

Introduction

Presently we are participants in and witnesses to social, economic and technological changes which offer new opportunities and pose challenges to consumption, marketing and trade. Innovations in production, distribution and marketing communications have changed the ways in which contemporary enterprises operate. Social and ecological innovations, modern solutions in retail trade and virtual reality are some of the indications of the latest dynamic and innovative approach to market operations as presented in this issue.

The above examples of the changes in business operations affect manufacturers as well as consumer behaviour and the decisions of business partners. They have a special impact on marketing efforts whose role is to reconcile consumers' needs and preferences with producers' and service providers' capabilities.

An interesting attempt has been made by Dariusz Dąbrowski in the first paper* who identifies whether gathering market information from different sources – customers, competitors and other entities – is related to product innovativeness. In this study it is observed that obtaining information from customers has a positive effect on a new product's innovativeness. It comes mainly from the fact that customers, individuals and other organizations are very innovative themselves. Therefore gathering ideas and new solutions proposed by innovative buyers can positively influence product innovativeness. The results also show there are also other market partners – such as commercial intermediaries, suppliers, industrial or independent experts – who could be potential sources of market information to improve product innovativeness. However it cannot be said in the case of competitors. The research results clearly support the current opinion that nowadays to be innovative brands have to be co-created by their consumers and other members of the value chain.

The ROPO effect (Research Online, Purchase Offline – a phenomenon involving the search for information about a certain product through the Internet) is one of the significant problems of the e-commerce sector unknown before the “e-revolution” in trade. In their paper Barbara Mróz-Gorgoń and Grzegorz Szymański analyse the size of the ROPO effect in the clothing industry. The results obtained based on a survey of 4,000 respondents who have recently purchased clothing products indicate that about 33% of women and men use the

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Internet as a place to obtain information about clothing products. The overall high evaluation of the impact of information found on the Internet in making a purchase decision confirms the general increase in the popularity of e-commerce in the clothing industry.

Filip Grudzewski, Marcin Awdziej, Grzegorz Mazurek and Katarzyna Piotrowska discuss a very up-to-date topic which is the role of virtual reality (VR) in marketing communication. In their study the authors examined the possible impact of VR on message perception and attitude towards particular offers. They also attempt to ascertain whether there is a relationship between the use of VR and the acceptance of new technologies in marketing communications. The research involving an experiment with 150 observations of respondents, taking advantage of three different marketing communications tools (VR presentation with Oculus Rift hardware, video and printed advertisements), demonstrated that VR technology positively and significantly impacts the reception of the offer, the technology involved and the presentation itself. According to the experiment's results, the use of modern technologies such as video and VR can significantly support marketing strategies and sales.

Authors Edyta Rudawska, Ewa Frąckiewicz and Małgorzata Wiścicka-Fernando also investigate innovation; in this paper, socio-ecological innovations in marketing strategy among SMEs operating in the food and drink sector in Central-Eastern (Poland, Croatia and Russia) and Western (Great Britain, Germany and Spain) Europe. The team of international researchers hypothesise that a country's level of socio-economic development determines the extent to which social and ecological innovations incorporated in marketing strategies are implemented by enterprises. The companies' managers, marketing department personnel, or employees delegated by the owners/managers were surveyed to determine how they perceive the role of implementing social and ecological innovations, if they undertake this activity and to what extent they take into account social and ecological aspects when designing their marketing strategies. Contrary to their hypothesis the country's level of economic development did not significantly influence managers' awareness and attitude to sustainable activities. Instead managers' understanding and perception of sustainable development and their company's activities are of greater importance. The research reported in this paper provides a number of important directions for future research.

In the final paper Grzegorz Maciejewski investigates consumer attitudes toward new technological solutions in modern retailing. In this empirical study a sample of 1,075 Polish consumers are surveyed to determine their attitudes, purchasing behaviours and opinions of service and commercial outlets which employ such technologies as self check-out systems, different types of technology-enabled shopping trolleys and virtual advisers. Overall the results of their on-line survey reveal that consumers hold positive attitudes to the modern solutions in this industry, even if their level of knowledge and understanding of

each specific technology is limited. When cluster analysis is applied to interpret the results five distinct groups of consumers are identified according to the frequency of their favourable attitude towards these new technologies and the frequency of their use when shopping. The author of this research highlights the dichotomy between those consumers, particularly younger consumers, who will expect retailers to adopt these technological solutions and those sceptical consumers who will need the time and support of retail staff to test and use these technologies before they become part of their routine.

Overall the five papers that feature in this issue illustrate both the importance of innovation and the adoption of new technologies in some traditional industry sectors. In addition they demonstrate the need to understand user perceptions towards new technologies and how they can be more effectively adopted and implemented by firms in a variety of industry and country contexts. The uptake and acceptance of modern solutions and innovative approaches are unlikely to be universal.

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