This means that offerors' efforts to involve purchasers in cooperation are not effective enough, however. The key importance of social factors (including the sense of belonging to a specific community) in motivating people to act, including co-creating value online, is also emphasised by other authors (Agrawal & Rahman, 2015; Gebauer et al., 2012). However, relationships based on an interpersonal bond can only be established offline, which is confirmed by the results of the research analysed in this article. Personal contact was here exposed as the primary advantage of the offline environment.

An important role fulfilled by sharing knowledge, which other authors write about as one of the key components of value co-creation (Chatterjee et al., 2021; Mingione & Leoni, 2020), is confirmed by the results of this study. The possibility to share one's opinions with offerors and thus share one's knowledge was mentioned as the main advantage of both online and offline environments. Moreover, it was placed in the cluster of the relatively smallest distance in the case of the advantages of both online and offline environments as places of cooperation with offerors.

In the literature, it is noted that the pillar of value co-creation is the emotional value of mutual interactions. For example, Mingione et al. (2020) emphasise its importance in relation to brand co-creation with other purchasers in social media, i.e. in the online environment. The results of the research conducted indicate, however, that the emotional value of mutual contacts was also very important for respondents in the case of the offline environment. In the hierarchy of advantages, the second position was taken by 'the possibility to recognise offeror's true intentions through his/her personal contact with a purchaser'. The great importance of this variable for respondents was confirmed by the fact that this advantage was included in the main cluster identified for advantages of the offline environment.

Moreover, many studies are conducted on the co-creation of banks' offers (Raza et al., 2020), although the results of the research show that among all the analysed types of services that the respondents would like to co-create, banking services took the last position.

As Saarijärvi (2012) rightly states, many offerors still do not benefit from cooperating with purchasers. The results of the research, compared with the results presented by other authors, indicate that this is an effect of, among other things, overestimating Internet as an environment for cooperation and underestimating the offline environment. The parallel use of both would be an appropriate response to respondents' preferred environment for joint creation of a marketing offer.

Conclusions

The results of the research indicate that almost three quarters of the respondents preferred parallel use of online and offline environments for cooperation with offerors. The main advantages of Internet in this context were the possibility to quickly submit one's opinions to offerors and the lack of geographic barriers in communication. In turn, the main advantage of the offline environment as a place for cooperation included the possibility of personal communication, especially possibility to personally submit one's opinions to offerors. The respondents would like to cooperate with offerors, first of all, in creating tourist, cultural and gastronomic services, showing relatively the lowest willingness to cooperate in the case of banking services. The preferred environment of cooperation with offerors turned out to be a feature that differentiated in a statistically significant way each of the seven analysed advantages of online and seven analysed advantages of the offline environments. Research hypotheses H1 and H2, respectively, turned out to be valid for all the analysed advantages of both environments. As for the type of services that respondents would like to co-create with offerors, the preferred environment for cooperation with offerors was a variable differentiating the responses only in the case of cultural services. Thus, research hypothesis H3 turned out to be true only for cultural services.

Implications, limitations and directions for future studies

The results of the research conducted and conclusions drawn based on it constitute a significant contribution to the theory of marketing and the theory of market behaviour. They fill the knowledge gap identified during the world literature review. They show the respondents' preferences regarding the environment of cooperation with offerors, refuting the dominant view that it should be conducted online. From the respondents' point of view, the optimal solution is to use both analysed environments of cooperation in a complementary way.

The identified hierarchy of advantages of online and offline environments as places of such cooperation also has a great cognitive value, showing what features of both these environments are particularly important for respondents as participants of the co-creation of a marketing offer and what are less important. The cognitive value is also reflected by the identified differentiation of respondents' opinions regarding the advantages of both environments according to the preferred environment of cooperation, as well as the discovery that such differentiation can only be referred to in the case of purchasers' willingness to cooperate with offerors on the creation of cultural services. Thus, the results of the research indicated that the theory of marketing and the theory of market behaviour have been also enriched with the knowledge that (1) the cooperation environment preferred by respondents is a feature that differentiates their responses on studied advantages of the online environment of cooperation with offerors and that (2) the cooperation environment preferred by respondents is a feature that differentiates their responses on studied advantages of the offline environment of cooperation with offerors.

The results of the research conducted also bring significant practical implications, constituting valuable guidelines for managers. They indicate, inter alia, the existence of final purchasers' expectations that cooperation with offerors in the scope of co-creation will be available simultaneously in online and offline environments. Therefore, activities aimed at involving purchasers in co-creating an marketing offer conducted only online is not in line with purchasers' preferences and thus may turn out to be ineffective. The knowledge of the identified expectations can certainly help managers to effectively use the marketing potential of final purchasers in the process of initiating mutually beneficial cooperation. Especially it allows to prepare and conduct the activities motivating final purchasers to co-creation engagement exactly matching their expectations regarding the cooperation environment reflected in the advantages indicated by respondents in the case of online and offline environments. Therefore, the indication of purchasers' clusters is of particular practical importance. Offerors can generate activities that strictly correspond to the opinions presented by the representatives of a given cluster. In the case of an online environment, managers should pay particular attention to the need to ensure the speed of communication. At the same time, they must ensure the conditions for personal contact with final purchasers, which was particularly important for respondents in the case of the offline environment. The marketing approach is also applied during the process of preparing conditions to co-create offers with final purchasers. As a result, it opens the possibility of creating a marketing community sharing similar values related to, inter alia, taking joint responsibility for the products created.

The research conducted has certain limitations. These include their subject scope (adult representatives of final purchasers) and object scope (the preferred environment of cooperation between final purchasers and offerors and the advantages of each of them, taking into account the types of services that purchasers would like to co-create). The perception of these limitations will guide future research into minors, and an attempt to thoroughly analyse the preferred environment of cooperation with offerors in terms of demographic, psychographic and behavioural characteristics of final purchasers. In particular in the next stages of the research process, the underage final purchasers are to be included in the studies, and the dependences between mentioned characteristics of young and adult respondents and their opinions on perceived advantages of online/offline cooperation environments are to be analysed.

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