Consumers' purchasing behavior in e-commerce furniture's sales in Greece

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Abstract
This research aims to investigate the behavior and attitudes of Greek consumers regarding online furniture sales. The main tool of the research was a specific structured questionnaire which was completed by 300 Greek consumers, in the post-Covid-19 period, in the year 2023. The main conclusions of the research were that a significant number of Greek consumers to a lesser or greater extent carry out electronic purchases for the furniture shopping, which is a distinct target market for furniture businesses. Their degree of satisfaction with online furniture shopping is high and the main factor in their online furniture's purchasing decision is the attractive price and it varies according to their educational level. Also, the online ads appear to have a large influence on consumer purchases, while social media's platforms Facebook and Instagram are commonly used for this. The highlighting of this research's results regarding the opinions and attitudes of consumers in online furniture's sales could contribute decisively to the decision-making of Greek furniture companies in order to satisfy the new desires and expectations of furniture consumers.

Keywords: Consumer behavior, On line furniture sales, e-Commerce, Furniture marketing, Marketing research.

1. Introduction

In the market environment where changes are continuous, the understanding of customer buying behavior is crucial for companies in order to have the results they want (Oblak et al., 2020). The monitoring consumer's purchasing behavior in terms of their preferences and behaviors is known as an important tool for the success and development of various industries, including wooden furniture companies (Pirc, et al., 2021). Consumer's behavior is a multifaceted science that investigates not only the process of making consumer's decisions and the acquisition of the product itself, but also the aftersales action of the consumer, like the evaluation and the disposal of the product or the service (Blackwell, et al., 2001).

In recent years the world's acceptance of online shopping has grown significantly with the gradual maturation of e-commerce in furniture market as well. The furniture industries in many countries give increased attention to online retailing. The experience of the online furniture sales has attracted attention in both academics and industries (Zhang, et al. (2022).

The rapid and leapfrog expansion of the internet has pushed the businesses to change their ecosystems and business structures. The e-commerce is a growing trend worldwide, including Greece. This modern technology is very dynamic, constantly reshaping and changing the online landscape, influencing society, consumers' behavior, business and marketing practices. (Charlesworth, 2014).

More specifically, the e-commerce is a new source of revenue for the business, which is related to the sale and the provision of products and services. Greek furniture companies have started to take advantage of this trend creating online stores and enabling consumers to buy furniture online.

According to data from ELSTAT (2023), the e-commerce is constantly expanding and in the year 2023 it showed an increase of 7.6% compared to the year of 2022, in the total number of businesses which have 10 employments or more, (42.451) with a total turnover of 354.3 billion euro. From these industries, 8.765 received orders via website or special applications or via EDI type messages, in a percentage of 20.6% and the turnover from these orders amounted to 25 billion euros, a percentage of 7.1% of the total turnover.

Also, according to Eurostat data, in Greece the online B2C sales (products and services) continue to grow steadily from €7.5 billion in 2018 at double-digit rates annually and with an estimated turnover of over €16 billion in 2023, when the total European market is estimated to have exceeded €1 trillion in 2023. Accordingly, Greek online consumers, continue to grow from 51% in 2019, to 70% in 2022 and to 75% in 2023. Also, a survey which be done by SELPE (Association of Retail Companies) and ELTRUN Laboratory (2023) for B2C e-commerce, it mentions a mature consumer's audience who used online shopping channels, but also consumers with growth prospects. The maturity of e-commerce is highlighted by the fact that the growth of online shopping has been maintained during the periods following the outbreak of the COVID pandemic and the traffic restriction measures (Doukidis, 2024).

The presence of Greek furniture companies in e-commerce has increased significantly in recent years. As mentioned by Doukidis (2024), according to research which be done by Focus Bari, the furniture market tends to become a digital affair, with online sales increasing about 41% between the years 2020 and 2023. The penetration of Greek consumers into the e-commerce of Furniture and Household items, estimated at 10.3% in 2020 and expected to 14.7% this year (2024)

2. Literature review

The researches that have been conducted on consumer's buying behavior for furniture in the international level examine the shopping preferences, habits, decisions that influence the purchase of furniture from the consumer's point of view. In addition, they focus on consumer habits in the post-Covid period but also research how the new technologies are developed in the sector of the furniture industry.

A study which be done by Pirc, et al. (2021) aimed to identify and compare the purchasing behaviors of furniture consumers in Croatia in the period before and during the COVID-19 pandemic. The research showed that the quality as well as the design of the furniture play the most important role regarding the purchase decision. Also, 18–24year-olds consumers tend to be more informed than people 65-year-old and over, with 46% of respondents buy furniture regardless of whether the item has discount. Regarding the findings related to the pandemic period, the survey showed that 60% of the respondents analyse all the options before the purchase in contrast to the pre-pandemic period when the percentage of the corresponding question was less than 20%. Finally, the research showed a change regarding to the source of purchase, highlighting an increase in online shopping mainly among the over 65s who traditionally made their purchases with their physical presence in the furniture store.

Research by Zhang et al. (2022) analysed the main factors affecting the consumers of wooden furniture online experience in China and distinguished the online consumer's experience of furniture into three dimensions: perceived risk experience, emotional experience, and new technology interactive experience.

The factors influencing the purchasing behavior of furniture consumers on the e-commerce, based on their demographic characteristics, purchasing behaviors and perceptions of the Online to Offline (O2O) sales are analyzed by Li, et al. (2016). The results of this research showed that the majority of consumers who buy furniture online are young and middle-aged women with medium income and high education. Also, the percentage of consumers who buy furniture online is relatively small, and their purchasing behaviors are more rational with higher loyalty. The quality and after sales service are the two main factors that are crucial in online buying decision. Finally, the correlation analysis on the relevant variables of consumers' online shopping behavior showed that the lower price of online sales is the reason for more consumers who tend to buy furniture from professional websites.

Corresponding research carried out in China by Lin, et. Al., (2019) rated the experiences and attitudes of furniture consumers towards their online purchases. The results of this research showed that the attitude of Chinese furniture consumers towards their online and offline purchases was greatly influenced by the regions where they resided, but in all regions consumer attitudes were influenced by the perceptions, reputation and safety of the online platform and the quality of business services.

In earlier research which be done by Morgan (2013), on the perceptions of small furniture retailers in the USA, they focused on good customer service and developing trust in their brand name as the most vital aspects of a furniture retailer's success. The website and online marketing are the most necessary and cost-effective tools that all furniture retailers should use to help consumers know their products.

Research which be done by Khojasteh-Khosro, et al. (2022) in Iran on furniture consumer behavior, showed that their most important purchase factors were product quality, design, price, environmental friendliness and warranty.

The study by Oblak, et. al (2020), analysed how different age groups and e-commerce monthly incomes per household influence the decisions of furniture consumers in Slovenia, Serbia and Croatia in relation to the factors: material, price and service. Significant differences in consumer buying behavior were identified in each of these countries, and the results provide a useful basis for furniture industry companies to design more successful marketing strategies that will help them achieve their goals in different target markets.

Bednarik & Kovats (2010) conducted research on the model of furniture purchasing behavior in Hungary. The research described the behavioral model and the characteristics of purchasing decisions as well as the environmental factors that influence buyers regarding furniture purchases. The research showed that the price of the product still plays a very important role in the purchase decision. Also, the need for cheap ecological products emerged as important. The 58.4% of respondents they are looking for good quality products at reasonable prices. Finally, regarding the influence of the purchase decision, friends and relatives emerged as the most important factor, with a percentage of 63%.

The impact of digital technology on furniture consumer decisions in Singapore was analysed in the research of Rangaswamy et al. (2022). The results of the research showed that digital technology is the new reality in the furniture market, while the pandemic has accelerated the pace of this development. People with a high level of education spend more time doing online shopping research with men showing a clear preference for online shopping at 54%. Finally, the income of the buyers plays an important role in Online shops and in physical presence shops too.

The purpose of this research is to study the perception of furniture consumers and to analyse their buying behavior in terms of online shopping and preferences. Also, the objective of this research is to determine the factors that influence the consumer behavior when they make their purchases in terms of variables such as quality, low price, brand of a product, easy transportation, warranty, etc. Finally, information about the views and attitudes of consumers in online furniture sales will highlight the modern reality in the post-COVID era thus help furniture businesses to understand and satisfy the

expectations of Greek consumers. while the determination of Marketing methods and strategies is possible to help businesses to respond to the new data of consumer behavior.

Based on our literature review on the issue, the research questions are the following:

- 1st research question: What are the factors that influence the choices of furniture's consumers online?
- 2nd research question: To what extent are furniture's consumers satisfied with their online purchases?
- 3rd research question: What are the most used online platforms for online furniture shopping?

3. Research methodology

The research was carried out using a specific structured questionnaire in order to collect reliable qualitative and quantitative data which highlight the habits of Greek consumers regarding online sales of furniture, answering the main research questions.

The questionnaire questions were easily structured to be understandable and clear for all respondents. Its structure consists of 19 questions, highlighting the attitudes and preferences of buyers regarding Online furniture sales, as well as the profile of consumers. The questionnaire in which the relevant reliability checks were carried out, includes closed and open type questions for easy and fast answer, as well as questions using the Likert scale and questions in the form of checklists.

It is noted that the first phase of a pilot survey with ten (10) respondents was preceded, where some ambiguities were regulated, in order to finalise the final questionnaire of the survey, while the participants of the survey were informed that it complies with the General Data Protection Regulation of the European Union (GDPR) and the collected data will only be used to conduct this research.

The questionnaire was distributed in its electronic form via the internet, and more specifically using the Google Forms platform, to Greek consumers of all ages and genders, with the aim of collecting responses regarding the research topic. Random sampling was chosen, while distribution was done via e-mails, SMS and social media groups (Facebook) to over 5,000 people during the period of February – June 2023. Finally, a total of 300 completed questionnaires were collected.

After the collection of the questionnaires of the sample, the statistical processing of the research data followed with the program of IBM SPSS Statistics, ver. 29 (Norris et al., 2013) with the procedures (Frequencies, Descriptives, Correlation, T-test with the Bonferroni criterion, as well as Pearson X^2 tests) and the level of significance was set equal to 0.05 in all cases.

4. Results

The demographics of the participants in this study as shown in Table 1, that most of them were female (66.7%), aged 31-40 years (30.3%), university educated (57.7%) and married (55.7%).

Table 1. Demographics of the surveyed sample

DEMOGRAPHICS OF SURVYED SAMPLE		Percentage %	DEMOGRAPHICS OF SURVYED SAMPLE		Percentage %
Gender	Male	33.3	Educational level	Compulsory education	0.7
	Female	66.7		High school graduate	20.3
Age	<20	1,7		University degree	57.7
	21-30	15.3		Postgraduate studies	21.3
	31-40	30.3	Family	Άγαμος	40.7
	41-50	27.0		Έγγαμος	55.7
	51-60	14.7		Άλλο	3.7
	60 and over	11.0			

From the responses which have been registered, it emerged that only 7.3% of Greek consumers buy furniture online, while 26.3% of the survey's participants do not buy it at all. But 41.0% and 25.3% of them have started in recent years and buy their furniture from e-shops to a small and moderate extent (Fig. 1). This fact is an important piece of information for furniture producers and traders to invest beyond physical furniture stores to e-shops, as with this way they will reach a significant portion of furniture consumers. After all, the trend that exists in many countries around the world shows that the online furniture market is growing more and more, noting in 2023 sales in America worth $67.36 billion, China $40.62 billion, Germany $10.37 billion, France $5.13 billion and the United Kingdom $5.08 billion (Statista 2024). According the above source in the 2nd quarter of 2023, the highest user adoption of furniture e-commerce was in the United States, as 31.0% of shoppers were buying household furniture online on a monthly basis. In comparison, that figure was only 10 percent for Finland.

Regarding the reasons why they buy their furniture online, 23.9% of the survey participants stated that they did it because of renovating their home, 20.9% because of an increased need, 37.2% because they found the furniture online at a discount price, while 10.3% bought furniture online due to wear and tear on their old furniture and 7.7% for other reasons. 56.0% bought their furniture from a well-known online furniture chain, 36.3% from a random online furniture store, while 7.3 chose other reasons. Regarding the frequency of online furniture's purchases within the last year, 70.9% bought furniture from 1 to 5 times while only 5.6% of them made purchases 6-10 times.
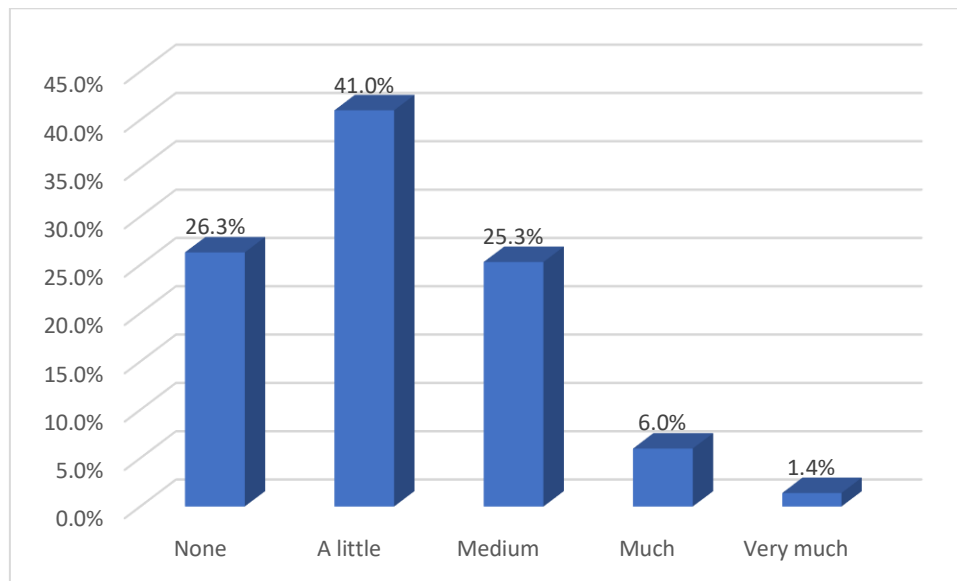
Figure 1: Frequency of buying furniture online by Greek consumers

Table 2 below lists the reasons why furniture is chosen in their online shopping in Greece, as well as their degree of importance on a Likert scale from 1-5 with 5 being the most important factor. The main factor for buying furniture online from the internet is its price (M = 4.26, SD = 0.97), while the least important is "Brand" (M = 2.86, SD = 1.18). According to research by Statista (2024b) the low price is the main reason why the U.S. shoppers in 2022 bough furniture online at a rate of 34.0%. Most reasons have a mean value close to 3.5 which means they are 'moderately' to 'very important'. Then the differences of all the online furniture buying factors were examined in relation to the demographics of the participants, like their gender, age, marital status and educational level.

Table 2. Degree of importance of reasons for choosing to buy furniture online

Παράγοντες	Mean	Std. Deviation	None	A little	Medium	Much	Very much
Price	4.26	0.97	3.5	3.5	5.8	38.1	49.1
Greater variety of furniture	3.67	1.06	5.0	6.8	27.6	37.1	23.5
Payment methods	3.59	1.20	8.3	10.6	19.4	37.8	24.0
Delivery guarantee	3.57	1.11	6.3	9.9	24.3	39.2	20.3
Flexible return terms	3.43	1.20	9.3	13.0	22.2	37.0	18.5
Delivery Speed	3.41	1.10	6.3	13.1	30.2	34.7	15.8
Original product	3.03	1.20	14.8	16.1	30.0	29.1	9.9
Furniture's quality	2.86	1.18	4.5	5.5	25.5	37.3	27.3
Design of furniture	2.86	1.18	16.9	19.2	32.4	23.7	7.8

The T-test statistical analysis for two independent samples showed that none of the considered parameters – reasons for buying furniture online – is observed to differentiate between men and women, as the p-values estimated are in all cases greater than 0.05 and the differences are very small ones. Therefore, women and men consider the specific reasons equally important. Also, the same statistical analysis of variance, showed that for none of the considered parameters – reasons for buying furniture online – no differentiation is observed according to age, except for the brand. Specifically, from multiple comparison tests with the Bonferroni criterion, participants up to 20 years of age consider the "Brand" in the online furniture market much less important (M = 1.00, SD = 0.00) compared to almost all other age groups namely participants aged 31-40 (M = 2.76, SD = 1.119), participants aged 41-50 (M = 3.15, SD = 1.157), participants aged 51-60 (M = 3, 00, SD = 1.233) and participants aged 60+ (M = 2.95, SD = 1.290). The p-values estimated for all other cases are greater than 0.05 and the differences are very small. Therefore, with the exception of the age group of < 20 years, the participants consider the Brand and the remaining 4 reasons equally important as it emerged from the results of Table 3.

In Table 3 the variance analysis showed that for none of the considered parameters – reasons for buying furniture online – no differentiation is observed according to the level of education, except for price and delivery guarantee. Specifically with regard to price as shown by multiple comparison tests with the Bonferroni test, the people who graduate from high school, consider "Price" much less important in the online furniture market (M = 3.84, SD = 1.263) compared to university graduates (M = 4.37, SD = 0.797). At the same time, regarding the delivery guarantee, the high school graduates consider the "Delivery Guarantee" in the online furniture market much less important (M = 3.03, SD = 1.230)

compared to the University graduates (M = 3.66, SD = 1.031) but also compared to MSc holders (M = 3.79, SD = 1.102). The p-values estimated for all other cases are greater than 0.05.

Based on the above results, the answer to the 1st research question is given on the factors that shape the choices of consumers buying furniture from online sales.

Table 3. Analysis of Variance of Online Furniture Market Selection Characteristics and Demographics Where Significant Variation Occurs

Factors	Age	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error	95% Confidence Interval for Mean Lower Bound	95% Confidence Interval for Mean Upper Bound	P
Brand name	<20	4	1,00	0,00	0,00	1,00	1,00	0,007
	21-30	30	2,63	1,13	0,21	2,21	3,05	
	31-40	78	2,76	1,12	0,13	2,50	3,01	
	41-50	59	3,15	1,16	0,15	2,85	3,45	
	51-60	26	3,00	1,23	0,24	2,50	3,50	
	60+	22	2,95	1,29	0,28	2,38	3,53	
Price	*Educational level*	*N*	*Mean*	*Std. Deviation*	*Std. Error*	*Lower Bound*	*Upper Bound*	*P*
	High School	38	3,84	1,263	0,205	3,43	4,26	0,012
	Bachelor	141	4,37	0,797	0,067	4,24	4,5	
	MSc	47	4,26	1,113	0,162	3,93	4,58	
Guarantee	High School	40	3,03	1,23	0,194	2,63	3,42	0,002
	Bachelor	135	3,66	1,03	0,089	3,48	3,83	
	MSc	47	3,79	1,102	0,161	3,46	4,11	

Regarding the effect of advertisements and the sources of information of the participants, as can be seen from Figure 2, they appear to be influenced to a moderate extent (37.2%), while to a large extent they are influenced at a rate of 26.9%. Regarding the main sources of information, the majority chose personal shopping research (53.4%), while the percentage of those who answered "Internet advertising" (19%) is important. The friendly environment and the family environment follow in percentages 9.9% and 7.8% and the choice "random" only 6.5%.
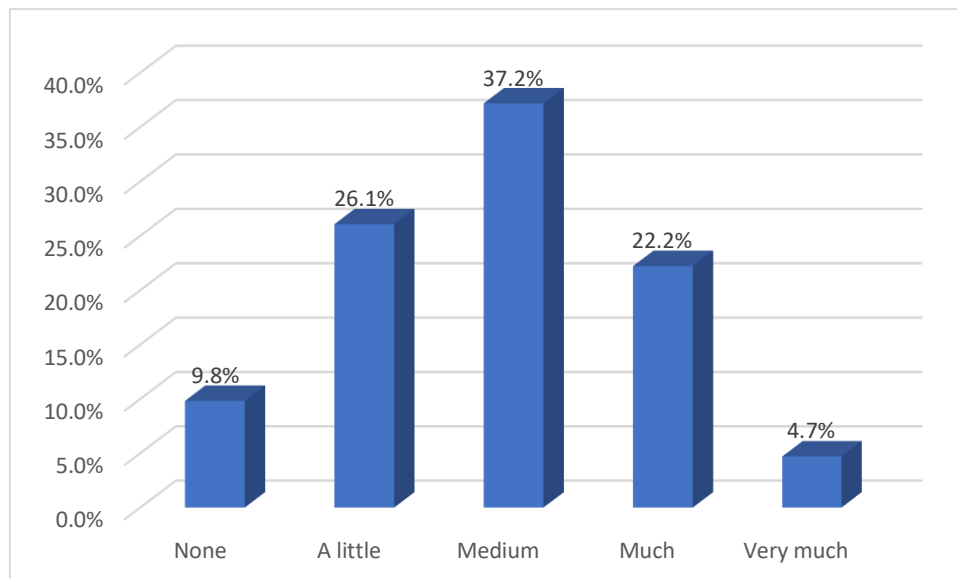

Figure 2: Degree of influence of Greek consumers buying furniture online by online advertisements

Regarding the satisfaction of Greek consumers with online furniture purchases 71.1% answered that they are very to very satisfied and only 3.0% of them, not at all (Figure 3). The X^2 test showed that the degree of satisfaction is not statistically significantly related to age and marital status, but a statistically significant correlation is observed with the level of education ($X^2=27.012$, for a<0.05 and df=15) and gender ($X^2=12.235$, for a<0.05 and df=5), as those with a higher educational level and women are more satisfied with online furniture shopping. So the answer to the 2nd research question is given regarding the extent to which furniture consumers are satisfied with their online purchases.
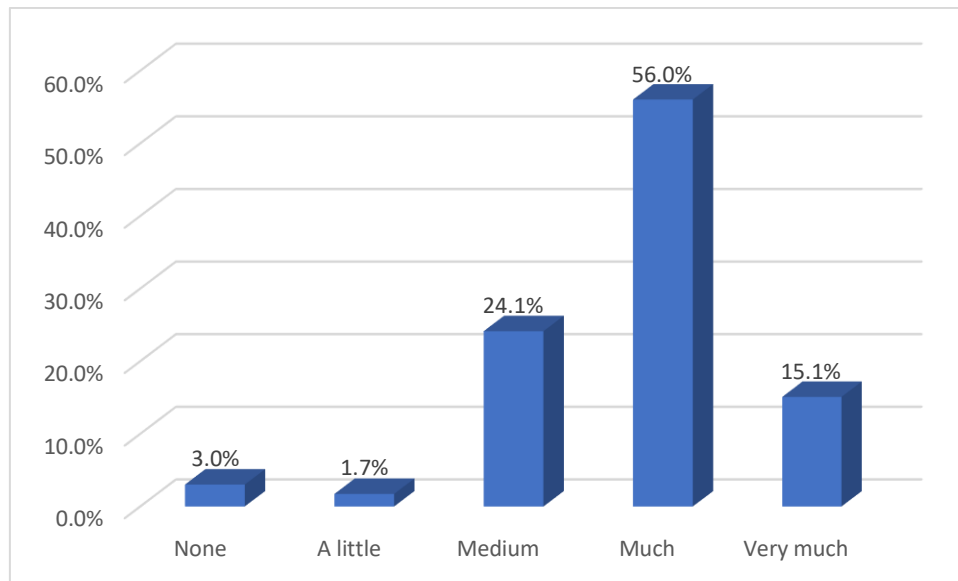
Figure 3: Degree of satisfaction of Greek consumers with the online purchase of furniture

Finally, regarding the degree of influence of social media on the decision to buy furniture online, as shown in Table 4, Facebook and Instagram seem to influence Greek furniture consumers more (mean values 2.42 and 2.37 respectively on a Likert scale of 1-5 with 5 is more important). Based on the results of the Pearson correlation (r), the two-way significance test certifies that the correlation between the following variables is positive and statistically significant at the $\alpha=0.001$ significance level, namely: a) Facebook and Instagram (r = 0.477**, p<0.001), b) Tik Tok and YouTube (r = 0.465**, p<0.001), i.e. those who are influenced by Facebook are more influenced by Instagram and those who are influenced by Tik Tok are more influenced by YouTube. This is how the 3rd research question is answered about the factors that shape the choices of consumers buying furniture from online sales.

Table 4. Degree of influence of social media on online furniture purchase decision

Factors	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	None	A little	Medium	Much	Very much
Facebook	229	2,42	1,192	29,7	23,6	24,9	18,3	3,5
Instagram	212	2,37	1,203	33,0	21,2	24,1	18,9	2,8
Pinterest	212	2,06	1,216	48,6	16,5	17,5	15,1	2,4
YouTube	210	1,80	1,066	55,7	19,0	17,1	5,7	2,4
Tik Tok	209	1,47	0,893	74,2	10,0	11,5	3,3	1,0
Twitter	205	1,23	0,572	82,9	11,7	4,4	1,0	0,0

5. Discussion

The online furniture's sales in Greece are an ever-increasing challenge for furniture businesses, as a significant percentage of Greek consumers increasingly have a more positive attitude towards online sales and ultimately choose to purchase furniture from e-shops, according many countries throughout the world (Zhang et al 2021; Pirc et al. 2021; Statista, 2024b). Therefore, e-commerce is offering new opportunities to Greek furniture businesses, allowing them to reach a larger audience and expand their business globally.

It is confirmed that low price is the most important purchasing decision factor for online furniture sales by Greek consumers, regardless of gender. This is confirmed from previous researchers too(Li, et al. 2016, Olbak, et al. 2021, Papadopoulos et al. 2018). Differentiation of the selection because of price is observed depending on the educational level of consumers, with those with a higher level of education choosing to buy furniture online. But the brand name's factor is differentiated according to the age of the consumers, as those who focus on this factor are mainly the age group between 41-60 years old. The research of Pirc, et al. (2021) focused on this too.

The majority of Greek furniture's consumers state that they are quite satisfied with online sales and the main source of information is personal online market research. The degree of satisfaction of furniture consumers is independent of their age and marital status, but those with a higher educational level and women seem to be statistically more satisfied with online furniture shopping.

Online advertisements appear to have large influence on consumer purchases, while the social networking platforms Facebook and Instagram are an important source of information, influence or inspiration regarding potential purchases of furniture products and even have a significant positive correlation between them, as well as Tik Tok media with Youtube.

The highlighting of this researcher's results on the opinions and attitudes of consumers in online sales of furniture could lead furniture companies to shape their marketing methods and strategies in order to satisfy the new desires of furniture consumers, especially in the post-Covid era (Pirc, et. Al. 2021), not only in Greece, but also in other countries too. (Papadopoulos et al. 2014).

It is suggested, as in Morgan's (2013) research informed, that all Greek furniture retailers invest in cost-effective and efficient tools such as having a website and creating digital marketing to help consumers know their products, services and their promotions.

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