

THE ASSESSMENT OF PREVIOUS RELATIONSHIPS WITH OFFERORS VS THEIR PERCEPTION AS INITIATORS OF THE PROSUMER ACTIVITY OF FINAL PURCHASERS

Agnieszka Izabela BARUK

Lodz University of Technology, Łódź; agnieszka.baruk@poczta.onet.pl, ORCID: 0000-0003-2864-509X

Abstract: The article aims to determine the significance of purchasers' assessments of previous relationships with offerors towards the way offerors are perceived as initiators of prosumer activity. It is of a theoretical and empirical nature. For the theoretical aspect, the world's literature on the subject was cognitively and critically analysed. The results of the analysis identified a cognitive and research gap regarding the assessment of previous relationships with offerors in terms of its effect on the perception of offerors as initiators of the prosumer activity of final purchasers. In order to reduce the gap, empirical research was conducted through a questionnaire to gather primary data. This data was subjected to statistical analysis, and the results of this indicated a statistically significant dependence between the perception of offerors as initiators of prosumer activity and the way previous relationships are perceived for producers and traders. The perception of offerors as initiators of prosumer activity statistically significantly differentiated the assessment of previous relationships with producers and traders. Both research hypotheses were found to be valid.

Keywords: offeror, final purchaser, relationships, prosumer activity.

1. Introduction

The contemporary consumer market can be regarded as a system that dynamically (Firat, Dholakia, 2006) forms relationships between its participants (Grubor, Marić, 2015), who are mainly offerors and final purchasers. Relationships between offerors and final purchasers may be formed over different time zones, different psychological distances, and with different intensities. The relationships are affected by previous experience gained between offerors and purchasers, previous experience gained with other entities, and current expectations. Purchase experience (Pantano, Priporas, 2016) and extra-purchase experience acquired by a final purchaser in the past are, therefore, of great importance for current and potential future attitude and market behaviour. This experience enables final purchasers to become aware of their own

market power (Simonson, Rosen, 2014) and allows final purchasers to create a particular perception of other entities, which forms the image of these entities.

In terms of market relationships, this mechanism is particularly important in relation to offerors. Positive attitudes towards an offeror contribute to the creation of a positive image, whereas a negative attitude generates a rather negative image. In practice, establishing and strengthening cooperation between offerors and purchasers is possible only with positive attitudes. The good perception of an offeror results from being considered trustworthy (Singh, Iglesias, Batista-Foguet, 2012). This is a prerequisite for cooperation. It can, hence, be concluded that the foundation for the joint creation of any values (Vargo, Maglio, Akaka, 2008) is a relationship that meets the expectations of final purchasers.

Obviously, not all contemporary purchasers want to go beyond the typical range of purchase behaviour within their market behaviour (Billows, McNeill, 2018), but even then, a positive assessment of a relationship with an offeror contributes to stimulating the purchase behaviours the offeror desires. For purchasers who want to become more involved in the functioning of the market, the assessment of existing relationships with other entities, especially with offerors, is extremely important. It is an incentive to undertake communicative and creative behaviours, the effects of which may be beneficial for both parties or at least desirable by one of them, usually the offeror.

The basis for modern concepts of management and marketing is the joint creation of material and/or immaterial values (Saarijärvi, Kannan, Kuusela, 2013; Ramaswamy, Gouillart, 2010). In order to achieve this, offerors need to show particular care towards shaping relationships in which a purchaser is not only the recipient, but also becomes the partner and co-creator of a widely understood marketing offer. This requires offerors to create appropriate conditions for purchasers to manifest their marketing potential of becoming active purchasers, i.e. prosumers (Gabriel, Lang, 2006; Ridell, 2013). This potential may contribute to increasing the potential of an offeror and the marketing competences of prosumers by meeting their expectations related to participation in creating values important for other entities (Grönroos, Voima, 2013) such as deepening knowledge, fulfilling their aspirations, etc.

The expression of knowledge, abilities, skills, etc. by active purchasers can be either spontaneous, inspired by offerors, or a combination of both. However, for a purchaser to become an active purchaser, an offeror needs to change their approach to mutual relationships and change from the traditional role of a supplier to a co-creator of values (Ramaswamy, Gouillart, 2010) that works with active purchasers. As part of this, offerors should, among other things, play the sub-role of initiator of purchaser activity, leading to effective encouragement of purchasers to cooperate.

It should be emphasized that in the literature on the subject, the relationship and image-related aspects for cooperation between active purchasers and offerors have so far not been analysed together. Therefore, there is still a relatively insufficient level of knowledge about the involvement of purchasers in cooperation with other entities, which has also been noticed in

other research (inter alia Martínez-Cañas, et al. 2016). These aspects have also not been addressed with regard to producers, service providers and traders. The focus has been placed mainly on a much narrower subject range, such as the stages of the purchase process (Gensler, Verhoef, Bohm, 2012), the scope of purchase activity (Chatterjee, 2010), the scope of prosumer activity (Dujarier, 2015), the determinants of purchase behaviour (Fianto, et al., 2014; Yogesh, Yesha, 2014; Hussein, Atwah, 2018; Hanaysha, 2018), behavioural loyalty and/or post-purchase satisfaction (Haverila, 2012; Leahy, 2011; Deng, Lu, Wei, Zhang, 2010) etc. Based on the results of the cognitive and critical analysis of the literature on the subject, one can, therefore, talk about a cognitive and research gap in this area.

Thus, it seems important to determine the significance of purchasers' assessments of previous relationships with offerors towards the way offerors are perceived as initiators of prosumer activity of final purchasers. This was the main goal of this article. During its realization, the following specific goals were to be achieved:

G1: identify the way respondents assess previous relationships with offerors,

G2: identify the perception of offerors as initiators of the prosumer activity of final purchasers,

G3: determine whether there are statistically significant dependences between the assessment of previous relationships with offerors and the perception of offerors as initiators of prosumer activity,

G4: determine whether the perception of offerors as initiators of the prosumer activity of final purchasers affects the assessment of previous relationships with offerors.

In order to accomplish these objectives, an attempt was made to verify the following two research hypotheses:

H1: There is dependence between the way of assessing previous relationships with offerors and the perception of offerors as initiators of the prosumer activity of final purchasers.

H2: The perception of offerors as initiators of the prosumer activity of final purchasers affects the assessment of previous relationships with offerors.

2. Characteristics of empirical research

In order to achieve the research objectives and verify the hypotheses, primary data was collected as part of the research project 2013/11/B/HS4/00430 financed by the National Science Centre. The proper research was carried out in the third quarter of 2015 and questionnaires were sent to 1200 Polish adult final purchasers. 1012 correctly completed questionnaires qualified for statistical analysis. Herein, 61% of the study population were women. Non-random selection of the test sample was then applied. According to M. Szreder (2010), it is not always necessary to apply random selection, and more and more often non-random selection can even be treated

as an opportunity for a researcher. The research was direct in nature, requiring an interviewer's personal contact with respondents. This made it possible to obtain a high return rate of completed questionnaires.

The primary data collected in the proper research was used to determine eigenvalues, as well as conduct cross-analysis and statistical analysis by means of the Pearson chi-square independence test, the V-Cramer contingency ratio, and the Kruskal-Wallis (KW) test. The Pearson chi-square test was used to determine whether there were dependencies between the analysed variables, and the V-Cramer ratio was applied to determine the strength of dependencies between the analysed variables.

The Kruskal-Wallis test assessed whether the diversity in terms of separating individual groups (e.g. opinions of respondents) is statistically significant enough to be able to say that the respondents' opinion determined by the analysed response is significantly different. This test is a non-parametric equivalent of ANOVA.

The data do not have to meet many statistical requirements for the KW test. In order to carry out the KW test, the following factors should be met (Ostertagova, Ostertag, Kovač, 2014):

- the dependent variable should be measured at least on an ordinal scale (it can also be measured on a quantitative scale),
- observations in the analysed groups should be independent of each other, which means that a person in one group should not be included in another group (this requirement is met by dichotomous and single-choice questions).

The KW test, as a non-parametric counterpart of a one-factor ANOVA, is therefore used when the data does not meet the requirements for similar parametric tests and the data can be ordered according to specific criteria. The test checks whether the number of independent results from a group come from the same population or from a population with the same median. Individual samples do not have to be of the same number. The input data is an n-element statistical sample divided into 'k' disjointed groups with numbers ranging from n_1 to n_k .

The test is interpreted by comparing the value of 'p' with the assumed level of significance (usually 0.05) or by analysing the test's statistical value in case it is necessary to assess the "power/intensity" differences between groups. High values of test statistics indicate differentiation in particular groups (i.e. against the equality hypothesis in particular groups), and the higher the values are, the greater the diversity.

Statistical analysis of the primary data collected from the questionnaires was done using the Statistica 8.0 package.

3. Research results

The results of the conducted research indicate that the majority of respondents assessed previous relationships with each of the three analysed types of offerors as at least good (Table 1). Relationships with traders and service providers were rated relatively better than those with producers. This is confirmed by 10% less respondents assessing previous relationships with producers as being good or very good compared with the percentage of respondents giving these grades to traders and service providers, as well as a much larger total percentage of bad and very bad opinions about previous relationships with producers. However, one cannot overlook the fact that in total, almost every third respondent badly assessed previous relationships with producers and almost every third respondent badly assessed previous relationships with traders and service-providers. This percentage is so large that one can draw a conclusion about dysfunctions in shaping relationships between purchasers and offerors, regardless of the type of offeror. The dysfunctions are relatively the largest for producers, where the average grade given for previous relationships was the smallest. However, the average grade was not more than the limit of 3.00 for any type of offeror, despite the use of a four-level Likert scale. The obtained results therefore indicate that respondents' expectations regarding relationships with offerors were not met in the past.

Table 1.

Respondents' assessment of their previous relationships with offerors (%)

Relationships	4	3	4 + 3	2	1	2 + 1	Average grade
with producers	9.38	60.91	70.29	26.06	3.55	29.61	2.76
with traders	12.64	69.20	81.84	15.20	2.86	18.06	2.92
with service-providers	16.58	63.87	80.45	17.18	2.27	19.45	2.95

where: 4 – very good; 3 – good; 2 – bad; 1 – very bad

Source: own study based on research results.

According to the conducted research, the majority of respondents did not perceive offerors as initiators of the prosumer activity of final purchasers. As many as 68.9% of respondents believed that offerors (regardless of type) did not take actions that would effectively encourage final purchasers to cooperate in the process of creating a marketing offer. For producers and traders, a greater majority of respondents who did not consider that the offeror initiated prosumer activity also negatively assessed their previous relationships, in comparison with respondents who considered offerors as initiators of purchaser activity (Table 2). Only for service providers, a slightly larger percentage of respondents who considered that they initiated prosumer activity negatively assessed previous relationships with them, in comparison with the percentage of respondents who considered that they did not initiate prosumer activity. Moreover, the conclusion that previous relationships with producers were assessed the worst was confirmed. These results suggest that there is dependence between the assessment of previous relationships with offerors and the perception of offerors as initiators of prosumer

activity. However, it needs to be determined whether this dependence really exists and whether the dependence is statistically significant.

Table 2.

Assessment of previous relationships with offerors and the perception of offerors as the initiators of prosumer activity

Assessment of previous relationships		Did offeror encourage cooperation in the preparation of an offer?			
		yes		no	
with producers	very bad	1.9	24.8	4.3	32.0
	bad	22.9		27.7	
	good	62.2	75.2	60.3	68.0
	very good	13.0		7.7	
with traders	very bad	2.2	12.0	3.2	20.7
	bad	9.8		17.5	
	good	72.1	88.0	68.1	79.3
	very good	15.9		11.2	
with service-providers	very bad	2.9	20.4	2.0	19.2
	bad	17.5		17.2	
	good	59.0	79.6	66.0	80.8
	very good	20.6		14.8	

Source: own study based on research results.

As can be seen from Table 3, a statistically significant dependence between the aforementioned variables exists for producers and traders. However, a dependence was not identified for service providers, with whom relationships were assessed relatively the best (Table 1). The significance level 'p' exceeded the accepted limit value of 0.05 for this group of offerors. Hypothesis H1 is, therefore, valid for producers and traders.

Table 3.

Dependencies between respondents' assessments of previous relationships with offerors and perceptions of offerors as initiators of prosumer activity

Analysed variable	Chi-square test value	V-Cramer co-efficient value	Level of significance 'p'
Relationships with producers	11.985	0.109	0.007
Relationships with traders	13.594	0.116	0.004
Relationships with service-providers	6.889	0.082	0.076

Source: own study based on research results.

In the last stage of the analysis, it was ascertained whether the variable regarding the perception of offerors as initiators of prosumer activity is a feature that differentiates respondents' assessments of previous relationships with particular groups of offerors. The results of the KW test indicate that there are statistically significant differences for producers and traders, i.e. the groups of offerors for whom statistically significant dependence between the analysed variables was identified (Table 4).

Table 4.

Analysis of differences between respondents' assessments of previous relationships with offerors and perceptions of offerors as initiators of prosumer activity

Analysed variable	Did offeror encourage cooperation in the preparation of an offer?	Kruskal-Wallis test value	Level of significance 'p'
Relationships with producers	yes	544.27	0.002
	no	490.18	
Relationships with traders	yes	546.71	0.000
	no	489.08	
Relationships with service-providers	yes	519.75	0.275
	no	501.24	

Source: own study based on research results.

Hypothesis H2 is, therefore, valid for producers and traders. It is worth adding that the diversity is relatively greater for producers than traders.

4. Conclusions

As can be seen from the considerations presented above, the majority of respondents assessed previous relationships with offerors as at least good, although previous relationships were assessed relatively the worst for producers. For producers and traders, among the respondents who considered that offerors initiated prosumer activity, in total the majority assessed previous relationships as good or very good, whereas for service-providers, a slightly higher percentage of respondents who positively assessed their previous relationships considered that the offeror had not initiated prosumer activity. Therefore, it should not be surprising that a statistically significant dependence between the assessment of previous relationships with offerors and the perception of them as initiators of prosumer activity was not identified only for this type of offeror. A statistically significant dependence was also found for producers and traders, although it was weak. For producers and traders, there is a statistically significant differentiation of assessments regarding previous relationships with them and the way they are perceived as initiators of prosumer activity. Both research hypotheses were thus found to be valid for producers and traders, and not valid for service-providers.

The conclusions drawn from the research results facilitate establishing and strengthening mutually beneficial relationships between offerors and final purchasers, by offerors' initiating prosumer activity in a way considered to be effective by purchasers. Obviously, the conducted research has some limitations, including its subjective scope (only adults), geographical scope (only Polish final purchasers), and objective scope (only selected relationship- and image-related aspects of functioning on the contemporary consumer market by purchasers and offerors). Future research is planned, and this will eliminate these limitations by including people under 18 years of age, final purchasers from countries other than Poland, and other aspects of relationships between purchasers and offerors than those analysed in this article.

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