

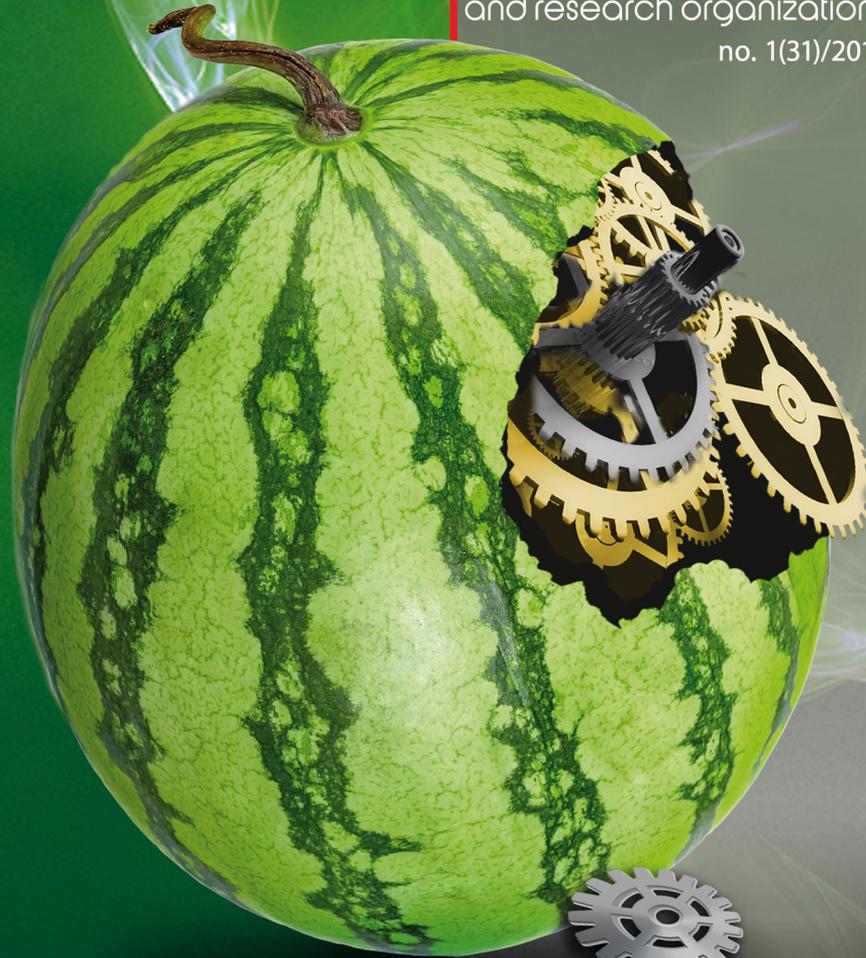


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**INFORMATION NEEDS OF TRADE FAIR VISITORS
— A SURVEY OF THE PARTICIPANTS OF
KOMPOZYT-EXPO 2018 AND FASTENER POLAND**



INFORMATION NEEDS OF TRADE FAIR VISITORS — A SURVEY OF THE PARTICIPANTS OF KOMPOZYT-EXPO 2018 AND FASTENER POLAND

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Summary

The article presents the results of surveys concerning the information needs of people visiting trade fairs and the conditions for satisfying these needs on the example of the participants of KOMPOZYT-EXPO 2018 and FASTENER POLAND. The results of the surveys are preceded by an overview of literature describing the behaviours of people visiting trade fairs.

The surveys were conducted during the aforementioned fairs by means of a direct questionnaire. On the basis of 98 cases qualified for analysis it was concluded, among others, that visitors during fairs look mainly for information about novelties in a given branch, about the current situation of the branch. They also look for information of an educational character. Moreover, over a half of respondents declared that they don't prepare for participation in fairs in any specific way and when they plan the sequence of visits to particular stands, they follow mainly the invitations from exhibitors (over 54%). Summing up their presence at fairs over 30% of respondents don't use special indicators of assessment.

The described surveys, due to small size of the sample, are preliminary in character and refer to a narrow branch represented by respondents, that's why verification based on a bigger group of respondents and representatives of other branches is required.

Keywords: trade fairs, visitors, information needs, fair goals, exhibitions

Introduction

Trade fairs constitute an important marketing element of contemporary companies. Increasing complexity of these events and the multitude of possible directions of development leads to a situation in which, paradoxically, it is getting harder and harder to plan their shape in such a way that their efficiency can be maximized. That's why exhibitors and trade fair organizers in order to better plan both the whole trade fair event and the particular presentations forming it, more and more intensively analyze the expectations of trade fair participants. Satisfying these expectations during an event will on the one hand guarantee that they will want to participate in subsequent editions of fairs and on the other hand satisfying contact with the exhibitor can faster lead to various kinds of business cooperation with an exhibitor.

Acquiring information and managing the flow of information in an efficient way is one of the most important success factors in contemporary companies. Nowadays the way of managing this process is changing, contemporary companies have broader and broader access to various kinds of market information and it is easier for them to obtain it. However, at the same time they have problems with verification of the credibility of acquired information and assessment of its usefulness. Trade fairs are a precious source of up-to-date information about branches represented at fairs and about the whole economy, where due to high dynamics of fair activity some bits of information are slightly elusive in character. Acquiring information most useful for a company during fairs requires making choices with regard to establishing contacts and engaging in them, participation in accompanying events and above all detailed planning of the activity of visitors during fairs.

The purpose of this article is an analysis of the information needs of trade fair visitors and chosen conditions for satisfying these needs during exhibition events¹ on the basis of surveys of the visitors participating in KOMPOZYT-EXPO 2018² and FASTENER POLAND³ organized by Targi w Krakowie Sp. z o. o. The surveys attempted to find out to what extent trade fairs are treated by the visitors as a source of market information, what kind of information is sought by them and what actions they take to acquire information. The main research questions forming the basis of the described research process are as follows:

- What trade fair goals do the event participants formulate for themselves?
- What was the position of collecting information among the named goals and what is the character of sought information?
- In what way do the respondents prepare for participation in fairs and thus for carrying out the assumed goals?
- What criteria of choice do the visitors apply?
- Which elements of respondents' demographic characteristics may have an impact on the mentioned areas of behaviours of the participants of trade fairs?

Trade fair visitors as a subject of research — an overview of literature

In contemporary marketing literature trade fairs are present above all as exhibitors' marketing communication tool⁴. The results of research presented in literature are focused on helping potential exhibitors properly choose fairs as a place of presentation (Palumbo & Herbig, 2002; Shoham, 1992), efficiently manage participation in fairs (Proszowska, 2015; Seringhaus & Rosson, 1998; T.M. Smith & Smith, 1999) and measure the results of this activity (Gopalakrishna & Lilien, 1995; K. Hansen, 1999; Kare Hansen, 2004; Proszowska, 2018).

At the same time usually less attention is drawn to trade fair visitors, who are presented above all as the recipients of marketing activities of exhibitors (Blythe, 1999; Rosson & Seringhaus, 1995; Tafesse & Skallerud, 2017). Only in the latest literature concerning trade fairs we can find a broader view of the visitors' activity at trade fairs. Their trade fair goals and own marketing policy during these events are identified (Gottlieb, Brown, & Ferrier, 2014; Proszowska, 2017; Rinallo, Borghini, & Golfetto, 2010). Among the appearing subjects there is even the need for managing the engagement of visitors in the event in a conscious way (Gopalakrishna et al., 2017).

Identifying visitors as entities implementing own marketing policies and forming particular goals for themselves in association with their participation in fairs justifies analyzing the process of managing their participation in fairs. Both the exhibitors and the organizers should strive to learn the fair-related goals of visitors and enable them to achieve these

goals. What has a big impact on the change of approach to trade fair visitors is the popularization of the paradigm of experiential marketing, which helps explain and consciously shape the behaviours of consumers (Dziewanowska & Kacprzak, 2013; Schmitt, 2000). That's why researchers more and more often pay attention to the goals and behaviours of trade fair visitors. Among the most often mentioned goals there is the need to look for information (Budzanowska-Drzewiecka & Proszowska, 2015; Dołhasz & Proszowska, 2018; Leszczyński & Zieliński, 2011), establishing contacts (Gębarowski & Siemieniako, 2014; U.R. Gottlieb, Brown, & Drennan, 2011) and strengthening relationships (Lin, 2016; Timothy M. Smith, Hama, & Smith, 2003).

The above-mentioned research results describe the reality in particular economic conditions, for particular branches and taking into consideration the specific character of market behaviours of particular visitors. Thus, there is a need for continuous verification of these results in course of research for other branches and regions. The changing reality makes it possible to presume that also the attitudes and expectations of trade fair visitors will be evolving and taking them into consideration in the policies of exhibitors and organizers of fairs will be more and more important for the success of the whole trade fair event.

Research method and the characteristics of the surveyed group

The subject of research was above all finding out what information needs the people visiting trade fairs have and what methods they use to obtain the information they need. The applied research method is direct questionnaire, in course of which an earlier prepared research questionnaire was filled out by purposefully chosen visitors during a particular trade fair. In the process of selection, along with the preliminary preparation of data for analysis, 98⁵ cases were qualified.

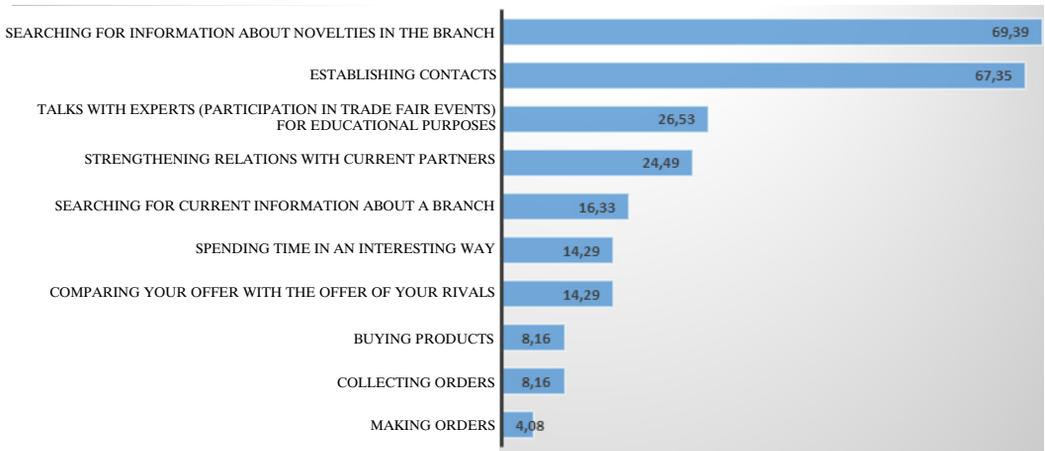
The survey covered visitors participating in KOMPOZYT-EXPO 2018 and FASTENER POLAND trade fairs organized by Targi w Krakowie Sp. z o. o. The dominant group were men (91.84% of the respondents) with an average of 11 years of experience in work in a branch represented at fairs ($m = 11.77$; $Q_1 = 5$, $m_e = 10$; $Q_3 = 17$). The respondents were most often the

representatives of companies employing them, less than 13% of the respondents appeared as independent natural persons. The average size of groups visiting fairs was almost 3 persons ($m_e = 2$; $Q_1 = 1$; $Q_3 = 3$). Most often they planned to spend about 17 hours at trade fairs ($m_e = 5$; $Q_1 = 3$; $Q_3 = 6$). To take part in the investigated events they had to cover an average distance of just over 250 kilometres ($m_e = 200$; $Q_1 = 60$; $Q_3 = 300$). They represented companies with an average of about 200 employees ($m_e = 60$; $Q_1 = 12$; $Q_3 = 150$). Over a year they would participate in an average of 4 trade fairs ($m_e = 3$; $Q_1 = 2$; $Q_3 = 5$).

Analysis of information needs of the visitors and conditions for satisfying these needs — the results of research and conclusions

In the process of drawing up the characteristics of the visitors' behaviours, the main goals they formulate for themselves in association with their participation in a trade fair were identified (chart 1). Among the goals named by the visitors the dominant ones are those associated with satisfying their needs for information and exchange of information with other participants of these events.

Chart 1. Visitor's goals associated with participation in trade fairs (the percentage of responses)*



*multiple-choice question.

Source: Own research.

The top goal on the list of visitors' goals associated with participation in fairs (Chart 1) is searching for information about novelties in the branch and establishing trade fair contacts. Analyzing the above set of goals from the point of view of satisfying needs for information we can notice that the participants of fairs are looking for very multi-dimensional information. They don't treat fairs only and exclusively as a place for the presentation of an offer and thus an area where you can observe the development of a given branch. For them it is also a place for collecting information about potential business partners, new possibilities of cooperation and assessment of their own position on a competitive market.

Table 1. Visitor's goals associated with participation in fairs, according to the number of years worked

	Visitors with work experience ≤ 10 years		Visitors with work experience longer than 10 years	
	Number of cases	Percentage	Number of cases	Percentage
searching for information about novelties in a branch	40	71.43	28	66.67
establishing contacts	40	71.43	26	61.90
strengthening relations with current partners	12	21.43	12	28.57
comparing your offer with rival offer	10	17.86	4	9.52
talks with experts (participation in trade fair events)				
for educational purposes	16	28.57	10	23.81
looking for current information about a branch	12	21.43	4	9.52
collecting orders	4	7.14	4	9.52
making orders	4	7.14	0	0.00
buying products	4	7.14	4	9.52
spending time in an interesting way	12	2.14	2	4.76

*multiple choice question.

Source: Own research.

We could presume that professional experience⁶ will influence the hierarchy of the visitors' goals. Table 1 presents a division of named goals related to participation in trade fairs from the point of view of the number of years worked by the visitors. The table suggests that these differences aren't too big — both respondents with shorter and longer professional experience display an identical hierarchy of the most important goals, differences can be seen in the subsequent positions. What can be seen to some extent is that trade fair visitors with shorter work experience attach more weight to talks

with experts for educational purposes, comparisons with competition, looking for current information about the branch and spending time in an interesting way. However, these differences weren't significant, as the independence test χ^2 didn't confirm the existence of a statistically important relationship between trade fair goals and the visitors' work experience.

The obtained results confirm a rather obvious truth that people working longer in a particular branch obtain a range of experiences and knowledge that they don't have to keep looking for and that they don't need to confirm many times. It would be important for the exhibitors to work out a formula for individual handling of potential visitors in course of which presenting their offer and company they would take into consideration the information needs of the recipients of their messages.

Table 2 presents the results of the analysis of relationships between visitors' trade fair goals and the distance from the respondents' workplace.

Table 2. The values of characteristics of χ^2 test for relationships between variables describing the most popular reasons for the respondents' presence at fairs and the distance from the respondents' workplace*

Chosen reasons for the presence of respondents at fairs	Values of characteristics of χ^2 test
looking for information about novelties in the branch	$\chi^2 = 9.223530$ p = 0.00239 V = 0.306786
strengthening relations with the current participants	$\chi^2 = 4.138514$ p = 0.04192 V = 0.2054987
talks with experts (participation in trade fair events) for educational purposes	$\chi^2 = 5.043091$ p = 0.02472 V = 0.226848

* „-” means lack of statistically significant relationships.

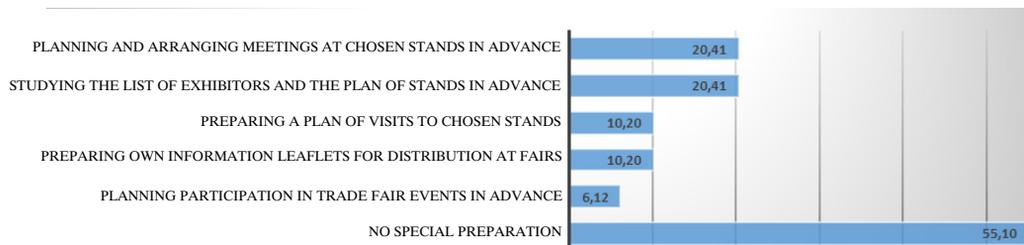
Source: Own materials.

A statistically important relationship has been noticed between goals mentioned in table 3 and the distance from company's seat, which suggests that entities coming to fairs from a greater distance participate in them in a more conscious way and more often name purposes of their participation.

Another question from the used questionnaire concerned visitor's preparations for participation in an event carried out before trade fairs.

Over a half (55.10%) of the respondents declared that they didn't prepare for participation in the event at all. The remaining respondents declared that they learned about the shape of fairs, the list of participants and the planned events, as well as prepared a plan for their own participation in all elements of the event in advance.

Chart 2. Visitors' preparation for participation in fairs (percentage of responses, multiple choice question)



Source: Own materials.

The group of visitors who don't prepare in any particular way is quite big, but compared to 2005 (Proszowska 2017) it decreased (back then it was 63.7% of respondents), which makes it possible to presume that trade fair participants use them in a more conscious way in their business policy.

In course of analysis of the collected information the relationship between variables describing visitors' goals of participation in trade fairs and the way of preparing for the event was investigated. Not too many statistically important relationships were identified. The most interesting results are contained in table 3.

In course of an analysis of the process of preparation for the implementation of named goals it was observed (table 3) that for the implementation of the goal defined as "talks with experts (participation in trade fair events) for educational purposes" the respondents prepare less intensively than for the implementation of the remaining goals, moreover, the assessment of the level of its implementation is at a very low level. We can presume that this is a result of the specific character of this goal and the difficulties associated with its parametrization, which hampers consciously preparing in advance and the subsequent assessment. Treating trade fairs as a source of current information about the situation in the branch presented during fairs, it is necessary to emphasize the importance of the named goal and thus, the necessity of preparing the methodology for its implementation by trade fair visitors.

Table 3. The values of characteristics of χ^2 test for relationships between the variable describing the visitors' goal of participation in trade fairs as "talks with experts ... for educational purposes" and the declared lack of particular preparations for participation in fairs and the lack of assessment of participation in fairs.*

Chosen trade fair goal of visitors	Values of characteristics of χ^2 test	
	Variable "lack of particular preparations for participation in trade fairs"	Variable "lack of assessments of the results participation in trade fairs"
talks with experts (participation in trade fair events) for educational purposes	$\chi^2 = 3.961006$ $p = 0.04657$ $V = 0.201043$	$\chi^2 = 7.227928$ $p = 0.00718$ $V = 0.2715776$

*,"-" means lack of statistically important relationships.
Source: Own materials.

The results of analyses of chosen relationships between the methods of preparation for participation in trade fairs and the demographic characteristics of the respondents were presented in table 4 (there are no statistically important relationships between the remaining methods of preparation and the respondents' descriptive parameters).

Table 4. Values of characteristics of χ^2 test for relationships between variables describing the ways respondents prepare for participation in trade fairs and the chosen demographic characteristics of the respondents.*

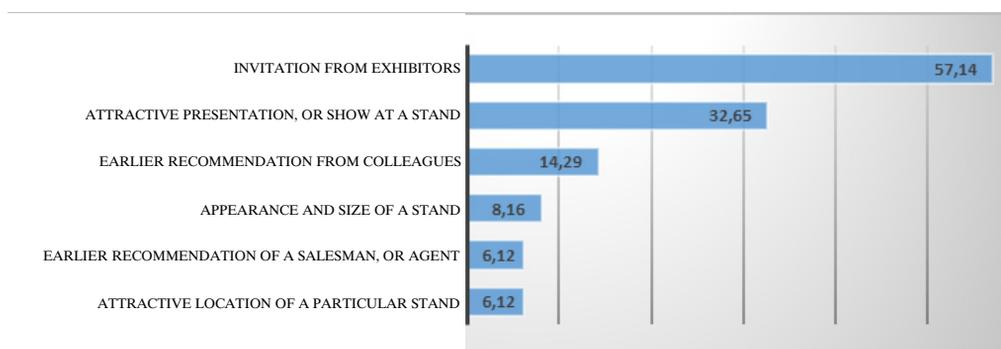
Ways of preparing for participation in trade fairs	Values of characteristics of χ^2 test		
	distance from company's seat (main workplace of the respondents)	years of work in a branch	number of employees
no special preparations	$\chi^2 = 13.21240$ $p = 0.00028$ $V = 0.367179$	-	-
studying the list of exhibitors and stand maps in detail and in advance	- $p = 0.005970$	$\chi^2 = 7.559402$ $p = 0.00000$ $V = 0.2777350$	$\chi^2 = 21.13282$ $V = 0.4643717$

*,"-" means lack of statistically important relationships.
Source: Own materials.

Analyzing the occurrence of relationships between the lack of preparations for fairs and the distance from company's seat we can assume that more distant trade fair destinations are not associated with the current operations of a company and are treated more like a special event and not an element of business activity. Preparation for this kind of event requires deeper analysis of an often less-known market and is a source of problems for the visitors and at the same time refers more to future activity and that's why it isn't top priority for the trade fair visitors. Further two relationships distinguished in table 4 may suggest that more experienced employees who also represent bigger business entities implement more conscious marketing policy and don't leave the conduct of participation in trade fairs to human spontaneity.

Another subject of research were also factors influencing the sequence of visits to particular stands during an event (chart 3). In case of events organized by EXPO Kraków this may not be a very important element, because it is a trade fair facility of a rather medium size and visiting all exhibitors is within the reach of an average visitor. However, in a situation in which a trade fair visitor plans to spend more time at particular stands, then the choice of sequence of visits starts playing a much bigger role.

Chart 3. Factors which influence the sequence of visits to stands at trade fairs (the percentage of responses)*



*multiple choice question

Source: Own research.

The factor that has the biggest influence on the sequence of visits to particular stands is the invitation from an exhibitor, which would suggest that the surveyed respondents use trade fairs to maintain and strengthen already existing relationships with other participants of the market and plan their presence already before fairs. It is a positive change, compared to the year 2015 when the main factor was "attractive presentation, or show at a stand", which may have been regarded as a result of lack of plans, or even fully intuitive style of work.

In course of an analysis of the relationships between factors influencing the sequence of visits to trade fairs by the participants and their descriptive parameters, statistically important relationships were identified and shown in table 5.

Table 5. . Values of characteristics of χ^2 test for relationships between variables describing factors influencing the sequence of respondents' visits to particular stands and chosen demographic characteristics of the respondents.*

Factors which influence the sequence of respondents' visits to stands at trade fairs	Values of characteristics of χ^2 test	
	number of years of experience in a branch	number of employees in a company
an attractive presentation, or a show at a stand	-	$\chi^2 = 5.364015$ p = 0.02056 V = 0.2339548
an invitation from exhibitors	$\chi^2 = 10.88889$ p = 0.00097 V = 0.3333333	-

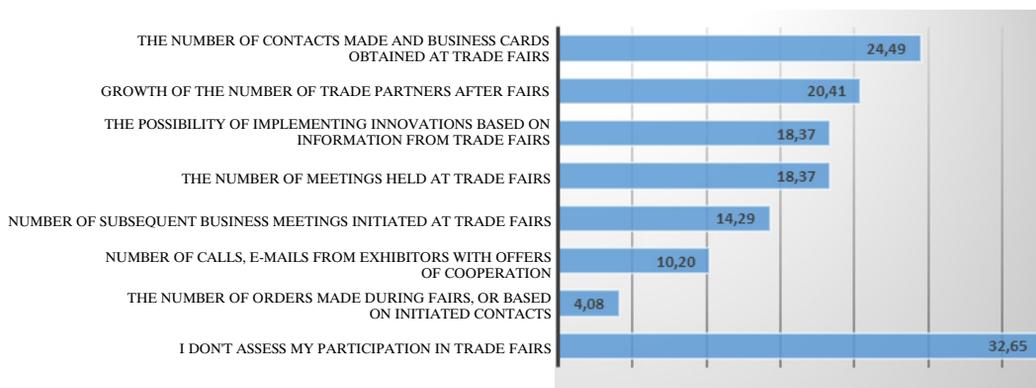
*,"-" means lack of statistically important relationships.

Source: Own materials.

Characteristics of the relationships presented in table 5 can be regarded as a confirmation that longer work experience means more conscious trade fair participation management and planning the participation in a given event in advance. At the same time bigger companies (greater number of employees) look for potential partners who are more visible at trade fairs, that is, entities organizing interesting shows and presentations.

Just as every market activity, also participation in fairs should be subject to assessment in terms of its efficiency and effectiveness. The surveyed respondents also revealed their activity in the area of assessment of their participation in fairs (chart 4.).

Chart 4. Indicators of the visitors' assessment of the results of participation in trade fairs
(percentage of given answers)*



*multiple choice question.
Source: Own materials.

Also in this area a positive trend has been observed, as in 2015 the percentage of respondents not using the listed indicators for the assessment of results amounted to 38.2%, while in 2018 the same percentage amounted to 32.65%. Those who use indicators are most eager to use "the number of obtained contacts and business cards", as well as "the number of trade partners after fairs".

By means of the independence test χ^2 statistically important relationships between variables presenting the utilization of chosen assessment indicators were identified and their numeric parameters are presented in table 6.

The first relationship listed in table 6 makes it possible to presume that visitors from more distant locations know less about the profile of exhibitors and that's why they put more effort into looking for new contacts, meeting people and collecting business cards. Analyzing further

relationships we can assume that bigger entities find it easier to make an organizational effort to hold business meetings with the participants of a particular event and thus, they pay more attention to the growth of the number of trade partners after events.

Table 6. Values of characteristics of χ^2 test for relationships between variables describing the utilization of chosen indicators of assessment of trade fair results and chosen demographic characteristics of the respondents*

Chosen indicators of the assessment of trade fair results	Values of characteristics of χ^2 test	
	distance of the location of trade fair from company's seat	number of employees in a company
number of established contacts and business cards collected at trade fairs	$\chi^2 = 4.138514$ p = 0.04192 V = 0.306786	–
number of subsequent business meetings initiated at fairs	–	$\chi^2 = 6.533333$ p = 0.01059 V = 0.2581989
growth of the number of trade partners after trade fairs	–	$\chi^2 = 5.653846$ p = 0.01742 V = 0.2401922

* „–” means the lack of statistically important relationships.

Source: Own materials.

Summary

Summing up, it is necessary to conclude that trade fairs are a place (and time), where visitors plan the implementation of a range of goals associated with satisfying their information needs. In particular, they look for information about novelties (69.39%) and current (16.33%) offer of the represented branch. They also participate in lectures and talks with experts for educational purposes (26.53%). If they prepare for participation in trade fairs (as over 55% declare that they don't do it) they most often do it in form of an analysis of the list of exhibitors and the plan of stands (just over 20%) and planning their visit to a trade fair and arranging meetings at the stands

they are interested in (just over 20%). When planning the sequence of visits the surveyed respondents usually take into consideration the invitations from exhibitors (57.14%).

Visitors regard the following as indicators of successful participation in trade fairs: the number of new contacts and business cards collected at trade fairs (24.49%), growth of the number of partners after an event (20.41%) and the possibility of implementing innovations based on the information obtained at trade fairs (18.37%). Over 30% of respondents declare that they don't use any such indicator for the assessment of the results of trade fair participation.

The presented characteristics of the attitudes and behaviours of people visiting the above-mentioned trade fair events don't exhaust the subject and show that trade fairs, despite their positive image, are not fully used within the contemporary marketing policy. The development of these events means that they are becoming very complex and multidimensional and participating in them requires advance preparation and precise planning. With trade fairs many activities are organized at the same time, which makes it impossible to participate in each of them. Also, for obvious reasons often advance registration is required. While registering for an event you should have defined goals of participation in fairs and analyzed possibilities of achieving these goals.

Raising the awareness of this necessity is to a large extent the duty of exhibitors and organizers who should help the visitors prepare their methodology of participation in trade fairs. The effects of such activities would be beneficial for exhibitors and organizers of these events, as trade fair visitors would be better prepared for participation in trade fairs and thus would achieve more benefits from this activity and would be more eager to participate in further editions of an event.

In course of the conducted research process a few statistically important relationships between the chosen indicators of visitors' trade fair activity and the demographic parameters defining them (and the companies represented by them) were distinguished. However, low V Cramer values show that these relationships weren't too strong. The comparably small number of respondents (even for the B2B) sector surveyed in course of the research process which is the subject of this article questions the credibility of particular detailed conclusions contained within this work, which leads

to the necessity to confirm the achieved results in a project with a greater number of respondents. At the same time, it would make sense to analyze the results of this research from the perspective of other branches and sectors of the economy in order to show the real possibilities for the development of trade fairs for particular branches of the industry.

References

- ¹ The work constitutes continuation and supplementation of the Author's research from 2015 described in paper (Proszowska, 2017) which discussed the research on the visitors to the 7th International Trade Fair for Powder & Bulk Solids Technologies SYMAS and the 6th International Trade Fair for Suppliers of Maintenance Products and Services, held on October 6–7, 2015 on the grounds of EXPO Kraków.
- ² 9th International Trade Fair for Composite Materials, Technologies and Products KOMPOZYT-EXPO®, 16–17. X. 2018, Kraków.
- ³ 2nd International Fair Trade for Fastener and Fixing Technology, 16–18. X. 2018, Kraków.
- ⁴ What has also been noted is the sales-focused character of at least some trade fairs (Bello, 1992; Godar & O'Connor, 2000), but certainly this is not a dominant trend for the presentation of significance and functions of trade fairs, especially in the B2B sector.
- ⁵ Taking into consideration the fact that the subject of research were trade fair behaviours of visitors to fair events from the B2B sector (that is, events which are not associated with mass attendance, like B2C fairs), at which both the exhibitors and visitors appreciate every individual contact, we can recognize the mentioned size of the sample as sufficient for a preliminary, trial analysis of the opinions and behaviours of the respondents. The achieved results and observed relationships may in the next stage of the proper research process be verified in course of research on a bigger sample of respondents and may serve the purpose of creating models describing the process of visitors' participation in trade fairs.
- ⁶ This is often accompanied by visitors' experience from participation in trade fairs.

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