

# THE NEW NORMAL AND DISTRIBUTION (II)

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**Abstract:** *The new approach to demand highlights a certain gap between the manifestation of desire and the existence of goods and services on the market is the starting point for the manifestation of the market in the buyer's mind.*

*In the producer theory, "social, economic and cultural development of society wouldn't have been possible without man's capacity to use the scarce resources nature offers him. The processing of resources (material and human) to fulfil individual or societal needs constitutes the object of activity of any production process and results in the creation of a certain quantity of goods, services and information which make up the supply. In a general sense, supply is defined as the quantity of an economic good, service or production factor that a producer produces and wants to sell on the market (actually, to exchange it on the market for other goods and services, by means of money) in a given period of time and at a given price level"*<sup>25</sup>.

*The new economy or digital economy has radically changed the direction of the relationship between supply and demand, from the one in which demand was a consequence of supply to the one in which supply is a consequence of demand, and terms such as customized or personalized describe a new way of making the products, in which the production process is assisted by the consumer, from the design stage to the finished product. Of course, this does not leave out innovation and industrial creation but, before these, the idea of a new product or service is rooted in consumer need.*

**Key words:** *Distribution; Market Structure and Pricing; Trade; Technological Change, Legal Procedure; Consumers; New Normal; e-Commerce.*

**JEL Classification:** *M13; M14; P17; Q01.*

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**The impact of technologies on the development and the dynamics of the market in the mind of the consumer.**

The components of the global environment have counterparts both at the national level as well as at European level, but in a different hierarchical order depending on the dynamics of the power of influence over them. Hence, in a relative, but interchangeable order, we list: the political environment, the institutional-legal environment, the technological environment, the demographic environment, the economic environment, the sociocultural environment and the natural environment.

*“For a consistent period of time, globalisation has supported the liberalization of international trade, just like the very international rules of conduct of global trade allowed free space for the manifestation of globalization”<sup>26</sup>.*

An up-to-date observation on this environment is, maybe unscholarly, stated as “the environment of SARS COV-19 pandemic”. This has dramatically influenced the demographic, sociocultural and economic environments, negatively impacting them, positively influencing the technological environment, and causing a series of disruptions in the political and institutional-legal environments.

The traditional concepts of the market which define it as an “*economic category of merchandise production which expresses all the buying-selling acts seen in organic unity with the relations they generate and in connection with the space they are carried out*”<sup>27</sup> are outdated by the incidence of globalization factors and the consumer’s sovereignty in satisfying desires.

The analysis of these paradigm shifts must be started with the form and functioning of exchange acts. Initially the two poles of exchange – Producer and Consumer – and the direction of the exchange from production to consumption were identified. Gradually, the two poles moved apart, and a series of intermediaries intervened between them, taking over a series of representation functions.

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<sup>26</sup> Napoleon Pop, Valeriu Ioan-Franc – 2018, *România în globalizare* Centre for Economic Information and Documentation of the Romanian Academy, p. 91

<sup>27</sup> <https://dexonline.ro/definitie/pia%C8%9B%C4%83/871137>

In the next stage, the two poles transformed: producers into symbols (brands) while consumers became anonymous, a consumer mass.

With the globalization of information and the prevalence of communication in relation to the exchange of goods and financial assets, a process of searching for brands and their meaning and “identifying” consumers/investors through their purchase and consumption behaviour has started.

The sovereign consumer has meanwhile become an object of study, being free to choose the way to satisfy his consumption needs.

*“Consumer sovereignty is the dominant doctrine according to which consumers dictate which enterprises to produce, as long as they vote with their dollars in order to guide production to satisfy their wants”<sup>28</sup>.*

Returning to the act of exchange and to what happens as a process before the consumer manifests his demand, under the pressure of information he gathered and analysed from the “global market of information” – namely, the manifestations of needs in the form of wants, in the absence of territorial and time constraints – the reflection of needs in wants has a high degree of freedom.

As John Komlos mentions in his book “Principles of Economics in a Post-Crisis World”, *“it is assumed that tastes are formed outside economy; it is considered that they are exogenous to the economic system. As long as they are predetermined, consumers’ tastes, expressed through want, determine corporations to manufacture goods in the right quantity and quality to satisfy these desires. After all, consumers are in charge, they determine what is produced.”<sup>29</sup>* This view is schematically presented in the next figure.

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<sup>28</sup> John Komlos – 2019, *Principiile economiei într-o lume postcriză*, Centre for Economic Information and Documentation of the Romanian Academy, p. 81.

<sup>29</sup> Idem, pp. 81-82.

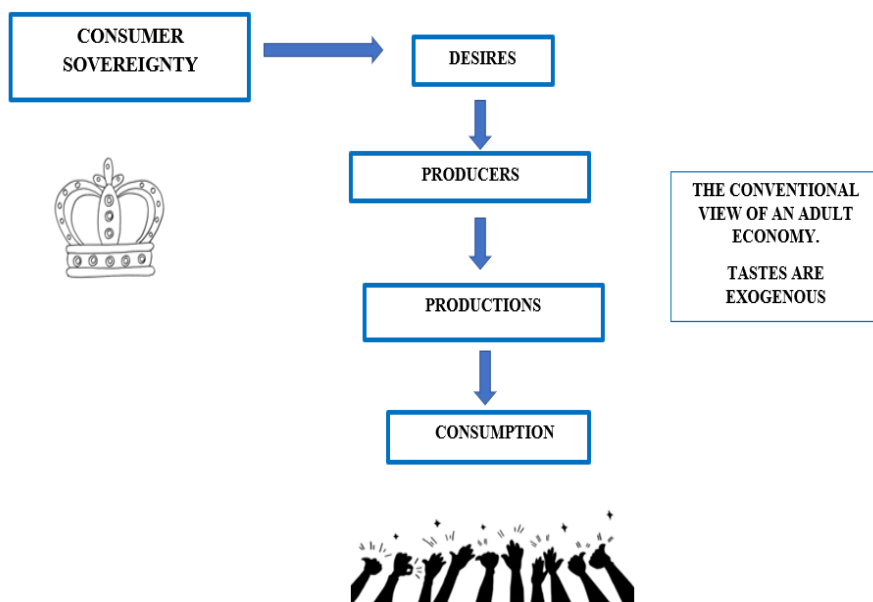


Fig. 1. The conventional view of consumer sovereignty

Source: John Komlos, *Principles of Economics in a Post-crisis World*, p.82

Komlos's conventionality is determined by the consumer's relation to a certain economic system, namely the American economic system, in which "*consumer's sovereignty is captured by the producer*" and in which "*the world of corporations influences deeply our culture and wants through advertising campaigns*". For this reason, he states, "*our tastes are endogenous to the economic system: our wants are determined within the frame of the economic system where corporations influence them*"<sup>30</sup>. His point of view has a limited validity in closed economic systems (North-Korean) or in those dominated by the most powerful corporations of the world (North-American system), but it is partially valid also in the economies of the countries subjected to the phenomenon of globalisation by external corporations, such as the economy of Romania.

<sup>30</sup> Idem, pp. 82-83.

Considering the state of our economy, it is necessary to “*the clarify a certain type of interference state-market by finding the right balance between regulation and the force of the markets. An economy defined by Constitution as a market economy, based on free initiative and competition, confirms the necessity to eliminate its need to be driven either exclusively by the regulations/ measures taken by the state or by the market forces. The right path is to give up the doctrine mix of each political orientation that impacts the normal completion of the royal functions of the state, the citizen being virtually dissatisfied with all the governments so far*”<sup>31</sup>.

In the Romanian economic system, consumer sovereignty is determined by the tastes and traditions preserved by his consumption behaviour as endogenous factors, but limited by income and purchase power. Consumer sovereignty gives colour to local and national markets, but it also manifests globally through online intermediaries.

Disintermediation is the most pronounced effect of the digital economy and of the transfer of exchange acts online. Here everything is concentrated in information. Through information the consumer has power over the producer, choosing, by comparison, the most convenient offer, while the producer controls the consumer through the information transmitted and the manifestations of purchase and consumption behaviour “mirrored” online. Thus, the optimal conditions of the exchange act are met:

- Free competition between producers in targeting consumers and free competition between consumers in the way of satisfying desires and acquiring a certain identity;
- Freedom to entry and exist an exchange relationship;
- Communication by ensuring the two-way flow of information, but by “feeding” online intermediaries;
- Exchange of equivalent values; the value of goods and services as sum of functional and emotional benefits and money value.

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<sup>31</sup> Napoleon Pop, Valeriu Ioan-Franc, Andrei Marius Diamescu – 2021, „România în confruntare cu pandemia Covid-19. Gestiunea riscurilor versus asumarea oportunităților”, in: Bogdan Simionescu, coordinator – 2021, *Pandemia. Constrângeri și oportunități economice*, Romanian Academy Publishing House, p. 188.

The process of globalising consumption markets and individual investments has started with the dematerialisation of financial assets and the use of new information technologies. After removing administration and legal limitations from the exchange act on these markets, time and space have been also eliminated. This is the example closely followed by the exchanges on consumption markets; and the meta market or the market in the mind of the consumer appeared.

*“Globalisation has been understood as the environment of societal transformations, whose benefits towards openness and rapprochement require cooperation and coordination between heads of states and governments at the level of the most multilateral agreements, preoccupations dedicated to the future of humanity: more economic growth equitably distributed, more care for the planet’s resources and, especially for its natural environment deeply affected by economic activities in the broadest sense”<sup>32</sup>.*

People and businesses manifest an increased interest in transparency, to make themselves known to the widest possible audience. At the same time, communications and information technology have ever-increasing access to information in a complex universe that is developing in parallel to the real world.

Everyone seeks to gain what satisfies his needs and make rational decisions for the future. At the same time, communication abilities are developed for the “communion in thoughts” between the participants in these searches, through reciprocal identification under the circumstances of globalization of real distances and increase in the speed of access to information disseminated in huge “quantities”, but many of it of poor quality.

We’re not talking about data, formation and their energy, but about Big Data and Data Mining and the taking over of the communication capacity adjustment by models and artificial intelligence. It is a sort of externalization of searches. The traditional “compass” is replaced by means and technologies that generate greater security of utilities of time,

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<sup>32</sup> Napoleon Pop, Valeriu Ioan-Franc – 2018, *România în globalizare*, Centre for Economic Information and Documentation of Romanian Academy, p. 19.

space, quantity, quality and costs in satisfying consumption needs, on one hand, and profit needs, on the other hand.

Unfortunately, such an externalization is accompanied by a detachment of individuals from the global issues that threaten life itself and the future of the planet.

On the consumers' side education has been invoked, while on the side of the businesses, the so-called social responsibility through voluntarily assuming environment protection issues and the social problems caused by their harmful activities. As time goes by, both have been proving to be inefficient as effects haven't been assessed and the real causes have been "ignored". The influence of economics over politics has deliberately masked these causes.

*The meta market or the market in the mind of the consumer* appeared at the same time with the development of the new technologies used in communication and transactions. In the process of globalisation two ways of developing this market have been shaped. The level of development and the dynamics of this market are mainly determined by the dynamics of the new technologies and the level of economic well-being of the social category the consumer is a part of.

The support of this market's development is represented by endogenous factors which, in different degrees, may represent change-resistant factors and dynamic independent variables. The meta market, through its formative factors, is predictable at individual or group level through behavioural manifestations, and at group and social level, through indicators.

The economics of knowledge impacts the developments of production throughout the entire economic chain. *In the field of production*, knowledge has stimulated creation, innovation, inventiveness and a new speed in the emergence of new products and services. *In the field of consumption*, it has made available for society an ever-increasing volume of information as well as criteria to allow the choice of the best solutions to satisfy needs and wants.

Since the very beginning of this “revolution”, that we believe can be called the Economic-Social Revolution, economy and society turned into distinct forces, interconnected, however, in their two-way relationship. As an argument for what has been stated, we bring into discussion the innovations in consumption and in the part the consumer plays in suggesting new solutions analysed and accepted by producers. The digital revolution is, actually, the base that determines the dynamics of the two components – economy and society.

Being contemporary with the most serious economic crisis in the history of humanity, actually, one of the crises overlapping with the stratified crises (sanitary crisis, financial, political, social etc.), adding to it the effects of the technologies used by humanity starting with the one in the beginning of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, whose negative consequences have been ignored (pollution, global warming, extinction of some species of animals and plants), we belatedly remember the subject called Bioeconomics, initiated and developed by the great economist Nicholas Georgescu-Roegen.

Bioeconomics uses the process of entropy in analysing the economic processes in the work *Legea entropiei și procesul economic* (Law of Entropy and Economic Progress), N. Georgescu-Roegen, 1971, drawing attention to the degradation of matter and energy, of natural resources useful to mankind, all leading to the phenomenon of economic decline. In this context, it is considered that the new information technologies must be used for a better knowledge of the world, of life in general and the individual in particular. Communication between consumers has gone beyond the boundaries of the small communities – family-household-rural community-social group-work teams -, gaining national and global dimensions, based on information technology (internet, social networks, forums) at global level.

Just as globalization has become an attribute that characterises many fields, we can accept that it can be attached to the noun consumer and it will be able to define the concept of global consumer.



The great disparities in the economic development of various countries and areas which also have left their mark on the technologies used by the consumer, in the New Economy need to materialize the advantages by erasing the disparities and generalizing on a planetary level. There is only one indicator that can highlight this, namely *the proportion of internet users in various countries and the speed of its generalization to the respective populations*.

As Klaus Schwab (the Executive President of World Economic Forum) mentioned in the book “*The Fourth Industrial Revolution*”<sup>33</sup>, „over 30% of the worldwide population use now the social media platforms to connect with each other and share information. In an ideal world, these interactions would offer an opportunity for cross-cultural understanding and cohesion”.

Although it is further pointed out that these may “also create and propagate unrealistic expectations” in a comparative historical analysis the respective kinds of “unrealistic expectations” occasioned, in the area of scientific research and production, the great discoveries and creations we enjoy today.

Coming back to the analysis of the classical concept of economics, we approached, in this stage, the analysis of the link between *production and consumer*, i.e., *distribution*. Here we need to make the following remark: while in the prior industrial revolutions the development of distribution was a consequence of the development of production through the “pressure” the latter put on the development of the relationship between producers and consumers, through intermediaries created by production, through the development of the distribution channels and diversification of services to ensure the physical movement from production to consumer in order to sell what it had been produced, gradually a balance was established between the *interest of production* and the *expressed expectations of consumers*.

The use of technologies in production and, consequently, the increase in labour productivity has led to the increase and diversification of supply,

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<sup>33</sup> Klaus Schwab – 2015, <https://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/2015-12-12/fourth-industrial-revolution>

but also to the liberation of the labour force, now on this site in distribution. For a long time, the source of the use of distribution were production and technologies used in its field (transport based on steam power, transport based on internal combustion engines, transport and handling based on electricity etc.).

The pandemic marked the beginning of the intensive development of digital economy thus becoming an undeniable opportunity. It is interesting to point out that the shock wave “hit” this sector first and the learning processes are transferred now from this sector to the others, that is production mainly. Education has had to cope with the shock wave so it had rapidly taken the knowledge gained so far for its own need, online learning.

The second sector, commerce, has quickly adjusted, benefiting from the ability gained in education. While, until now virtual shops and online commerce have been focused in the computer market and for the consumer goods in the limited category of users knowledgeable in using remote ordering (corporate employees) the entities in the areas of distribution have stepped up the pace of taking up the benefits of digitalization in order to cope with the orders of goods and services widespread at the level of the majority of internet users.

*“Digital transformation of economic-social activities carried out through adopting the digital technologies requires technological, but also organisational and cultural changes within the targeted economic system. In order to fully capitalize on the potential offered by adopting digital technologies, digital transformation strategies are being defined, based on which long, medium and short-term digital measures are implemented”.*<sup>34</sup>

In 2020, the peak year of the pandemic, the first effects of this process of widespread digitalization emerged through retail restructuring; many small physical stores closed while activities in e-commerce accelerated.

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<sup>34</sup> Mihai-Sabin Muscalu, coordonator, Daniela-Nicoleta Băileanu, Constanța-Nicoleta Bodea, Daniel-Frantz Fistung, Elena-Manuela Iștoc, Alexandru Isaic-Maniu, Stelian Stancu – 2021, „Impactul pandemiei Covid-19 asupra unor activități economice din domeniile serviciilor și întreprinderilor mici și mijlocii”, in: Bogdan Simionescu, coordonator – 2021, *Pandemia. Constrângeri și oportunități economice*, Romanian Academy Publishing House, p. 543.

Thus, the first pole of B2C exchange relationship, businesses (B) adjusted to a massive demand of goods based on remote commerce.

In the “E-commerce in Europe 2020” report, *“using a combination of RetailX research, interviews with experts in the field and detailed case studies a detailed view on the e-commerce in 34 different countries is provided to offer the retailers and brands the necessary information to have access on the European market”*, *“the spendings with Europe’s business-to-consumer e-commerce are on the rise, with a consistent double digit growth year-on-year”*<sup>35</sup>.

The respective report estimated that those spendings were to reach 717 billion euro in 2020 (a figure that is now being recalculated, with huge prospects to be exceeded in the final statistics of 2020) representing 5.16% from total GDP. Of this figure, Western Europe accounts for around 70%.

Romanian e-commerce recorded a turnover of 6.2 billion euro at the end of 2021, almost 10% more than in 2020.

*“Romanian e-commerce is in a continuous growth, even though last year this was less than the spectacular 30% growth recorded in 2020 compared to 2019. This shows the significant potential for further growth in a market that is still permissive and very attractive, both for local as well as international players – an ever-increasing number of on-line businesses from abroad are locating in Romania and the trend will continue this year too”*, states Andrei Radu, CEO and Founder GpeC.

*“Starting from the value of 6.2% billion euro as the balance of Romanian e-commerce in 2021 and doing a simple calculation, it means that Romanians spent around 17 million euro in average every day of last year for internet shopping – an increase form 15 million euro, the daily average recorded in 2020”* adds Andrei Radu.<sup>36</sup>

The B2C development in Europe and Romania as a EU member country also took place against the background of the intensification of internet

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<sup>35</sup> <https://vtex.com/ro/blog/strategie/cum-comertul-digital-european-s-a-schimbato-in-2020-si-ce-urmeaza/>

<sup>36</sup> Andrei Radu, <https://www.startupcafe.ro/afaceri/cumparaturi-online-6-miliarde-euro-2021-romania-produse-achizitie-romani.htm>

use. It is observed that in Europe, compared to 2015 when 78% of the population had access to internet, in 2020 this percent reached 87%.

To flesh out the meaning of this description it can be stated that the “old” concept production-distribution-consumption becomes consumption-purchase-production, logistics being still reserved for distribution. Peter Drucker said that, in the future, all businesses would move online, a view expressed decades ago but which has taken shape recently.<sup>37</sup>

Digitalisation moves satisfying consumers' interests to this environment, but businesses in production field follow the same trend. We're not referring here to working remote only, but also to the organisation and carrying out of production processes as such. Referring to the impact of digitalization on the companies in Romania, as it is presented in Digitalization Barometer<sup>38</sup> the conclusions justify, in fact, the new vision of managers regarding the future of the use of the main technologies which transform the business environment and the internal environment of the companies managed by them. It should be pointed out that the first four technologies: *artificial intelligence*, *machine learning*, *robotic process automation* and *5G technology* have a direct impact on the organization and carrying out of the production processes. It is useful to note that, among the conclusions of the study previously presented, 55% of the companies state that digital transformation is a central part of their business strategy, 65% of the companies say that they have punctually capitalized on digitalisation for competitive advantage and 61% assert that simplification of processes is the main benefit of digitalization, at the level of 2020. At the same time, it is also worth noting the significant increase of the influence of digitalization on companies in just two years: 57% of the enterprises in Romania in 2020 compared to 47% in 2018 state that digitalization has had a huge influence on their businesses so far.

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<sup>37</sup> Peter Drucker – 1992, *Managing for the future*, New York, Truman Tally Books.

<sup>38</sup> *Barometrul Digitalizării*, [https://valoria.ro/wp-content/uploads/2022/01/Studiu\\_Barometrul-digitalizarii-2020\\_RO.pdf](https://valoria.ro/wp-content/uploads/2022/01/Studiu_Barometrul-digitalizarii-2020_RO.pdf)

Companies in Romania quickly assimilate the new vision regarding vegetal development. They are part of the overall process of business remodelling based on new production technologies and rebuilding relationships with consumers, accepting at the same time more easily their influence on the production processes.

The shocking result of the lack of in-depth study of this vision is remarkably rendered by Nicholas Georgescu-Roegen: „*Yet, a fear has been lingering in my mind – says the author – since I started to take an interest in the entropic nature of economic processes. Is humanity going to follow a program involving a limitation of its inclination towards exosomatic comfort? Is the human being destined to live a short, but proud and exciting life, rather than a long and vegetative one? Then, we shall leave it to other species, devoid of any spiritual ambition – both, for example – to inherit an Earth bathed constantly and abundantly in solar light*” (Energy and Economic Myth, in *Southern Economic Journal*, vol.41, no.3, January 1975)<sup>39</sup>.

Conceptualized as the meeting place of demand and supply or as the “totality of selling/buying acts seen in their organic unit with the relationships they generate and in connection with the space they are carried out”, the market has evolved from the simple, primary forms of economic exchanges to the markets of today ‘s new economy, the digital economy.

E-commerce, as it looks today, benefiting from the Information Technology vector, is the one that “dictates” these processes of dynamic interconnection of consumption with production. The phenomena have been and are visible in Romania too, especially during the pandemic, but also during the crisis after the pandemic, through the growing number of “virtual” intermediaries and the orders received, processed and executed.

The development of the respective virtual “space” has given rise to new types of markets, the “marketspace” markets in which the new intermediaries, benefiting from abundant and high-quality information,

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<sup>39</sup> January, 1975 – “Energy and Economic Myths”, in *Southern Economic Journal*, vol. 41, no. 3, <https://www.finantare.ro/bioeconomia.html>

have increased their capacity of anticipating the manifestations of consumers' behaviour.

Globalization, determined mainly by the unlimited access to information, modern communication technologies, generate exchange of information before the exchange of goods, during and after purchasing and consumption acts. Moreover, the intermediaries in the universe created by the dissemination and reception of information have enormous capacities of processing, analysing and elaborating the dynamic models that anticipate the manifestations of demand for each category of goods and even for products and brands.

*The market in the mind of the consumers*, of potential consumers, is determined by the reality of things perceived through information from different sources accumulated in their brains. Things exist in reality for as long as they are in our minds. Communication has been at the basis of exchange acts, starting with primitive forms and up to the present ones, where the amount of information covers more and more the goods needed and desired by people worldwide.

In the process of the development of economy and society, economic exchanges have been accompanied by exchange of information between all the participants on the producers-end consumers chain acquiring, over time, a two-way character. Thus, the capacity of communication and analysis has developed, both senders and for receivers, so that communication could be defined as a “communion of thoughts”.

In practice, in the context of globalization of communications, based on Information Technology, time and space that separate producers from consumers “have disappeared”. Moreover, the speed of online communication and the direct access to information increase the number of coincidence points between ideas for new products and services and the needs projected in the form of consumer desires. Against this background, the ability to predict the manifestations of desires and to anticipate the new creations of producers developed.

Big Data analytics systems predict behavioural manifestations with sufficient accuracy or create those types of expectations for which the

supplies with the expected functional and emotional benefits are already prepared.

In the consumers' mind, the market is formed before the real market through information held, systematized and concentrated, in the form of desired which are to be satisfied.

In the new economy, the digital economy, in the disintermediation process, the online intermediaries play a crucial part in "photographing" the desires in the consumers' minds and the way of satisfying them and in identifying the products, brands and producers worldwide as well as the ways in which they reach consumers ensuring utilities of time, place, quantity and quality. From the market in the mind of the consumer attention shifts to the real movement in time and space of the products, with all their processes resource-intensive processes (material, human, financial and time), processes included in the sphere of distribution.

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