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PRO-ECOLOGICAL ACTIONS AND CONSUMER CHOICES IN THE MODEL OF RESPONSIBLE BUSINESS

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Abstract. The current farming conditions cause that recent social and environmental aspects of management play an important role for the functioning of modern enterprises. This results from the fact that on the one hand the activities of modern enterprises are determined by the surroundings' increasing complexity, on the other hand the growing demands of various groups of stakeholders build company's success based not only on a quest to maximize their profit, but primarily on taking the responsibility for the consequences of their actions. Additionally, the growing awareness of consumers makes more and more enterprises implement the concept of corporate social responsibility (CSR) in their actions. For this reason, it is important to discuss about the actions and choices of consumers in the model of CSR. The aim of this article is to present the results of the research on customers's environmentally conscious activities and choices.

Key words: social responsibility, responsible consumption, pro-ecological attitudes

INTRODUCTION

Increasing complexity of the market phenomena and processes cause that the entrepreneurs should have the ability to harmonize a series of activities with the requirements of the market. For this reason, modern managers have to take action to combine economic and social and environmental interests to provide businesses with the ability to effective, long-term functioning. It might seem that such an orientation goes beyond the boundaries of

classical economics, which professes the principles of the free market, where the main aim of every business is to maximize profit. However, growing consumer awareness makes the participants of the business sector note the need of implementation of actions, to some extent not related to achieving economic benefits – that is, social and environmental activities enrolling in a model of responsible management. In this context, the question about purpose of the existence of modern enterprise, which covers simultaneously realization of business objectives (including generate income and growth of the company) with social objectives or ecologically appears. Of course, the fact that the ultimate goal is to earn profit is undeniable but it can not be overlooked by the ethical dimension of economic activity. Concentrating exclusively on maximizing the profit is a violation of the balance necessary to achieve significant results for the common good (Kuraszko and Rok, 2007, p. 8). Of course, it is an undisputed fact that the activity of the company is primarily transactional rather than altruistic. It is important to work out the profit that will satisfy the needs and expectations of all stakeholders. But it does not justify omitting the public good. Nor is it acceptable to social or environmental goals to obscure the basic objectives of the company. A correctly functioning organization first of all, realizes its basic objectives – economic and moreover, social and environmental ones (Brendzel-Skowera and Puto, 2013, p. 69–70). Considering the above information it is worth analysing whether it is possible to obtain benefits through linking

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of these three objectives simultaneously – thereby addressing the concept of corporate social responsibility. Additionally it is worth giving thought whether in the face of the implementation by enterprises CSR's activities, will the consumers be willing to procure ecologic products. The aim of the empirical research served both determining the environmental awareness of consumers, as well as identifying their environmentally friendly measures and choices.

RESPONSIBLE CONSUMPTION – BETWEEN RESPONSIBILITY AND CUSTOMERS CHOICES

Responsible consumption concerns on the customers buying behaviours, such as making conscious choices of services and products that are manufactured by companies whose strategic and operational activities are consistent with the principles of CSR (Cyfert and Hoppe, 2011, p. 17). In other words, responsible consumption means the deliberate and thoughtful approach to the acquisition of goods available on the market. It means making the right choices while shopping. It should be noted that there are two forms of responsible consumption i.e.:

- positive buying – preference for products manufactured by companies that include in their activities the common good and are guided by well-understood long-term interests of customers and society,
- the moral boycott – indicating avoidance of goods or services from companies that are accused of unethical practices (Dąbrowska and Janoś-Kresło, 2012, p. 11).

In the context of discussion on responsible consumption a lot of attention is paid to the ecological aspect, in particular environmental/ecological awareness.

Environmental awareness is a concept, which consists of many components, both psychological, sociological, and economical. The essential elements in shaping of environmental awareness are: the level of environmental knowledge, a sense of environmental risk and access to environmental information. These three components form a system of ecological values that affect the extent of environmental consciousness. The appropriate level of environmental awareness contributes to environmentally friendly attitudes and behavior, thereby shapes organizational culture (Seroka-Stolka and Brendzel-Skowera, 2011, p. 257). A conscious consumer selects products guided by subjective, important

for him indicators, such as: package (both those that can be recycled, such as those derived from recycling), biodegradability of packaging, animal testing, the growing importance of ecology in life as well as the fashion for a healthy lifestyle. In practice the purchase decisions may include (Huma, 2007):

- selection of specific products that affect minimizing negative effects on the environment (eg. Energy-efficient light bulbs),
- avoiding buying the products to which we have a critical attitude (eg. Cars that burn large amounts of fuel),
- avoiding buying goods from companies whose activities violate the certain social and environmental standards and choosing those which are based on principles of social responsibility,
- selection of such products, which fulfill specific social and environmental criteria in the highest level.

It can be said that currently the main criterion for decision making are factors related not only to the quality or price, but also to social and environmental issues.

EMPIRICAL RESEARCH METHOD AND CHARACTERISTICS OF RESPONDENTS

Presented conclusions were formulated based on the results of survey research carried out in the second quarter of 2014. The study was conducted among group of 165 people who live in the city of Czestochowa. The research tool used in the study was a survey questionnaire, which had a structured character and was divided into two thematic parts, covering such issues as:

- ecology in everyday life, including: the level of knowledge of the ecology, supporting environmentally friendly initiatives,
- ecological activities: waste segregation, sensitivity to save water and electricity, the use of eco-bags.

It should be noted that the study was completely anonymous and participation in it was voluntary. The study was attended by 102 women and 63 men. During making the characteristics of the respondents it should be added that the vast majority of respondents are people with higher education – 82%. 15% of those with secondary education, and 5% of the respondents were people with vocational education. In terms of age group: people in the range of 36–45 years were dominant (they comprised 48%), the next group were people to 35 years – 31%, 21% of respondents were over 45 years of age.

RESULTS OF THE RESEARCH – ENVIRONMENTALLY FRIENDLY ACTIONS AND CONSUMER CHOICES

Analysing the received results it can be concluded that the vast majority of respondents support ecological activities not only in everyday life but also in business operations (Fig. 1).

As it is clear from the data presented in Figure 1, about 98% of respondents support environmental activities in their daily lives, and 82% in the activities of firms in the market.

Another issue that was raised in the questionnaire was to determine the level of consumer awareness, regarding these products, which have a harmful impact on the environment (Fig. 2).

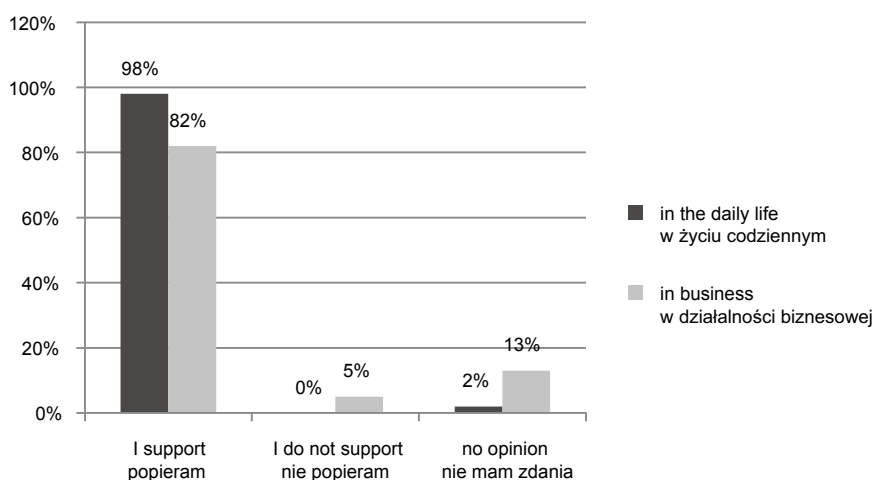


Fig. 1. Respondents' opinion on the ecological activities
Source: elaboration based on own researches.

Rys. 1. Opinia respondentów na temat popierania działań proekologicznych
Źródło: opracowano na podstawie badań własnych.

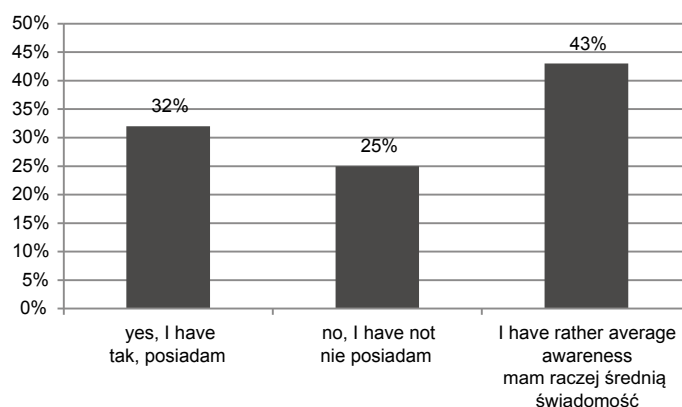


Fig. 2. Respondents' opinion on the environmental awareness
Source: elaboration based on own researches.

Rys. 2. Opinia respondentów na temat stopnia świadomości ekologicznej
Źródło: opracowano na podstawie badań własnych.

Although the respondents support the eco-friendly activities, their detailed knowledge of the products, which have a harmful impact on the environment is low. Only 32% of respondents are ecologically aware and have knowledge on eco-friendly products, while 43% is not entirely certain whether they have sufficient knowledge which products are ecological and which are not. Unfortunately, 25% of respondents do not have such knowledge at all.

The study takes into account also the respondents' knowledge of the concept of responsible consumption (Fig. 3). The next question was: Do you know the concept of responsible consumption? Unfortunately, as with the previous question knowledge about responsible consumption remained at a fairly low level. Only 24% of respondents said that they heard about this term and they know what the responsible consumption is. Meanwhile, 58% could not give a clear answer on this subject (they were not sure whether they have heard this term, but they do not rather know what the responsible consumption is). 18% of respondents said that they definitely did not meet with such a concept.

What is interesting, the respondents reported that during their shopping they are primarily guided by the price of the product – regardless of the category to which the product belongs (87% of responses). Then the quality (64% of responses) and brand (59% of responses). Other

factors such as environmental safety and thus the products influence on the environment (22% of responses), appearance (18% of responses) and packaging, in particular the possibility of recycling (17% of responses) are further selection criteria. Fewer of respondents pay attention to the expiry date (9% of responses) and information on the composition (6% of responses).

Obtained results made it possible to determine not only the degree of interest in the ecology of the respondents but the source of information on environmental protection as well. The analysis of respondents questionnaire shows that 71% of respondents derive environmental information from the internet, 16% from the TV and 8% from the press. It is worth noting that only 4% of the respondents are not interested in ecology, and 1% talks with friends on the ecology topics. To analyse the environmental activities of consumers, respondents were asked to evaluate the availability of information on environmental pollution and its impact on human health. Based on the obtained results, we can conclude that the information on environmental pollution and its impact on human health condition is rather available – mainly in the form of messages in the media (TV, Internet), which are aimed at encouraging the protection of the environment and health. This view was expressed by as many as 84% of respondents. As it was a semi – open question, respondents made up their

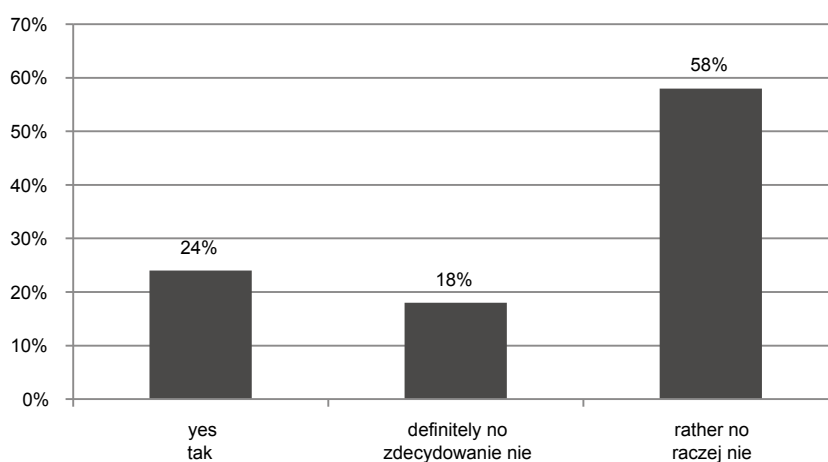


Fig. 3. Knowledge of the term of concept of responsible consumption
Source: elaboration based on own researches.

Rys. 3. Znajomość pojęcia odpowiedzialnej konsumpcji
Źródło: opracowano na podstawie badań własnych.

statements indicating that the main source of information are social campaigns aimed at protecting the environment, messages warning against excessive pollution levels and programs devoted to this topic etc. 14% said that only the most important information is communicated. Only 2% of respondents said that companies do not provide such information, claiming that they are not relevant.

The analysis of the first part of this study led to the conclusion that although respondents declare support for environmental actions in everyday life and indicate the availability of information about ecology, they do not have detailed knowledge and high awareness of these activities, and environmental issues and it does not determine their choices as consumers.

An important part of responsible consumption is the implementation of friendly environmental activities. For this reason the respondents were asked to comment on the following questions, namely:

- Do you segregate waste? (Fig. 4),
- Do you pay attention to saving water and electricity? (Fig. 5).

Data presented in Figure 4 show that 12% of respondents select all waste, 48% of them select only bottles and 25% of them paper while 15% of respondents unfortunately do not select waste. Such an attitude is related to the lack of suitable containers on the estate where respondents live (does not therefore appear directly from the lack of willingness or knowledge).

Analysing the data presented in Figure 5 it can be concluded that 61% of respondents save water (e.g. they turn off the water while brushing teeth and washing dishes), and 25% save light. Only 8% of respondents save both water and light and 6% do not do it at all. Due to the fact that ecobags are gaining more and more popularity, among today's consumers, respondents were asked about the reasons for their use. It should be noted that the question was open and respondents had complete freedom of answer. The most frequent responses were:

- possibility of reuse,
- ease of storage,
- appearance,
- beneficial to the environment.

In the next part of the survey all respondents had the opportunity to express their opinion on the efficiency and profitability of ecological behaviors and proceedings. The most frequent answers were:

- reduce costs, and hence savings,
- responsible attitude towards the environment,
- a positive impact on health,
- fashion for a healthy lifestyle.

Follows from the foregoing, it could be said that, respondents see the need to protect the environment. For example, the environmental benefits are one of the arguments for the use of consumer eco-bags, as well as state about (according to the respondents) the profitability and effectiveness of environmental actions. In addition,

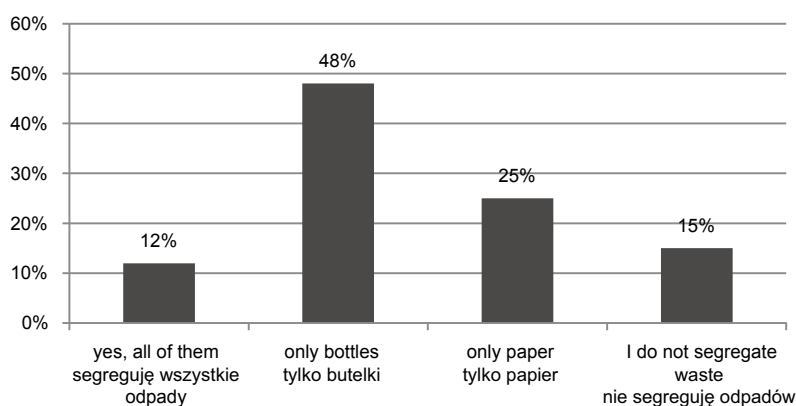


Fig. 4. Segregation of waste by respondents

Source: elaboration based on own researches.

Rys. 4. Segregacja odpadów przez respondentów

Źródło: opracowano na podstawie badań własnych.

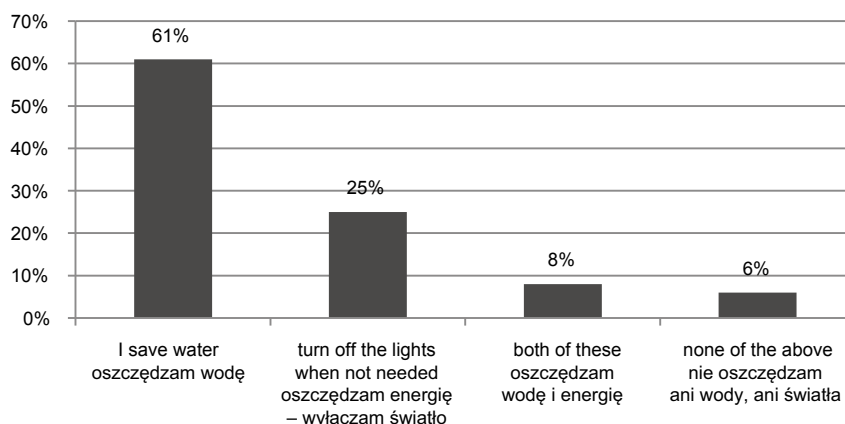


Fig. 5. Pro-ecological actions by respondents

Source: elaboration based on own researches.

Rys. 5. Proekologiczne działania respondentów

Źródło: opracowano na podstawie badań własnych.

consumers perceive other ecological benefits – including: reduced costs, saving money, protecting their own health, or simply being fashionable.

SUMMARY

Based on the survey research it can be concluded that the knowledge of respondents related to environmental awareness, for products that have a harmful impact on the environment is at a fairly low level, i.e. it is superficial and amounts to a general statement that such impact exists. Therefore, it can be inferred that the ecological choices and actions are conditioned by consumers ecological knowledge that shapes their environmental sensitivity. It should be noted that the impact on consumer behaviour and formation of ecological imperative of actions are long and difficult processes. Nevertheless, the vast majority of respondents support the pro-ecological activities in their daily lives, as well as in business operations. Thus, we can say that from year to year consumer's interest in environmental protection will be growing. It will be related to the purchase of products by customers, which support the environment, and also are connected with saving the used resources. What is more, eco-shopping on the one hand leads to responsibility towards the environment and on the other

hand to savings (the consumers noticed it). By taking into account factors such as selection of waste, energy and water consumption, or reducing the use of harmful substances, consumers make environmentally friendly choices.

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DZIAŁANIA I PROEKOLOGICZNE WYBORY KONSUMENTÓW W MODELU ODPOWIEDZIALNEGO BIZNESU

Streszczenie. Obecne warunki gospodarowania sprawiają, że w ostatnim czasie bardzo duże znaczenie dla funkcjonowania współczesnych przedsiębiorstw mają społeczne i ekologiczne aspekty zarządzania. Jest to podyktowane faktem, że z jednej strony działalność współczesnych przedsiębiorstw coraz bardziej determinowana jest wzrastającą złożonością otoczenia, z drugiej zaś rosnące wymagania różnych grup interesariuszy sprawiają, iż sukces przedsiębiorstwa opiera się nie tylko na dążeniu do maksymalizacji zysku, ale przede wszystkim na braniu odpowiedzialności za skutki swoich działań. Dodatkowo rosnąca świadomość konsumentów sprawia, że coraz więcej przedsiębiorstw w swoich działaniach realizuje koncepcję społecznej odpowiedzialności (CSR). Z tego względu istotne jest podjęcie rozważań odnoszących się do działań i wyborów konsumentów w modelu CSR. Celem niniejszego artykułu jest przedstawienie wyników badań dotyczących działań i proekologicznych wyborów konsumentów.

Słowa kluczowe: społeczna odpowiedzialność, odpowiedzialna konsumpcja, proekologiczne postawy

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