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## Social Relations and Environmental Influence as a Determinant of Customer Capital

**JEL Classification:** *A11; A14; B16*

**Keywords:** *customer; customer capital; company value; business relationships*

**Abstract:** *The article presents the influence of feedback and recommendations provided by the customers on the customer purchase behaviour along with the benefits resulting from the use of the customer feedback potential in the process of company value creation. On the basis of survey conducted on the beer market in Poland, it was demonstrated that the customer feedback and recommendations have a significant influence on the purchase behaviour and allow for cost reduction of customer communication. In the analysis of the results, statistical methods were used, including focus analysis, ANOVA test and factor analysis.*

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## Introduction

An unquestionable consequence of the changes taking place in the business environment is the intensification of competitive struggle, which, in the conditions of increasing demand barrier, comes to a struggle for a customer. In the struggle, the winning company is the one which creates a distinguishing customer value. Such value, remaining in a relation with changing customer needs, has a subjective and dynamic character, which from the business perspective means not only a necessity of “listening” to the customer and defining the value proposal, and then building the structure of operational processes on this basis, but also creating such customer relationship that enables customer engagement in the process of value creation.

An effect of such relation is, among others: a possibility to improve the process of value creation systematically, obtain more customers, reducing the risk of resources engagement in activities that do not generate value, business innovativeness increase or building confidence and corporate reputation, which affects revenues, costs and the risk of the activity conducted in a positive way. From the perspective of achieving corporate goals, it means a necessity to step away from passive perception in favour of active perception of the customer significance and role in the contemporary processes of value creation. The customer, as an active participant of market game, may generate own knowledge resources of the company thanks to using own knowledge. He or she may also become a reporter of the value offered by the company to other customers, using the contacts and relationships that he or she establishes in his or her environment every day. For the needs of this work it was assumed that the customer environment consists of all the subjects that the customer exchanges information with, even though the exchange takes place among the anonymous subjects and has a periodical, random, formal and informal character. On the other hand, the customer environment, being the element of the whole environment, is formed by a relatively coherent group of people that the customer most often maintains more permanent or less permanent social relationship with what affects his or her: development, behaviour and activity.

The foundation of the relationship, in which the customer becomes an active participant of exchange, is customer’s emotional engagement, which finds its reflection in, among others, launching a one-way or two-way information transfer. Regardless of the fact whether this transfer takes place inside the customer group or between the customer and tenderer, it may result in capital supply for the company, having its final reflection in the customer capital. This capital, when expressing the economic customer

value, most often comes down to the value of generated net cash flow that the company obtains in the customer life cycle.

In the conditions of supply surplus over demand, increasing significance of the Internet in taking purchase decisions by the customer and growing customer requirements that remain in a relation with the level of education, in the process of customer capital creation the greater significance is ascribed to feedback and recommendations provided by the customers. However, it should be emphasized that the potential of this message remains in a relation with the amount of feedback, as well as with the power of information transfer. This means that it depends on both customer's readiness and the ability to launch the information transfer, as well as recipient's readiness and ability to use the information.

Nevertheless, these variables depend on the company itself to a great extent, as it creates its image through the development of customer relationship. The image may encourage or discourage the willingness of transferring and using the information obtained (Aarikka-Stenroos & Sakari Makonen, 2014). Therefore, the questions seem justified:

- do relationships, maintained by the customer in his or her environment, have influence on taking purchase decisions?
- can the customer feedback potential be used in the process of company value creation?

The basic objective of the article is to indicate the significance of recommendations and feedback provided by the customers in the process of taking purchase decisions and customer capital creation.

In order to achieve the objective stated in this way, it was assumed that the opinions given by the customers, as well as the impact of the group that the customer maintains the social relations with, determine his or her purchase decisions and have influence on the level of the costs of customer communication.

### **Methodology of the Research**

The necessity to use the customer feedback potential is more and more often noticed not only by the companies functioning in the service industry but also by the manufacturing enterprises (Tomczak & Rudolf-Sipötz, 2003 p. 145; Caputa, 2015, pp. 181-240). It refers to the subjects that have a sufficient production potential at their disposal and conduct their activity on a diminishing market in which the number of tenderers is increasing. Beer market in Poland is an example of such market. In order to gain consumers, the breweries face the necessity to extend their offer continuously, further-

more, to reduce the cost of customer satisfaction, and also to improve the effectiveness and efficiency of customer communication. In the light of the decreasing effectiveness of advertising, increasing possibilities, and increasing difficulties of the conscious product choice following it, the importance of interpersonal transfer is growing, moreover, the customer purchase decisions are more often made on the grounds of the knowledge increase about the company and its offer, which the consumer may communicate in a reliable way.

Taking the above into account, the verification of the hypothesis was based on the survey conducted on a sample of 800 adult beer consumers. The acceptable statistical error of the research sample equalled no more than  $\pm 5\%$  with the confidence coefficient  $p=0.99$ . On this basis, the objective and subjective factors determining the consumer purchase behaviour were identified, taking into consideration the criterion of the tenderer. 12 variables that characterize the customer value proposition were estimated by the consumers using 5-level Likert scale. These variables describe the basic components of customer capital, referring to the value perceived by the customer: offer, brand and relationship. The results achieved were subjected to focus analysis and factor analysis. In order to determine the number of main factors a scree test was used, as well as the method of the percentage of variance explained by those factors. In order to examine the differentiation of the ranks of variables determining the choices of the consumer, the ANOVA test was used.

When examining the relation between the choice of the products offered by the analysed tenderers and information transfer, the Chi-squared test was performed. Additionally, the analysis of intensity and effectiveness of advertising activities conducted by the tenderers during EURO 2012 was performed, including the customer readiness and the tendency to provide feedback and recommendations, as well as the prestige of the tenderer.

### **The Determinants of the Customer Feedback Potential**

In the contemporary management conditions the creation of the company value, for which the most objective measure is the value of generated cash flow, is to a great extent dependent on the relationships with the subjects of the environment that the company established. In the network of those relationships, the customer relationships gain fundamental significance, and their value is reflected by the customer capital (Kumar & Reinartz, 2006).

This capital is a derivative of the direct and indirect capital supply acquired by the company during the period of maintaining customer relationship. The former is a result of the transactional customer relationship. On the other hand, the indirect supply is a derivative of a one- or two-way information transfer, which may take place both between the customer and the company, as well as among the customers (Steck, 2003, pp. 109-131; von Wangenheim, 2003, p. 34). In effect, the value of customer capital is determined by the customer market and resource potential, which remains in a direct connection with the profitability and the duration of those relationships (Caputa, 2015, pp. 129-163).

Undoubtedly, providing of the customer value lies at the bases of the creation of customer relationship, regardless of duration. This value, even though it is not uniformly defined, is tied to the advantages identified by the customer due to the product purchase, ownership and usage (Vogel, 2006, pp. 15-16; Piercy, 2003, p. 53; Szymura-Tyc, 2003). Those advantages are of multidimensional character and their identification should be connected with the tasks set by the customer to be performed in the particular conditions (Caputa, 2013). These tasks can be of functional character, which means that they focus on the essence of the product (e.g. fulfilment of the desire) and of emotional character in which they are most often tied to personal tasks (sensation of success) or social tasks (distinction in the eyes of others) (Ulwick, 2009, p. 57). As a result, the customer value is the reflection of the sum of advantages expected by the customer in return for the price paid for the product which is bought in the particular conditions of exchange.

Taking into consideration the changes occurring in the business environment, including changes in the customer attitudes, expectations and behaviours, it should be recognized that the substance of this product is created by knowledge, competencies and skills of the organization, which need to be systematically developed so that the product may find such a user who will choose it from many others offered on the market and will be willing to pay for it. In the customer's opinion, such a product should comprehensively solve the '*customer's problems*'. On the other hand, in the company's opinion, it should make it possible to: acquire above-average advantages, reduce '*empty*' actions and the risk of customer leaving, as well as to launch synergy effects stemming from the enrichment of the company's competencies with the customer's competencies in the process of company value creation (Caputa, 2008, pp. 165-167; Jonek-Kowalska, 2007, pp. 117-133) Therefore, if the company wants to maximize the advantages coming from the engaged capital and wants to generate it in the long period of time, it has to create such customer relationship, in which the

customer is not only a passive recipient of the product but also a supplier of knowledge as well as a subject communicating the value created by the company to other participants of the market game (Prahalad & Ramaswamy, 2000, p. 80; Szymura – Tyc, 2006, p. 160; Rudawska, 2005, pp. 178-190)

When the customer takes the role of an active participant of the exchange, he or she launches own competency resources, as well as uses knowledge of the company, what may contribute to:

- probability increase of maintaining a continuous capital supply for the company,
- reducing the scale of activities that do not generate the customer value, what results in cost reduction,
- decreasing the risk concerning wrong offer adjustment to the customer requirements,
- increasing engagement and confidence in the company, through inclusion of e.g. customer propositions and suggestions,
- risk and uncertainty reduction of own innovation process,
- shortening the time from the moment of starting the works on the product until the moment of product launch on the market,
- increasing the innovativeness degree of the product, perceived by the customer, what enables rising the price accepted by the customer,
- increasing the positive attitude of the buyer towards the products, what allows establishing the customer relationship based on loyalty, which is a guarantee of a continuous capital supply for the company (Caputa, 2015, pp. 141- 163).

All of the above translates positively into the value of revenues gained, cost borne and risk of the activity conducted, and also into the company value at the same time.

In the conditions of: overproduction, unrestricted possibilities of transferring and acquiring information, which are accompanied by the rise in the information overload, as well as of the increasing significance of knowledge about the company and its products in making purchase decisions, interpersonal communication becomes particularly significant (Meyer & Davidson, 2001, p. 679). The effect of the communication, from the perspective of meeting the company goals, is reflected in the value of feedback and recommendations provided by the customer, the measure of which is, among others: increase in the number of customers gained, reduction of the costs of gaining them, reduction of the risk of engaged capital or increase of the confidence in the company and its reputation, which are the effects of creating the feedback circle (Rudolf-Sipötz, 2001, pp. 111-113; Rau, 2009, p. 40; Caputa, 2011)

The achievement of those effects depends on the individual activity and the strength of the influence of both the suppliers, as well the recipients of feedback. This is determined by satisfaction (or lack thereof), engagement, customer confidence, as well as the network of social relationships, which the supplier and recipient of feedback establish in the environment (Fridriechs-Schmidt, 2006; Cornelsen, 2000, p. 199).

### **Parameters of Consumer Decisions on the Beer Market in Poland**

When analysing the possibility of using the customer feedback potential in forming the customer capital, firstly the question should be asked whether the opinions and recommendations are significant parameters determining the customer purchase behaviour. Answering such question was based on the survey mentioned in the methodological part, in which twelve variables characterizing the customer value proposal were subject to the assessment of respondents in the context of their importance in the process of taking purchase decisions, including the criterion of tenderer at the same time (Table 1)

**Table . 1** Determinants of purchase decisions of beer consumers in Poland

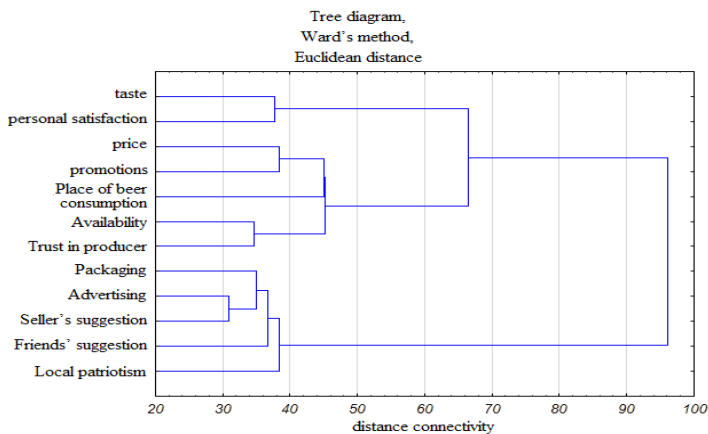
<b>Influence of the particular factors of deciding significance when choosing the particular brand of beer</b>							
Factor	Total	ŻG	KP	CP	OC	ANOVA test	ANOVA test
Taste	4.74	4.71	4.80	4.70	5.00	NS	NS
Personal satisfaction	3.94	3.87	4.02	3.85	4.13	NS	NS
Confidence in producer	3.29	3.39	3.40	3.03	2.88	0.0233	0.0401
Availability	3.26	3.26	3.38	3.15	3.13	NS	NS
Place of beer consumption	3.26	3.28	3.28	3.17	3.25	NS	NS
Price	3.21	3.23	3.23	3.21	3.50	NS	NS
Promotion	2.72	2.83	2.72	2.74	1.50	NS	0.047
Friends' suggestions	2.71	2.72	2.68	2.69	3.25	NS	NS
Package	2.46	2.53	2.50	2.27	2.63	NS	NS
Advertising	2.21	2.28	2.21	2.23	1.13	NS	0.0316
Local patriotism	2.17	2.30	2.14	1.81	2.25	0.0023	0.0067
Seller's suggestions	1.89	1.93	1.85	1.90	2.13	NS	NS

ŻG - Żywiec Group; KP - Kompania Piwowarska; CP- Calsberg Polska; OC -Other corporations

Source: own work.

As it is shown in Table 1, the seller's suggestions and friends' suggestions, which are the variables directly connected with customer feedback potential, belong to the factors of the least influence power on the customer purchase decisions. Furthermore, this observation is confirmed by focus analysis, in the effect of which there are three basic groups of influence distinguished (Fig. 1).

**Figure 1.** The results of focus analysis



Source: own work

The first group consists of two factors with the greatest influence, that is taste and personal satisfaction. Next, price, promotion and confidence in producer, beer availability and place of consumption generate a set of factors with an average impact on consumers. The lowest influence is noticed in case of the remaining factors. However, it does not mean that they may be considered as insignificant, which is proven not only by the amount of focus point but also by the results of factor analysis performed (Table 2). On this basis, three leading factors were generated that determine the consumer choices.

The first one remains in a direct relation with the social relationships established by the customer, as well as with the readiness to use the information provided by the environment. Therefore, the construction of this factor is based on mutually correlated variables such as: friends' and seller's suggestions, advertising and local patriotism. However, it should be emphasized that taking the set of variables under analysis into account, the variables indicated above are the most correlated with one another.



The second factor determining the consumer choice is the offer availability and producer identification. In effect, this factor links such variables with one another which, on the one hand, reduce the cost of customer satisfaction allowing the consumer to establish the transactional relationship quickly, without bearing additional expenses (product availability), on the other hand, they facilitate the product choice by, among others, the package specific for the brand of the product offered. Nevertheless, it is worth noting that this factor translates into the proximity of two parties of the relationship. The customer is able to quickly buy the product that he or she knows and can identify in the whole set of the brands offered by various producers. In turn, the producer, in the way of availability, reduces the risk of using competitive offers by the customer and in the way of advertising he or she builds not only his knowledge resources, but also establishes and maintains the customer relationship based on emotions, which finally translates into permanence.

**Table 2.** The main factors determining consumer purchase decisions – normalized Varimax

Decision parameter	Factor loadings (normalized Varimax) Distinguished: The factors of the highest confidence (The loadings found are >.350000)				
	Factor 1	Factor 2	Factor 3	Factor 4	Factor 5
Taste	-0.011932	-0.029947	0.381057	-0.017995	-0.007131
Personal satisfaction	0.102477	0.618685	0.073793	0.128688	0.048035
Confidence in producer	0.215530	0.168757	0.089387	0.637082	0.084429
Availability	0.089520	0.222615	0.308664	0.422248	0.144610
Place of beer consumption	0.115730	0.566411	0.068172	0.151891	0.618532
Price	0.396965	0.007212	0.057486	0.522753	0.568846
Promotion	0.619723	0.080283	0.102990	0.089350	0.029660
Friends' suggestions	0.742204	0.059538	0.009757	0.072425	0.119948
Package	0.125853	0.017286	0.477581	0.073951	-0.033228
Advertising	0.153975	0.038977	0.547063	0.280478	0.113768
Local patriotism	0.368627	0.012115	0.167819	0.255906	0.053300
Seller's suggestion	0.308610	0.145211	0.086207	0.181255	0.051353
Output value	1.441683	0.815619	0.835524	1.093100	0.771358
Share	0.120140	0.067968	0.069627	0.091092	0.064280

Source: own work.

The last of the factors generated remains in a relation with the basic factors of the cost of customer satisfaction, which is the price of the product offered and promotional activities correlated with it. Consequently, we deal with a variable directly referring to the value of company's offer perceived by the customer on one hand, and on the other hand, with the activities supporting the transactional customer relationships.

On the grounds of the analyses performed, it may be assumed that on the examined market we deal with three types of consumer behaviour. The first behaviour means taking decisions under the environmental influence. The second one is to choose the recognized and available product. And the third one is making a choice on the basis of the direct transactional factors. However, it should be emphasized in this moment that the factors described above may be considered as the basic determinants of customer choice, regardless of the offer of the producer selected. Furthermore, in some cases the changes were observed concerning the area of factor construction (Table 3).

Undoubtedly, for the whole examined population, the factor that explains the consumer purchase decisions to a great extent is the environmental influence. The construction of this factor does not change in case of the two largest beer producers. These capital groups address their market offer to the similar groups of consumers. Therefore, it is worth paying attention to the fact that the direct transactional factors, which are the price and the type of promotion used, in case of Żywiec Group explain a much higher percentage of variance than in the case of Kompania Piwowarska. What is more, in case of the latter producer, the factor based on the aforementioned variables explains only 7% of variance, whereas for other groups it exceeds 11%. Consequently, it may be concluded that the consumers preferring the brands of Kompania Piwowarska are less susceptible to price change. This may mean at the same time that the price rise of the products offered by Żywiec Group, especially in the segment of low-cost beer, as well as reduction of promotional activities may result in customers leaving.

**Table 3.** Factors determining consumer choice who use the product offer of the beer market leaders in Poland

<b>Factor construction – total population</b>	Seller's suggestion Friends' suggestion Advertising Local patriotism	Price Promotion	Confidence in producer Satisfaction Taste	Package Advertising Availability	Promotion Advertising
<b>Output value</b>	14.4%	8.15%	8.4%	10.9%	7.7%
<b>KOMPANIA PIWOWARSKA</b>	Seller's suggestion Friends' suggestion Advertising Local patriotism	Price promotion	Confidence in producer Satisfaction Taste	Price promotion	Package Advertising Availability
<b>Output value</b>	14.3%	7.7%	8.2%	8.1%	10.7%
<b>ŻYWIEC GROUP</b>	Price Promotion	Seller's suggestion Friends' suggestion Advertising Local patriotism	Confidence in producer Satisfaction Taste	Advertising	Package Availability Advertising
<b>Output value</b>	11.5%	15.7%	9.6%	5.6%	9.9%
<b>CARLSBERG POLSKA</b>	Advertising Package Promotion	Local patriotism	Price promotion Availability	Seller's suggestion Friends' suggestion	Confidence in producer Taste Availability
<b>Output value</b>	16.5%	10.1%	11.6%	12.3%	9.4%
<b>OTHER PRODUCERS</b>	Seller's suggestion Friends' suggestion	Advertising Package Promotion	Satisfaction Confidence in producer	Availability Local patriotism	Taste
<b>Output value</b>	16.7%	15.6%	14.4%	11.9%	<b>Place of consumption – negative correlation</b> 10.2%

Order of the variables in the table includes the correlation strength of the variable.

Source: own work.

In case of the remaining groups this factor still explains the largest percentage of variance, nevertheless, the change in its internal structure may be observed. It is limited to the seller's and friends' suggestions. Accordingly, it means that the correlation between the aforementioned variables and local patriotism, as well as advertising, is much lower than in case of the two largest beer producers. What is more, in these groups there is a separate factor generated with similar loadings – local patriotism. It includes only one variable for Carlsberg group. However, in the group of "Other producers" it is correlated with the product availability. It may mean that the consumers preferring the brands of Carlsberg and of other producers are linked by a specific bond with the producer and it may reduce the effectiveness of the activities aimed at customer gaining and retaining undertaken by other subjects in a significant way.

This statement has found its confirmation in the course of the direct interviews conducted by the author with the representatives of the management staff of the examined companies and consumers. In this place it is worth emphasizing that in the product structure of the analysed groups the segments of regional beer plays an important role, which is preferred by the customers searching for a non-standard, outstanding product. It may be justified by a higher share of environmental factor in variance explanation in comparison with the other groups, as well as by isolating local patriotism as a separate factor.

### **Environmental Influence**

The results presented implicate that one of the factors determining the consumer choice is environmental influence. This finds its reflection in one-way or two-way information transfer taking place between the consumers, as well as the consumer and the product tenderer. Taking into account the beer market, the seller is the direct tenderer (shop, restaurant etc.). Nevertheless, it does not mean that the producer is excluded from the information transfer. This subject provides information for both seller and consumer through advertising campaign, and in effect it has an indirect influence on the seller's recommendation and consumer choice.

In the context of the problem raised, it is worth paying attention to: consumer inclination to passing information about the product, frequency of this message as well as possibility of peer influence on purchase decisions made by the consumer. In the presented research this goal was achieved using three questions indicated in Table 4.

**Table 4.** Social information transfer – message frequency

Questions	no	never /sometimes	sometimes	often	always /yes
	in %				
“When feasting do you talk about: beer quality, its assessment, taste, producers etc.?”		14.1		70.6	12.8
“Have you ever recommended the beer brand or brands you prefer to your friends?”	22.9		53.2	22.4	
“Do your friends drink the same beer or the same beer brands?”	9.1		32.9	36.8	18.6

Source: own work

As it results from the table, most of the respondents, during social information transfer: pass the information about beer quality – often (70.6%), sometimes (53.2%) or often (22.4%) recommend the beer of brand preferred, however, over 55% of the interviewees drink the same brands of beer as their friends. Therefore, the obtained results of survey provide a base to make a statement that the beer consumers have a large feedback potential. Consequently, it means that they constitute a source of not only direct but also indirect capital supply for the company.

Taking into account the environmental influence it is worth emphasizing that only about 9% of the respondents have declared that their friends drink a different type of beer. This means that the choice of product is affected by both, social information transfer as well as group’s influence that the consumer maintains relationship with, what is confirmed by the results of Chi-squared test presented in Table 5.

**Table 5.** Social information transfer – the results of Chi-squared test

CRITERION TYPE	“Do your friends drink the same beer or the same beer brands?”				
	no	sometimes	often	always	Total
Premium lux (pl)	17	92	151	75	335
Premium (p)	14	70	122	56	262
Premium international (pl)	14	65	60	32	171
Regional (re)	6	35	40	11	92
Economical (ec)	4	22	42	22	90
Flavour (fl)	10	24	21	6	61
Total	65	308	436	202	1011
Test	Ch2	df	p		
Per.	35,29	15	.002		
NW	33,56	15	.004		

Table 5 continued

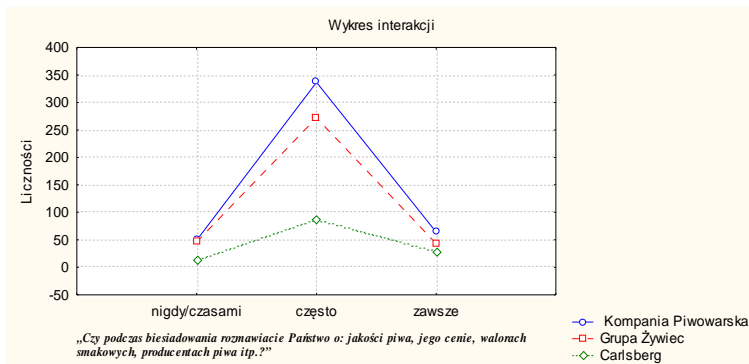
CRITERION TYPE	“Have you ever recommended the beer brand or brands you prefer to your friends?”			
	no	sometimes	often	Total
Premium lux	74	187	74	335
premium	40	178	43	261
Premium international (pi)	28	96	46	170
Regional (re)	9	38	45	92
Economical (ec)	22	36	31	89
Flavour (fl)	14	32	14	60
Total	187	567	253	1007
Test	Ch2	df	p	
Per.	58,19	10	.000	
NW	55,39	10	.000	
CRITERION TYPE	“When feasting do you talk about: beer quality, its assessment, taste, producers etc.?”			
	never/ sometimes	often	always	Total
Premium lux (pl)	37	259	37	333
Premium (p)	23	203	34	260
Premium international (pi)	20	129	22	171
Regional (re)	5	63	24	92
Economical (ec)	8	48	33	89
Flavour (fl)	17	39	4	60
Total	110	741	154	1005
Test	Ch2	df	p	
Per.	70,52	10	.000	
NW	58,77	10	.000	

Source: own work.

Furthermore, it is worth paying attention to the chart of interactions occurring between the frequency of information transfer and the choice of products offered by the leading beer producers.

As it results from Figure 2, beer qualities are a subject of information transfer, especially in case of the products offered by Carlsberg Group. If this transfer results in the desired purchase behaviour from the company's perspective, which is proven by the research results, then the producer is able to reduce the outlays for customer communication maintenance.

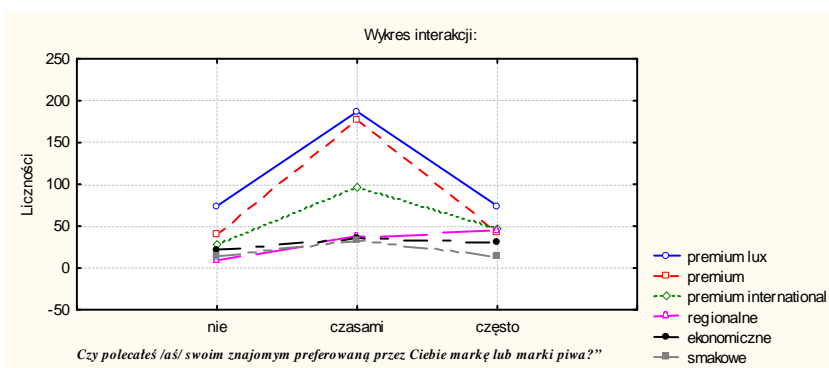
**Figure 2.** Frequency of information transfer and choice of products offered by the producer



Source: own work.

However, it should be emphasized, that the customer susceptibility to pass the information about the product is not consistent with susceptibility to recommend the product. As it may be seen in figure 3, the products of the Premium class are more often recommended than it was expected, and these dominate in the product structure of Żywiec Group in particular. These are relatively expensive products and their buyers are the people of rather high income potential (Caputa, 2015).

**Figure 3.** Frequency of recommendation and choice of beer type



Source: own work.

Consequently, it may be concluded that the customer susceptibility to pass the recommendation remains in a relation with the product (producer) prestige itself, perceived by the environment. The higher prestige the more often and more willingly the product is recommended, becoming at the same time an element distinguishing the consumer himself or herself.

However, the fact cannot be omitted that the customer purchase behaviour remains in a direct relation with his or her income potential. This potential has diminished in the last few years, which translates into increased interest in the products of economical segment (Caputa, 2015). In effect, the recommendation provided, concerning the Premium segment, may not bring the results desired by the tenderers.

### **Feedback and Recommendations Contra Costs of Customer Communication**

The aforementioned research indicated that the customer readiness to conduct the social information transfer is especially high in the segment of the customers who prefer the economical products. In this segment the position of Carlsberg Group is very strong, which means that for this subject the social information transfer may be used, on the one hand, as an instrument of brand awareness creation, which is the ability of a potential customer to recognize the brand or to get reminded that it belongs to the particular product category (Aaker, 1991, p. 61). On the other hand, it helps in brand image creation, reflecting the product's significance for the buyer connected with the power, advantages and exceptionality of the associations translating into such image. However, it should be emphasized that the effect of brand awareness and brand image creation is customer loyalty (Kall & Sagan, 2006, pp. 11-32) which, beside profitability, is the basic factor of customer capital formation. The use of the customer information potential should therefore provide a possibility for the company to gain the customer and to reduce the costs connected with customer communication maintenance and with the brand awareness creation. Having verified the observations made and resulting conclusions, the attention may be paid to the expenditures on advertising borne by the leading beer producers, as well as to the changes taking place in their market share.



**Table 6.** Estimated advertising expenditures of the leading beer producers in the years 2009–2012 (in PLN million)

Producers	Advertising expenditures			
	2009	2010	2011	2012
Żywiec Group	112.4	141.3	131.0	131.8
Kompania Piwowarska	95	161.0	130.0	169.1
Carlsberg Polska	39.8	82.3	68.5	71.3

\*Advertising expenditures from March to May 2012 – leading brands (excluding Internet)

Source: own work based on Agencja Kantar Media, [www.wirtualnemedia.pl](http://www.wirtualnemedia.pl) (23.08.2013).

As it results from Table 6, a significant growth in advertising expenditures is observed in the year 2012, what is connected with the Euro 2012 football cup in Poland. In this period the highest activity in terms of TV use is specific for Żywiec Group, which in the ranking of beer industry advertisers took the definite first place. The GRP ratio (Gross Rating Point), being the measure of intensity (impact) of the advertising campaign equalled 843 for the aforementioned Group, whereas for Kompania Piwowarska it obtained a level of 522, furthermore, SOV ratio was on the level, accordingly: 6.5% and 4.2%<sup>1</sup>. However, none of the companies was able to retain the previous market share. The expenditures of Carlberg Polska are much lower and despite this fact, its market share increased in the analysed period from 13.2% to over 18.5%<sup>2</sup>, what may confirm the effectiveness of information transfer launched through the network of social relationships.

## Conclusions

Taking into account the research results presented, it should be stated that the relationships established by the customer in his or her environment have the influence on their purchase decisions. The significance of the influence is determined by the customer income potential to a great extent. The survey shows that the highest customer readiness to launch the information transfer and use this transfer is observed in the groups characterized by a lower income potential. The susceptibility to launch the information flow does not follow the readiness to recommend the product. A subject of the

<sup>1</sup> SOV ratio (Share of Voice) reflects a relation of ad shows of the particular producers to total number of all ad shows of advertisers in the same period.

<sup>2</sup> <http://www.portalspozywczy.pl/alkohole-uzywki/wiadomosci/carlsberg-polska-chce-dalej-powiekszac-moce-produkcyjne,99223.html>

recommendations are usually relatively expensive products, that is the ones usually purchased by the customers of relatively high income potential.

The unfavourable changes noted in the recent years concerning the social-economic situation of Polish households, have translated into increased interest in the economical products. These products are most often purchased by the people of low income potential. In effect, the producers who possess the market offer where the products of economical segment or relatively cheap products ascribed to the other segments dominate, were able to reduce the expenses on customer communication. The research results presented indicate that the use of customer feedback potential provides a possibility to reduce the costs of customer communication. Consequently, this confirms the necessity of diverting from a passive approach into an active approach concerning the perception of the customer role in the process of company value creation.

On the consumption goods market, a special significance is assigned to the customer readiness to pass the information about the product and tenderer to other customers and, for this purpose, own network of social relationships is used. Launching such activity, was it confirmed by the research, translates into benefits obtained by the company, which find their expression in the following possibility, among others: impact on customer purchase decisions, operational cost reduction including the cost of customer communication or creating confidence in the company and its reputation.

The research results presented and the conclusions drawn from them should incline the producers to undertake the actions aimed at the creation of social groups, organizing feasts, concerts or other similar events that enable the establishment of social relationships and the use of group influence as a stimulus inclining to the choice of the products offered.

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