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RELATIONSHIPS OF RETAIL CHAINS WITH CUSTOMERS – GLOBAL APPROACH

Summary: The goal of the paper is to identify activities of global retail chains in the sphere of development of relationships with customers through indication of specific business practices. For the purpose of achievement of assumed goals the methods of analysis of the literature of the subject and case studies are applied, webpages of global retail chains are reviewed. Global retail chains operate in a very competitive environment, what makes them search for effectiveness. Relationship marketing is perceived by retail chains to be an important source of competitive advantage.

Keywords: relationship marketing, customers, retail chains, global market.

JEL Classification: M21, M31.

Introduction

The paper introduces the relationship marketing as a new marketing concept for retail enterprises. It ought to be mentioned that in world literature the application of relation marketing has only been started to be discussed recently because, according to the views of representatives of the Nordic School [Gummesson, 2004], it was not adjusted for the so-called marketing of packaged goods. It ought to be mentioned that powerful retail chains operating on global markets market implement of innovations based on application of new marketing tools and strategies focused on customers.

According to Ch. Grönroos's [2004] view, development of partnership marketing was associated with noticing the fact that possessing a permanent base of buyers who do shopping repeatedly is much cheaper than stimulating interests of new customers in the company offer. In conditions of growing competition, pro-

tection of own customer base is even more important [Grönroos, 2004, p. 8]. It ought to be added that people for whom acquisition of information and comparison of offers is simple, thanks to the access to the Internet and new technologies, constitute an increasingly more significant group of customers. The most important benefits resulting from the fact of adoption of the concept of partnership marketing by the enterprise include economic, social, and marketing benefits. Relationship marketing does not assume unrealistic altruism and kindness, and aims at ensuring optimal profits to an enterprise from investments made for formation of relationships [Egan, 2004, p. 34].

In practice, global operations of retail chains create bases of their customers and apply acquired knowledge to create competitive commercial offers. Application of information systems allowing for winning customers' loyalty on a large scale, such as CSR and communication via Internet, particularly social media, is the expression of adoption of orientation focussing on creation of relationships with customers [Bilińska-Reformat, Reformat, 2014, pp. 208-215].

1. Global retail sector – dynamics and characteristics

Retail chains have been perceived recently as key market players in national, international, and even global scale. Firstly, retail chains show the qualities of chain organisations and are defined as groups of entities of various scope of relationships and interactions between them (contract, financial) [Olesiński, 2010, pp. 88-89]. Because of relationships and the scale of operation, retail chains guarantee survival and strengthening of their position among competitors to the group, thanks to multidimensional cooperation relationships as well as focussing on key competences that are activated and applied in a coordinated way. Thereby, this makes it possible to share the chain resources as well as knowledge and relationship potential [Wyrwicka, 2003, p. 67].

It is also important that retail chains are organisations of global range, of supranational (transnational) ownership links, and financial as well as organisational, etc. relationships that function across national borders. According to J. Mittelmann [2000, p. 12], transnational organisations bring spatial reorganisation and penetration of industries across borders, interconnections of financial markets, technology diffusion and making norms, standards of sale and consumption styles similar across the world which is the expression of globalisation.

Retail chains encompass a wide variety of forms (shops, electronic commerce, open markets, etc.), formats (from medium – size shops to hypermar-

kets), products (food, non-food – apparel and accessories, hardliners and leisure goods, prescription and over-the-counter drugs, etc.), legal structures (franchises, integrated groups, etc.), locations, etc. Retail chains show an immense complexity. They also show diversity when financial issues are taken into consideration, like retail revenue growth and profitability or Q ratio – the ratio of a publicly traded company's market capitalization to the value of its tangible assets. If this ratio is greater than one, it means that financial market participants believe that part of a company's value comes from its non-tangible assets. These can include such things as: brand equity, differentiation, innovation, customer experience, market dominance, customer loyalty, and skilful execution. The higher the Q ratio, the greater share of a company's value that stems from such non-tangibles. According to 20th Global Powers of Retailing report presented by Deloitte, the 250 largest retailers were identified around the world based on publicly available data for fiscal year 2015 (encompassing companies' fiscal years ended through June 2016) and analyses their performance based on geographic region, primary product sector, e-commerce activity, and other factors [Deloitte Global Report, 2017]. The top 10 global retail chains are presented in Table 1.

Retail revenue for the Top 250 Global Powers of Retailing totalled almost US\$ 4.31 trillion in fiscal year 2015, an average size of over US\$17 billion per company. The world's four largest retailers maintained their positions on the industry's leader board in FY2015, but there are changes concerning the rest of the top 10. Wal-Mart continued its dominance as the world's largest retailer. Its revenue declined slightly in FY2015, due to unfavourable currency exchange rate fluctuations, and some store closures including the decision to shut its smaller Walmart Express chain. Walgreens and Alliance Boots completed merger in December 2014, creating Walgreens Boots Alliance, the world's fifth-largest retailer. The new global company is now comprised of Walgreens, the largest drugstore chain in the US; Boots, the market leader in European retail pharmacy, and Alliance Healthcare, the leading international wholesaler and distributor.

Table 1. The top 10 retailers worldwide

Top 250 rank	Name of the company	Country of origin	FY 2015 retail revenue (USSM)	FY 2015 retail revenue growth	Dominant operational format 2015	# of countries of operation	% retail revenue from foreign operations
1	Wal-Mart Stores Inc.	US	482.130	-0.7%	Hypermarket/ Supermarket Superstore	30	25.8%
2	Costco Wholesale Corporation	US	116.199	3.2%	Cash & Carry/ Warehouse Club	10	27.4%
3	The Kroger Co.	US	109.830	1.3%	Supermarket	1	0.0%
4	Schwarz Unternehmen -streuhand KG	Germany	94.448	8.1%	Discount store	26	61.3%
5	Walgreens Boots Alliance, Inc. (formerly Walgreen Co.)	US	89.631	17.3%	Drug Store/ Pharmacy	10	9.7%
6	The Home Depot Inc.	US	88.519	6.4%	Home Improvement	4	9.0%
7	Carrefour S.A.	France	84.856	3.1%	Hypermarket/ Supermarket Superstore	35	52.9%
8	Aldi Einkauf GmbH & Co. oHG	Germany	82.164 e	11.5%	Discount store	17	66.2%
9	Tesco PLC	UK	81.019	-12.7%	Hypermarket/ Supermarket Superstore	10	19.1%
10	Amazon.com, Inc.	US	79.268	13.1%	Non-Store	14	38.0%

Source: Based on: [Deloitte Global Report, 2017].

Amazon joined the top 10 leader board for the first time in 2015. The world's largest e-retailer was ranked 186th in 2000, when it first entered the Top 250. The company also ranked on the first position among Top 50 e-retailers.

As e-commerce becomes the key factor influencing retailers' growth, separate ranks are made for worldwide e-retailers. Analysing the e-commerce activity of the world's 250 largest retailers, it may be observed, that 12 of the e-50 are non-store or web-only retailers. For many Top 250 retailers, e-commerce is the primary driver of revenue growth. In FY2015, digital sales generated 35.3% of the combined retail revenue growth for the 151 companies with online operations (22.5% excluding Amazon, JD, and Vipshop). For 62 retailers, online sales

accounted for the majority of their growth, if not their only growth. The vast majority of the e-50 are based either in the United States (26 companies) or Europe (19 companies). The other five are emerging-market companies (four from China and one from Brazil). The top 10 e-retailers are presented in Table 2.

Table 2. Top 10 e-retailers

Top e-50 rank	Top 250 rank	Name of company	Country of origin	FY2015 e-commerce retail sales (US\$M)	FY2015 e-commerce retail sales % of total retail revenue	FY2015 e-commerce growth rate
1	10	Amazon.com Inc.	US	79.268	100.0%	13.1%
2	36	JD.com, Inc	China	26.991	100.0%	54.5%
3	33	Apple Inc.	US	24.368e	46.5%	18.2%
4	1	Wal-Mart Stores, Inc.	US	13.700	2.8%	12.3%
5	46	Suning Commerce Group Co., Ltd.	China	8.095e	37.1%	95.0%
6	92	Otto (GmbH & Co KG)	Germany	7.181	68.0%	0.5%
7	9	Tesco PLC	UK	6.539e	8.1%	9.0%
8	157	Vipshop Holdings Limited	China	6.084	100.0%	64.4%
9	97	Liberty Interactive Corporation	US	5.146	51.5%	-1.0%
10	35	Macy's, Inc.	US	4.850e	17.9%	n/a

Source: Based on: [Deloitte Global Report, 2017].

Consumers buy more and more goods online, traditional store-based retailers are under massive pressure to find new ways to grow. Rapid shifts in consumer shopping behaviour, driven by technological advances and changing preferences, are forcing companies to accelerate an omnichannel approach to the business – creating a more innovative retail environment where online and in-store shopping are a seamless experience for consumers. As a result, many store-based retailers are seeking to bolster their online reach and expand their e-commerce capabilities by acquiring web-only merchants and other e-commerce technologies.

Retailers act as a link between a multitude of upstream and downstream markets interacting with various entities (organizations' stakeholders). In the upstream markets, retailers often interact across borders with a wide range of players, in particular: wholesalers and suppliers, employees, commercial property services, transport companies, logistics services, providers of payment systems, advertising and marketing agencies, security companies, energy suppliers, and

waste collection and recycling services. To the extent that the retail sector determines customers' access to a wide choice of consumer goods, the operation of the retail market has a direct impact on the quality of life of citizens. It is thanks to the services provided by retailers that many customers have access to products from all over the world. Retailers can become a driving force in the adoption of sustainable growth paths thanks to their responsiveness to consumer behaviour and their interaction with customers.

Any developments in the retail sector thus automatically have knock-on effects in other economic sectors and on their respective actors. Therefore, due consideration should be given to potential impacts on the global retail supply chains [Retail Market Monitoring Report, 2010, p. 3].

2. Relationship marketing in retail

In general aspect, relationship is comprehended as interactions, connections and partnership among subjects or entities. Relationship in the economic context may be perceived as long term interactions with clients and other company's stakeholders when their aims may be achieved by mutual, beneficial exchange of values [Grönroos, 2004 p. 35]. Since their introduction in the 80's, "relationship", and the more managerial and normative "relationship marketing", have transitioned to central concepts in mainstream marketing [Vargo, 2009, p. 373], which is reflected in some of the representative definitions of relationship management presented in Table 3.

Table 3. Relations marketing – definitions

Author	The definition of relationship marketing
L.L. Berry [1983, p. 25]	"Relationship marketing is a strategy of attracting, maintaining and enhancing customer relationships"
R.M. Morgan and S.D. Hunt [1994, p. 22]	"Relationship marketing refers to all activities directed towards establishing, developing, and maintaining successful relational exchange"
E. Gummesson [2004, p. 136]	"Relationship marketing is marketing based on interaction within networks of relationships"
R.W. Palmatier [2008, p. 5]	"Relationship marketing is the process of identifying, developing, maintaining, and terminating relational exchanges with the purpose of enhancing performance"

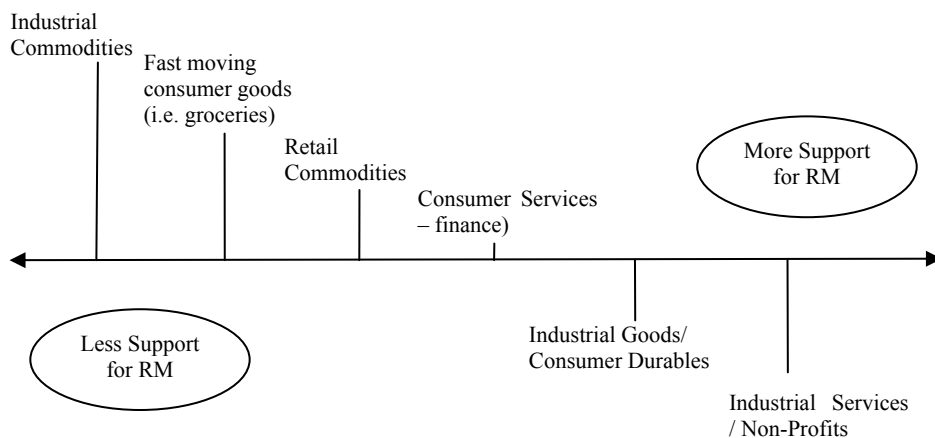
Studies on literature show that company's relationships may be perceived from different points of view, i.e. company's stakeholders, time when relationships are built and maintained (managed), market entity commencing relation-

ships, etc. A long-term perspective has become a dominant way of thinking for contemporary enterprises in terms of building relations among a company and its stakeholders, which is the opposite of traditional, „transactional” marketing, focused on a single transaction – a short-term relation.

A very important element of marketing strategies implemented by retail entities is establishing relationships with customers in general, and target market specifically. The major marketing challenges include finding the ways to gain new customers and maintain the present ones. The basic concept of their activity was based on using marketing instruments [Sullivan, Adcock, 2002]. However, due to significant changes in consumer behaviour, their importance has also changed.

The approach to the relationship marketing (RM) is different in different sectors. Coviello and Brodie [1998], based on Grönross [1991] proposed a continuum, showing the scope of RM support. It may be noticed, that in comparison to finance services, industrial goods and industrial services, the support for RM in retail is relatively smaller.

Figure 1. Continuum of support for the „cornerstone” RM proposition



Source: [Coviello, Brodie, 1998, p. 179].

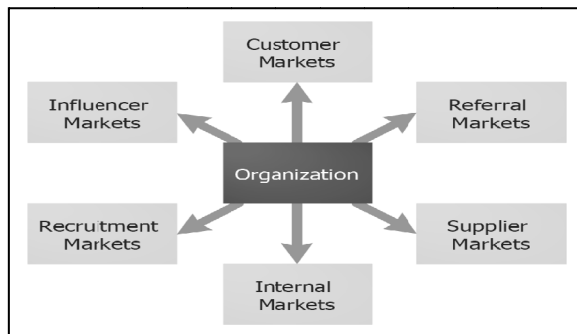
According to Kenyon and Vakola [2001, pp. 313-332], the high competitive nature of Polish retail sector makes a requirement for companies to estimate their strategies regarding relationships in order to win the competitive advantage. For instance, the loyalty strategies of many retailers (Tesco, Auchan, Carrefour) are examples of using one-to-one relationship marketing strategies. These strategies are based on maximizing the value of customers, creating marketing knowl-

edge about individual customers, building own brands and using CRM [Maklan, Knox, Peppard, 2007, p. 6]. It may be summed up stated that customer satisfaction and their positive attitudes in general are important drivers in achieving marketing success [Cooil et al., 2007].

Relationships may be commenced by a company, which is the most common case, but also by a market subject, a customer for example. This is a very specific situation that takes place when customers are the party initiating a contact with the company or other company's customers, called Customer Citizenship Behaviour. This behaviour may be described as discretionary and prosocial actions displayed by customers that benefit both the companies and, usually, other customers as well [see: Groth, 2005; Bove et al., 2009].

From the point of view of the entities that an enterprise establishes certain relationships with, the model of six markets can be indicated as an example in which major current, and potential relationships partners occur. This model is presented in Figure 2.

Figure 2. The six markets model



Source: [Christopher, Payne, Ballantyne, 2002, p. 109].

Operations concerning relationship management can be indicated in relation with each of indicated markets. Table 4 presents areas of operations associated with marketing management of relationships with reference to retail trade on each of the aforementioned markets.

Table 4. Marketing actions of retail chains referred to the six markets model

Market type	Actions associated with marketing management	Range of application by retail chains
Customer market	According to the concept of relationship marketing, marketing actions of enterprises ought to be focused on establishment of durable relationships with customers. Currently, customers constitute one of the most important groups of enterprise stakeholders	Actions in this sphere are reflected in creation of numerous loyalty programs by retail chains, application of such programs as CRS in management of knowledge about customers, conducting customer segmentation by retail chains, etc.
Referral market	Intermediaries, including distributors, branch offices, and agencies are market entities that ought to be taken into consideration as potential sources that affect improvement in company turnover and profitability	Retail chains show significant activity in acquisition of a positive image through application of social networking media, implementation of CSR for the purpose of establishment of a positive image in the environment
Supplier market	Suppliers constitute an important entity for an enterprise. This is because relationships with suppliers can be translated into relationships with customers in the sphere of value offered to buyers, quality, business ethics, etc.	Far-reaching integration of actions with suppliers and including them in marketing programs can be observed in particular chains. Creation of own brands or implementation of “fair trade” concept can be examples here
Recruitment market	Workers currently constitute one of the key resources of each organisation. Actions aiming at recruitment of workers with appropriate qualifications are necessary. Companies must design effective and attractive job offers and direct them at potential workers	There are examples of retail chains that care about development of relationships with the market of current and potential workers. Contact with employment offices that constitute a source of workforce for chain is an important strategic operation
Influencer market	They are government and financial institutions, journalists, institutions of normalisation and standardisation, consumer associations, institutions of environment protection, etc. Cooperation with these institutions, influencing them, and in some cases joining their actions, may be considerably important not only for protection of basic activity of an enterprise, but also for formation of its image	In the case of retail chains, municipalities in the areas of which commercial outposts are located, also organisations controlling chains, such as: sanitary services (Sanepid), State Trade Inspection Offices (Urząd Inspekcji Handlowej), organisations protecting consumers’ and workers’ rights, and various types of media that can affect shaping the image of retail chains are such influential institutions
Internal market	Importance of internal marketing results from the assumption that every worker and every company department are at the same time internal customers and external suppliers. Company operations are effective if every worker or department both provide, but also receive services of the highest quality. The goal of internal marketing is to stimulate the company workers in such a way that they represent the company in the best way through EVP – Employee Value Proposition in all contacts with customers	They are workers of retail chains. These workers significantly influence the shaping of chain image in the environment

Source: [Bilińska-Reformat, 2015, p. 62; Dewalska-Opitek, Bilińska-Reformat, 2016, p. 156].

As it was presented on Figure 2 and in Table 4, there are six markets, i.e. six company stakeholders to build and maintain bonds with. Nevertheless, customers seem to be the key subjects for contemporary, customer-oriented companies. The idea of creating a relationship with customers based on quality, dialogue, innovation, and learning is regarded as a more sustainable strategy and could be seen as largely inimitable by competitors – in essence, a strategy that could create a long-term competitive advantage. That paradigm still holds today [Ngunjen, Mutum, 2012, p. 401].

3. Relationship management of global retail chains with customers – contemporary trends

In order to examine trends in customer relationship management of global retailers, the research was conducted among nine thousand managers of retailers operating in 211 markets around the world. The research was conducted in the Fall of 2016 [PwC Report, 2017].

According to PwC Report [2017], global retailers shall take into consideration four main trends in customer relationship, which are:

- Trend 1: A visible change in customers' buying behaviours: from rampant consumption towards intentional one.
- Trend 2: "Retailization" of the world.
- Trend 3: Changing retail format towards on-demand and convenient sales.
- Trend 4: Exponential technologies are key drivers of changes in the way the customers live and shop.

Contemporary customers are more and more conscious of what they buy, moving from mass-produced goods towards "tailor-made" ones – products that reflect the personal brand customers promote on social media. This means decreased share of wallet on non-durable and durable goods (particularly apparel), as well as declining foot traffic at mass retailers and department stores. This causes a shift away from traditional business model, built on customers buying more frequently at a lower price to buying less often but more exclusive goods bought. "Fewer, better things" is the slogan for Cuyana, a San Francisco based e-commerce retailer which has found a market niche by selling customers high-quality, craftsman-made goods. Also traditional fast-fashion retailer H&M is responding to that trend by launching programs like "H&M Conscious" which will debut a new conscious exclusive collection of high-end, environmentally friendly clothes at higher prices. What is also important for customers, the pur-

chased products should be „Instagrammable“ – easily hashtagged and presented on social media. Retailers that can deliver this value to customers will likely get and maintain loyalty of customers.

In recent years, it was easy to define a retailer as an business entity buying and selling goods, either in store or online. The maker movement as well as the sharing economy have made it difficult what a retailer is and does. Customers exchange goods, services, and information and play an important role in delivering values to other market entities. It is predicted that in 2017 and beyond market fragmentation in retail space will continue to grow.

Another noticeable trend in building and managing retailers' relationships with their customers is to fulfil the requirement of on-demand and convenient sale delivered to customers. The on-demand economy is large, and getting larger. Economic activities centered around online platforms, where independent sellers can offer goods or services to customers, are attracting significant consumer attention and spending. The largest categories of on-demand spending are online marketplaces (e.g. eBay), transportation (e.g. Uber, Lyft) followed by food/grocery delivery (e.g. AmazonFresh or Carrefour's one-hour delivery service).

The final trend is the arrival of exponential technologies like: artificial intelligence, robotics, sensors, and virtual reality. These technologies are no longer futuristic. The most innovative retailers are already using them to enhance interactions with customers. For example, Lowe's is using OSHbot retail service robots in its Orchard Supply Hardware stores. The robot greets customers in English and Spanish, can scan products to determine whether the store has the item in stock and guides customers to products through store navigation capabilities. eBay, in partnership with Australian retailer Myer, has created the world's first virtual reality department store. Using eBay Sight Search, consumers can explore over 12.500 products from Myer, access real-time price and product information, and add selected items to their basket.

The impact of technology is not limited to the in-store experience. Exponentials are changing how customers live and how they will shop. Unmanned cars will allow smaller or hyper-local retailers to afford personal, same-day deliveries. They will also have impacts to the customers' journeys. The same impacts can be expected from the wide-scale adoption of augmented reality, 3D printing, holograms, and other technologies.

Conclusions

What may be observed in the contemporary market is the increasing complexity of relationships of retailers with their stakeholders. Customers seem to be the crucial subjects, determining the company's growth of sales, revenues, development, and even sometimes survival in the turbulent global environment.

On the basis of PwC Report [2017], four main trends in customer relationships of global retailers were identified to be determining their marketing actions. Customers appreciate more intentional consumption of goods and services that reflect their personal brand on social media. The concept of sharing economy enhances the "retailization" of the world by collaborative consumption and other forms of customer citizenship behaviours observed in the contemporary market. Relevancy will also be determined by the ability of retailers to meet the on-demand mindset of the customers. But one of the most important trends identified by Deloitte is the arrival and implementation of exponential technologies as key drivers of changes in the way customers live and shop.

The trends in customer relationship discussed in the paper are of general nature. A focus shall be put on geographical diversification and dispersion of customer behaviour patterns and thus, marketing actions of retailers managing their customer relations in different national or regional markets. This, however, indicates the future field of study.

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RELACJE SIECI HANDLU DETALICZNEGO Z KLIENTAMI W UJĘCIU GLOBALNYM

Streszczenie: Celem artykułu jest przedstawienie marketingu relacyjnego jako ważnego źródła budowy przewagi konkurencyjnej globalnych sieci handlowych. Sieci te, stosując marketing relacji, budują trwałe powiązania ze swoimi rynkami docelowymi i w coraz szerszym zakresie wykorzystują koncepcje marketingu relacji w praktykach swojego działania. W artykule posłużono się metodą analizy literatury przedmiotu, stron internetowych badanych sieci oraz opisem konkretnych działań sieci handlowych w zakresie wykorzystania marketingu relacji w oddziaływaniu na klientów.

Słowa kluczowe: marketing relacji, klient, sieci handlowe, rynki globalne.