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## Changes of Polish Customers' Attitudes Towards Non-Ethical Activities of Food Producers

**Article's goal:** to identify and carry out a comparative analysis of the changes that occurred in opinions and attitudes of Polish final customers towards unfair activities addressed to them by food producers in the years 2010-2012. Those activities were divided into 3 groups: related to the product, its packaging and advertising.

**Research approach:** striving to achieve the main goal, the author used the analysis of findings of primary surveys, inclusive of the comparative analysis considering the time factor.

**Basic research findings:** based on the findings of primary surveys the author drew the conclusion of a definite growth of the respondents' radical attitudes in case of product-related activities, what indicates an increase in their sensitivity to such stimuli. At the same time, there took place an apparent growth in the respondents' tolerance towards controversial activities related to packaging many of which were not any longer considered by a significant part of people as non-ethical, though still more than half of respondents coined most of those activities as unethical.

**Practical implications:** results of the analysis of the changes taking place in the final customers' opinions and attitudes should direct producers' activities what is indispensable for implementation of the assumptions of the modern marketing orientation.

**Social implications:** the emphasised in the article divergence between the postulated in the subject literature partner-like approach to customers and the actual behaviour demonstrated by manufacturers, which is aggravated by their non-ethical actions, precludes joint achievement of aims, as it is not then possible to establish a marketing commonwealth of market partners comprising the offerer and customers.

**Key words:** final customer, producer, ethics, marketing, partnership.

**JEL code:** M31

### Introduction

One of the key rules of marketing says that the customer is the most important for the offerer. One may ask the question if this is the statement conveying the actual state of affairs or merely a beautifully sounding slogan having not much with the reality. Analysing the presented in the literature of the subject views of various authors pointing out to the need to form long-term relationships with customers, seeing in them partners, with whom offerers cooperate preparing their market offer, setting up the marketing community<sup>1</sup> integrated

<sup>1</sup> See A. Baruk, Offerers' relations with customers. Marketing holistic approach and marketing practice, Lambert Academic Publishing, Saarbrücken 2013.

around their common pursuits, etc., as well as comparing them with empirical research findings, one may have an impression that the theoretical assumptions more and more depart from the practice. The place of partnership in the reality more and more often is taken up by manipulating customers being treated not as partners but as inquirers whose value is evaluated only with their current financial capacities. There is not seen or appreciates the fact that the customers' potential is decided, first of all, by their knowledge, experience, feelings, etc.<sup>2</sup>, which they certainly will not want to share with offerers treating them objectively<sup>3</sup>.

This is particularly apparent in case of food producers. There arises the question whether the application towards customers of the actions contradicting the rules of ethics allows establishing such partnership. Certainly not, the more so as customers, as more and more aware market participants, better and better can identify the unfair stimuli addressed to them<sup>4</sup>. One may, therefore, have an impression that producers still many a time do not understand the need to apply the activities confirming equal treatment of customers, arousing their positive attitudes, in practice basing, first of all, on the use of the stimuli enabling achievement of short-term objectives, irrespective of long-term negative effects they may cause. Observing the market reality one may state that producers not only do not know the theoretical assumptions of contemporary marketing concepts or they forget of them, but they fail to observe one of the basic rules of social coexistence<sup>5</sup>, which says: "do as you would be done by"<sup>6</sup>. However, one should remember that ethical conduct is not, contrary to all appearances, simple; just the opposite, it is the complex decision-making process where there is the need to frequently make difficult choices<sup>7</sup>.

Authentic realisation the seemingly simple fact that without customers there cannot exist any firm, and adoption of their point of view<sup>8</sup> just is conducive to achievement of market objectives of the offerer is the first, crucial step in the process of implementation of the marketing orientation whose foundation is observance of the rules of ethics<sup>9</sup>. The "customers' point

<sup>2</sup> See R. P. Lee, G. Naylor, Q. Chen, Linking customer resources to firm success: The role of marketing program implementation, "Journal of Business Research" 2011, Vol. 64, Issue 4, pp. 394-400.

<sup>3</sup> Then it is not possible to create new knowledge (see Te Fu Chen, Hsuan-Fang Huang, An integrated CKVC model to building customer knowledge management synergy and impact on business performance, in: International Conference on Economics, Trade and Development. IPEDR, 2011, IACSIT Press, Singapore, pp. 78-82) reinforcing mutual partnership.

<sup>4</sup> Surveys show that value of the socially responsible enterprise, i.e., *inter alia*, those observing the rules of ethics in business, is growing if the level of customers' market awareness is high. See H. Servaes, A. Tamayo, The Impact of Corporate Social Responsibility on Firm Value: The Role of Customer Awareness, "Management Science" 2013, January, <http://mansci.journal.informs.org/content/early/2013/01/08/mnsc.1120.1630.abstract> (29.08.2013).

All the more producers should conduct ethically, also playing the role of market educators in relations to purchasers.

<sup>5</sup> Rules of such a type takes into account in his definition of business ethics, *inter alia*, W. I. Sauser, Ethics in business: answering the call, "Journal of Business Ethics" 2005, Vol. 58, No. 4, pp. 345-357.

<sup>6</sup> They forgot that ethics has been considered as the fundamental value prejudging 'to be or not to be' of an organisation in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. See S. E. Brimmer, The Role of Ethics in 21<sup>st</sup> Century Organizations, "Leadership Advance Online" 2007, Issue XI, [http://www.regent.edu/acad/global/publications/lao/issue\\_11/pdf/brimmer.pdf](http://www.regent.edu/acad/global/publications/lao/issue_11/pdf/brimmer.pdf) (30.08.2013).

<sup>7</sup> See L. K. Trevino, M. E. Brown, Managing to be ethical: Debunking five business ethics myths, "Academy of Management Executive" 2004, Vol. 18, No. 2, pp. 69-81.

<sup>8</sup> On the importance of subjective assessment of customers in shaping their market attitudes and behaviours, including satisfaction and loyalty there write, among other things, Z. Yang, R. T. Peterson, Customer Perceived Value, Satisfaction and Loyalty: The Role of Switching Costs, "Psychology & Marketing" 2004, Vol. 21, No. 10, pp. 799-822.

<sup>9</sup> They should take into account the changes occurring in the generally accepted in a given community system of values, what requires improvement thereof. Hence, they are not of a static nature but dynamic one. See P. E. Murphy, Developing,

of view" must be understand in a broad sense, not relating it exclusively to the exposed in marketing the customers' needs, but comprising with it, *inter alia*, their opinions and assessments of various activities taken by offerers as, based on them, there are shaped customers' attitudes leading to definite market behaviours, inclusive of those purchase-related.

Hence, the basic aims of this article are to identify and analyse opinions and attitudes of the food customers concerning the applied by food producers' activities related to the product, its packaging and advertising as well as to carry out a comparative analysis of the changes occurred in this respect in the years 2010-2012. The pursuit to achieve the mentioned aims was a basis for carrying out by the author primary surveys. They were implemented during 2 editions: in 2010 and 2012. A research instrument was a survey questionnaire, which contained in both research editions the identical questions, what enabled carrying out a comparative analysis of the results obtained in both years and, thus, determining the scope of possible changes in respondents' opinions and attitudes concerning non-ethical marketing activities of food producers. During each research edition, it covered by 500 respondents representing practically all the age, income, social, etc. groups of final customers from the territory of Lublin Voivodeship. In both research editions, the demographic (for such traits as sex and age), social (for marital status), geographical (for residence), and economic (for the average monthly per capita income in the household) structure of the respondents was very similar, to what we were intentionally aspiring in order to have the achieved results with greater comparability.

### **Hierarchy of the purchase-related decision-making factors and its changes in the years 2010-2012**

The changes taking recently place in Poland, particularly social and cultural, are also reflected in Polish customers' market attitudes and behaviours. They are especially clearly visible in case of food products, what issues from the specificity of the needs being satisfied owing to them. These transformations concern, *inter alia*, frequency of shopping, places of purchasing products, amounts of one-time shopping, type of products being chosen, etc.<sup>10</sup>. They are also seen in customers' attitudes towards producers and their offer stemming from the level of compliance of their conduct with the rules of ethics, which will be in detail analysed in a further part of the article. However, earlier it is proper to pay attention to the factors taken into account by customers in the purchasing decision-making process concern-

communicating and promoting corporate ethics statements: a longitudinal analysis, "Journal of Business Ethics" 2005, Vol. 62, No. 2, pp. 183-189.

<sup>10</sup> Pentor Research International has been carrying out for several years cyclical surveys on Poles' shopping behaviours, primarily in the FMCG market. The omnibus surveys are carried out on 1000-individuals representative samples of Poles aged 15+. See *Zachowania zakupowe Polaków w 2010 roku [Poles' shopping behaviours in the year 2010]*, <http://www.detaldzisiaj.com.pl/article/konsument-zachowania-zakupowe-polakow-2010> (07.02.2011).

Recently, such surveys were also carried out by other institutions, confirming the substantial changes in Polish customers' shopping attitudes and behaviours. See *ShoppingShow – edition 2013. Zwyczaje zakupowe Polaków*, <http://strategyjournal.pl/index.php/2013/04/shoppingshow-edycja-2013-zwyczaje-zakupowe-polakow/> (01.09.2013).

ing foodstuffs, particularly places occupied by them among the issues of ethical conduct of the manufacturer.

As Table 1 shows, for respondents in both time-periods in question, of the key importance was general quality of the product and its price, though in 2012 by as much as 21% less people mentioned quality, what caused the drop of this factor from the 1<sup>st</sup> to the 2<sup>nd</sup> place in the hierarchy of determinants of food products purchasing. The simultaneous insignificant (by 2%) growth of the per cent of indications concerning price additionally evidences its growing importance. Nevertheless, one must remember that for many customers price is a direct mapping of the level of product quality, i.e. it is closely connected with quality. The still significant importance of quality is also evidenced by the fact that in 2012 the 3<sup>rd</sup> place were taken by product nutritional properties (they were mentioned by as much as 55% of respondents), i.e. the factor directly issuing from the level of product quality. Earlier, it took only the 7<sup>th</sup> place and was indicated by more than three times less percentage of respondents. Therefore, it was definitely the biggest growth of the per cent of indications as well as the greatest improvement of the place in the hierarchy.

The so far discussed three factors were the only ones indicated in 2012 by more than half of the respondents, whereas in 2010 there were only two such factors. It is worth to note that then the product quality was mentioned by more than 80% of individuals, whereas two years later no factor was indicated by more than 70% of the respondents, what means a considerable reduction of differences between the factors occupying the first positions.

**Table 1**  
**Factors affecting respondents' purchasing decisions concerning food products**

Evaluated factor	Indications (in %)		Place		Change	
	2010	2012	2010	2012	in %	places
General quality of the product	86	65	1	2	-21	-1
Price of the product	67	69	2	1	+2	+1
Positive opinions on the product	45	10	3	6	-35	-3
Confidence in the producer issuing from one's own experience	39	31	4	5	-8	-1
Positive opinions on the producer	20	8	5	7	-12	-2
Brand of the product	19	49	6	4	+30	+2
Properties and nutrition values of the product	17	55	7	3	+38	+4
Advertising	4	4	8	9	0	-1
Habit	3	5	9	8	+2	+1
Purchase places	0	4	10	9	+4	+1
Packaging appearance	0	0	10	10	0	0
High charity activity of the producer	0	0	10	10	0	0

Source: author's own elaboration based on surveys' findings.

In 2012, all in all five decision-making factors were mentioned by more than 30% of the interviewees, i.e. by one more than in the earlier period. They included confidence based on one's own experience. Indeed, in 2010, it was indicated by a higher by 8% per cent of individuals, taking the 4<sup>th</sup> place, but in 2012 it was still the factor influencing purchasing decisions of 31% of respondents, and the percentage change between it and the factor occupying the first position has significantly decreased against that of the year 2010 when it accounted for as much as 47%. Therefore, one may state that for the respondents there was more important their own experience related to a definite producer as, at the same time, a definitely lower percentage of people considered in 2012 as important positive opinions on the product (it was the highest drop compared to 2010 both in terms of percentage and of the place occupied) as well as positive opinions on the producer, which were mentioned by more than twice less people.

The experience gained during contacts with a given offerer stems, *inter alia*, from their level of ethics. Low generates negative experience<sup>11</sup>, whereas high is conducive to acquisition by customers of positive experience. As the carried out surveys show, each of them as experience gained personally acquires greater and greater importance compared to experience of other individuals, articulated by them in their opinions on the product and producer. Considering the definite decline of the role of others' opinion, all the more it should not surprise the invariably low importance of advertising as the decision-making factor.

It is also worth noting that habit played the third-rate role, albeit purchases of food products are stereotypically described as routine ones. It appears, however, that in practice they are not of such nature, what is also evidenced by the fact that in 2012 habit was mentioned by more than six times lower per cent of respondents than confidence based on one's own experience, i.e. the factor being subject to dynamic, sometimes even rapid, changes (particularly in case of noticing by the customer breach of the rules of ethics by the producer), what distinguishes it from the habit for which characteristic is the static nature.

Moreover, in 2010, three factors were not taken into account by respondents while making decisions on purchasing food products, whereas in 2012 their number dropped to two. Nevertheless, in both periods, they included the producer's charity activity. Ignoring this factor by researchers may result from perception by them of the fact that charity campaigns undertaken by offerers often enough do not reflect their authentic care of weaker subjects, but they merely issue from their striving for a superficial creation of an image of socially responsible organisation, which has little common with its actual conduct towards customers, employees, etc., in relation to whom there are not observed the rules of ethics. Perception of such discrepancy reinforces the customers' negative experience, negatively affecting their shopping decisions.

<sup>11</sup> Producers must remember that the purchaser must as many times as 12 acquire their positive experience in contacts with a given offerer that it could be possible to obliterate only one negative experience share by one customer in relationships with that offerer, what is confirmed by empirical research findings. See A. K. Smith, R. N. Bolton, An Experimental Investigation of Service Failure and Recovery: Paradox or Peril?, <http://www.ruthnbolton.com/Publications/PARADOXFV.pdf> (14.02.2013).

## **Respondents' attitudes towards non-ethical activities taken by producers and their changes in the years 2010-2012**

In case of food products, customers' purchasing experience concerns primarily the very products, their packaging and advertising. Although, of course, as it issues from the hitherto analysis, of the greatest importance as the decision-making factor related to future purchasing behaviour is experience related to the very product, the respondents also noticed non-ethical producers' activities related to packaging and advertisements, assessing them more or less negatively. However, taking into consideration a relatively greater role of features of the very product and related thereto experience, it is proper to start from analysing the changes that have occurred in respondents' attitudes since 2010.

As Table 2 shows, among the six evaluated activities closely related to the product, in case of as many as 5 in 2012 there increased the per cent of indications concerning the need to punish producers for use thereof. It needs to be emphasised that in each case it was a growth by more than 10%, while in case of three activities it exceeded 25%. The greatest growth (by as much as 32%) took place in case of improper product labelling which was in 2010 assessed as the activity, for which the producer should be punished, by the least group of people (29%, i.e. by less than the percentage growth of indications). A significant increase of the per cent of individuals believing that application of most activities in question should entail penalising of the producer caused that it exceeded 60%, and in case of four activities – even 70%, each of which was in 2012 considered as punishable by most respondents than the activity mentioned earlier as punishable, i.e. adulteration of the product's composition. It is worth adding that in 2012 still the biggest part of respondents believed that producers should be punished for them but their per cent grew to 87%. The only activity, in case of which there took place a decline of the percentage of indications reflecting respondents' opinions on the necessity to punish the producer for its use, was manufacturing of counterfeits of the known products, though, all in all, in 2012, 74% of respondents described them as non-ethical; however, a little bit bigger number of people viewed that its use should not entail producers punishing (respectively 36% and 38%).

The growth of the percentage of respondents believing that the activities in questions should be punishable caused that there decreased, at the same time, the share of individuals considering particular activities as non-ethical, but not requiring penalisation of producers for the application thereof. In case of two activities, that decrease did not exceed 25%, and the biggest was in case of product dilution what undoubtedly affects its quality. Whereas in 2010 the biggest group of respondents (47%) thought that there was no need to punish the producer for them, despite the fact that this activity was non-ethical, in 2012 such an opinion was shared by only every tenth respondent (12%), what additionally indicates a definite growth of radicalism of respondents' attitudes towards unfair activities of food producers. This conclusion is also confirmed by the fact that in case of the four activities in question in 2012 the percentage of individuals, according to whom it is not proper to punish producers for them, was lower than 20%, albeit two years earlier no activity was not in this context

**Table 2**  
**Respondents' opinions on activities carried out by food producers related to the product (in %)**

Evaluated activity	Indications (in %)											
	Non-ethical activity for which the producer should be punished		Non-ethical activity for which the producer should not be punished		Fully ethical activity							
2010	2012	Change	2010	2012	Change	2010	2012	Change	2010	2012	Change	2010
Adulteration of the product's composition	72	+15	23	10	-13	5	3	-2	0	0	0	0
Concealment of the fact of replacement of one component with another but worse	50	+29	46	19	-27	4	2	-2	0	0	0	0
Improper product labelling	29	+32	38	35	-3	33	4	-29	0	0	0	0
Application in the product's composition of additives not revealed on the packaging	70	+8	22	19	-3	8	3	-5	0	0	0	0
Product dilution	53	+26	47	12	-35	0	9	+9	0	0	0	0
Manufacturing of counterfeits of the known products	49	36	-13	38	38	0	13	+13	0	0	0	0

Source: author's own elaboration based on surveys' findings.

mentioned by such a low per cent of people; what's more, two of them were indicated by almost one half of the interviewed individuals.

The characteristic activity was manufacturing counterfeits as, on the one hand, it was the only activity, in case of which there dropped the percentage of people believing that it should be proper to punish producers for them, but, at the same time, it was the only activity, in case of which no change took place as regards the share of people considering that it is non-ethical, but does not require punishing manufacturers. One may, therefore, state that it was the only product-related activity that did not affect stiffening respondents' attitudes, which confirmation is also the two-fold growth of the percentage of respondents believing that is on the merge of ethics (from 13% to 26%).

To be sure, in 2012, there also grew the number of respondents for whom the activity on the borderline of ethics is product dilution, though in 2010 nobody assessed it this way, but, at the same time, as much as to 79% there grew the per cent of individuals considering that producers must be punished for that act, what evidences greater radicalism of respondents.

The definitely greatest drop of the per cent of individuals not considering explicitly a definite activity as non-ethical took place in case of improper product labelling (from 33% to 4%), what means that in 2012 as much as 96% of respondents considered it as non-ethical. As it was already mentioned, it was also the activity, in case of which there took place the greatest per cent of indications concerning the need to punish producers for them, what indicates a definite increase of customers' sensitivity to such conduct of producers, maybe issuing from a relatively frequent experiencing thereof. On the other hand, no changes took place in respondents' attitudes towards the activities in question, related to consideration whichever of them as fully ethical. Both in 2010 and in 2012, nobody described any of these activities as fully ethical.

Most food products are offered in packaging which also may be an object of non-ethical impact on customers by producers. What's more, in practice they even apply more unfair acts concerning packaging than those related to the very products. Moreover, those activities are, as a rule, earlier apparent for customers as, before they get acquainted with the very product, they have contact with its packaging, and the experience they gain then may cause their negative purchasing decision. To be sure, respondents invariably alleged that they did not take into account the packaging as the decision-making factor, but the issue was with its appearance. And whatever perceived irregularities stemming from non-ethical conduct of producers are the grounds for negative experience which belonged to the factors of a great decision-making importance.

Most of the nine activities in question, related to packaging, was in 2012 considered by a higher than in 2010 percentage of respondents as a non-ethical activity for which the producer should be punished (Table 3). It is worth noting that those growths were relatively higher than the drops which in case of three activities did not exceed 4%. In result, as many as five activities were then considered as requiring punishment of producers by at least 1/3 of the interviewees; two activities were assessed this way by at least 45% of individuals, whereas in 2010 only two activities were considered as punishable by more than 30% of

respondents, and only one activity by more than 1/3 of individuals. However, it must be added that in 2012 none of activities was considered as punishable non-ethical act by more than 50% of respondents, otherwise than the activities related to the very product; only one of them was so assessed by less than half of individuals.

Moreover, in case of two activities in 2012, none respondent considered they should be punishable, although earlier each of the analysed activities had been in this context mentioned by at least a few per cent group of people. The matter is here with adding useless free goods to the packaging and application of a very similar shape of the packaging to the shape of the product packaging of a well-known producer. Hence, one may state that particularly these two activities were in 2012 considerably less important for the respondents, what is additionally evidenced by the fact that in their case there took place the biggest drop of the per cent of indications of the individuals considering them as non-ethical, though not requiring penalisation (respectively by 28% and 50%), with the simultaneous highest growth of the share of respondents in whose opinion these are the fully ethical activities (respectively by 58% and 70%).

On their example one can, therefore, clearly see the changes taking place in respondents' attitudes towards the packaging-related activities applied by producers, which over time become less radical, and even stop to be negative. This is particularly apparent while comparing for both period the number of activities which were by some respondents considered as fully ethical. In 2010, there were indicated only three such activities, whereas in 2012 – as much as twice more, i.e. six activities. What's more, as many as three of them as fully ethical were in 2012 considered by at least every fourth interviewee, and two were rated so by as much as 89% and 73% of people, whereas earlier – only one activity was considered as ethical by more than every fourth respondent (31%). It is proper to remind here that in case of activities related to the very product, disregarding the time span, none was considered as fully ethical, what clearly confirms a definitely greater sensibility of the interviewees to unfair activities related to the product compared with the activities related to packaging, also confirming its growth in case of the product-related activities and the drop as regards the packaging-related activities.

As Table 3 shows, in 2010 every activity related to packaging, all in all, as non-ethical was considered by more than half of the interviewees, except for adding useless gifts to packaging, which were considered as non-ethical, in aggregate, by 32% of individuals. On the other hand, in 2012, three activities as non-ethical were considered by less than 50% of respondents, while two activities – by less than 10% of people; of them one activity was not considered as such by anybody. The matter here is with the already mentioned adding useless free goods to the packaging. Therefore, it was the only activity which was, in the opinion of respondents, fully ethical (as much as 89% of indications) or was on the borderline of ethics (11% of indications). Hence, one may say that application thereof by producers does not have negative impact on behaviour of customers who, as it can be seen, do not pay any greater attention to it.

**Table 3**  
**Respondents' opinions on some food producers' activities related to product packaging (in %)**

Evaluated activity	Indications (in %)											
	Non-ethical activity for which the producer should be punished		Non-ethical activity for which the producer should not be punished		Activities on the borderline of ethics		Fully ethical activity		2010	2012	Change	
2010	2012	Change	2010	2012	Change	2010	2012	Change	2010	2012	Change	
Application of more similar colours of the packaging to the colours of the product packaging of the known producer	19	33	+14	56	41	-15	18	12	-6	7	14	+7
Placement on the packaging of a very similar artwork to the artwork of the product packaging of the known producer	24	22	-2	48	22	-26	28	31	+3	0	25	+25
Placement on the packaging of a very similar logo to the logo of the known producer	19	38	+19	51	24	-27	30	22	-8	0	16	+16
Placement on the packaging of a very similar typeface to the typeface on the product packaging of the known producer	15	36	+21	47	27	-20	38	22	-16	0	15	+15
Adding to the packaging of useless free goods	4	0	-4	28	0	-28	37	11	-26	31	89	+58
Application of a very similar shape of the packaging to the shape of product packaging of the known producer	12	0	-12	56	6	-50	29	21	-8	3	73	+70

Application of downsizing, i.e. decreasing the contents of the packaging without decreasing the size of the very packaging	32	28	-4	48	56	+8	20	16	-4	0	0	0
Application on the packaging of logos suggesting the features of the product it does not have	35	46	+11	52	28	-24	13	26	+13	0	0	0
Presentation of the packaging of the idealised product which does not reflect the reality	26	45	+19	50	36	-14	24	19	-5	0	0	0

Source: author's own elaboration based on surveys' findings.

However, one should not forget that still invariably three activities related to the packaging were considered by respondents as terminal or non-ethical, and as non-ethical they were in 2012 considered, all in all, by the majority of respondents. The matter is here with the application on the packaging of logos suggesting the product's features it does not have (altogether 74% of indications); presentation on the packaging of the idealised product which is far from the reality (altogether 81% of indications) and application of downsizing, i.e. decreasing of the packaging contents without decreasing the size of the very packaging (altogether 84% of indications), albeit the last of the specified activities was considered by the twice higher per cent of respondents as non-ethical, though not requiring punishment than as non-ethical and, at the same time, punishable contrary to two others, which were considered by a bigger part of respondents as punishable than as non-ethical, though not requiring penal actions against producers.

Therefore, it can be seen that among the activities strictly related to the product packaging there also take place such activities that are more and more often noticeable for customers, negatively predisposing them to the producers applying them. Therefore, they should, in the first instance, eliminate them from their marketing activities, with which, after all, they have not much in common as forms of activity intentionally misleading customers as regards the product's features or size thereof. They are rather an element of manipulation, not marketing, with which, unfortunately, they are many a time identified by customers, affecting negative perception thereof what, in practice, effectively hampers the postulated in the assumptions of all modern marketing concepts of building partnership between offerers and customers, hurting in effect both parties, inclusive of the producers applying them.

Although advertising as a decision-making factor was invariably mentioned by a low per cent of respondents (Table 1), this does not mean that respondents did not perceive irregularities related thereto. Quite the opposite, awareness of their occurrence is probably one of the basic reasons for immune of customers to advertising messages, which, in their opinion, are unreliable and sometimes even hurting. Dis, therefore, change the respondents' attitudes towards the addressed to them unfair advertisements, and if so, how big were those changes? As Table 4 shows, unlike the product- and packaging-related activities, in case of most activities consisting in advertising the product there took place a drop of the per cent of indications related to their consideration as non-ethical and penal. Only in case of two activities a major part of the respondents assessed them in 2012 in such a way, though only in case of one activity, i.e. presenting advertisements, which discriminate some customers, that growth was two-digit and accounted for 30%. Owing to that, it took the second place as the activity causing the most negative attitude, becoming, at the same time, one of the two activities mentioned in this context by more than half of the interviewees, whereas in 2010 only one activity was so evaluated by more than half of the respondents.

The issue is here with presentation of advertisements which humiliate the dignity human being and which were in 2010 considered as punishable by 69% of respondents. It is worth noticing that two years later there took place a minor decrease of that percentage to 68%, what did not change the fact that this activity still occupied the first place among the activities considered as punishable. All in all, in 2012, the biggest group of respondents (as much

as 93%) considered it as a non-ethical activity; it must be said that more than two and half times bigger part of them considered that the producer should be penalised for them as compared with the percentage of individuals considering them as non-ethical but not requiring penalising the manufacturer. At the same time, it was the only activity evaluated as terminal by less than 10% of respondents. This means that vis-à-vis other advertising activities in question the respondents demonstrated the highest degree of sensitivity to the application of advertisements humiliating the dignity of human being.

A clear growth of the degree of respondents' sensitivity manifesting itself in their negative attitudes took also place in case of the already mentioned presentation of advertisements which discriminate some customers. This is evidenced, on the one hand, by the fact of the definitely biggest growth of the per cent of individuals considering them as punishable, while, on the other hand, by a clear drop of the share of respondents considering them as non-ethical but not requiring penalisation, as well as by the drop of the share of people treating them as the activity on the borderline of ethics. Therefore, one may say that for customers, together with time elapse, of greater and greater importance become the issues of respecting the human being dignity, so to say pushing to a background the issues related to the very product, for example, to non-disclosure of its negative features which were in 2010 considered by as many as every third respondent not only as non-ethical but, at the same time, as requiring penalisation.

It is worth emphasising that per the seven analysed advertising activities in case of as many as five there took place in 2012 growth of the percentage of indications reflecting the respondents' opinion that they were non-ethical activities, but there was no need to penalise producers for them; three of them were so assessed by more than 30% of people more than two years earlier. All in all, by more than 80% of individuals they were considered as non-ethical, whereas in 2010 they were altogether considered as non-ethical by significantly lower per cent of respondents (from 52% to 60%), what also stemmed from the fact of considering them as terminal by a definitely bigger part of the interviewees than in 2012; however, respondents' attitudes became clearly less radical as in case of two of those activities more than three times bigger per cent of people, and in case of one as much as more than five times bigger group of respondents did not see the need to penalise producers for them as compared with the respondents who would like to have penalised them.

As Table 4 shows, a specific activity was presentation of advertisements which compare the product with another product as in 2012 it was the only activity which was not considered by anybody as penalisable, whereas two years earlier each of the activities in question was by at least several per cent of respondents so evaluated, although in 2010 this activity as requiring penalisation of producers was considered by the least percentage of respondents, i.e. 16%. However, in its case it is possible to state a definite revaluation of its importance for respondents as earlier altogether 58% of individuals considered it as punishable. At the same time, it was the only activity, in respect of which there took place growth of the per cent of people considering it as fully ethical; what's more, that growth accounted for as much as 52% (from 4% to 56%). In other words, more than half of respondents considered that it was fully ethical, what is only comparable with the two activities relating to packaging, which

**Table 4**  
**Respondents' opinions on some food producers' activities related to product advertising (in %)**

Evaluated activity	Indications (in %)						Fully ethical activity					
	Non-ethical activity for which the producer should be punished	Non-ethical activity for which the producer should not be punished	Activities on the borderline of ethics	2010	2012	Change						
Presentation of advertisements which exaggerate the product's values	18	21	+3	34	65	+31	48	14	-34	0	0	0
Presentation of advertisements which play on customers' heartstrings	26	20	-6	31	68	+37	43	12	-31	0	0	0
Presentation of advertisements which arouse disgust in customers	22	12	-10	38	69	+31	40	19	-21	0	0	0
Presentation of advertisements which compare the product with another product	16	0	-16	42	25	-17	38	19	-19	4	56	+52
Presentation of advertisements which conceal negative features of the product	33	23	-10	31	54	+23	31	23	-8	5	0	-5
Presentation of advertisements which discriminate some customers	24	54	+30	52	31	-21	24	15	-9	0	0	0
Presentation of advertisements which humiliate the dignity of human being	69	68	-1	21	25	+4	10	7	-3	0	0	0

Source: author's own elaboration based on surveys' findings.

were also assessed so in 2012 by more than 50% of people. Therefore, one may assume that application of the comparative advertising is not, from the point of view of its addressees, anything improper and it does not arouse negative attitudes towards advertisers.

It must also be noted that there decreased the number of advertising activities considered as ethical. In 2012, it was only one such an activity, whereas in case of packaging-related activities there occurred a definite growth of their number, what points out to a little bit higher sensitivity of the interviewees to application in relation to them of non-ethical advertising stimuli compared to sensitivity to the packaging stimulus. Such a conclusion may also be confirmed by the fact that some advertising activities were considered as penalisable by more than half of respondents, whereas in case of packaging-related activities the biggest percentage of such opinions in 2012 accounted for 46%.

## Resumption

Pursuant to the fundamental assumption of marketing, the perspective of market activities addresses should always be a benchmark for offerers. In her article, therefore, the author made a comparative analysis of their attitudes towards the product-, packaging- and advertising-related activities directed to them, with a pursuit to determine the changes that took place in the years 2010-2012 in terms of the subjectively evaluated level of their compliance with the rules of ethics. The presented considerations indicate a diversified customers' sensitivity to the addressed to them by food producers unfair activities some of which were evaluated definitely worse than other ones. Certainly the respondents were the most sensitive to producers' activities closely related to the product, considering them not only as non-ethical but, at the same time, as penalisable. Moreover, with time elapse, there were tightened assessments of almost all of those activities, what is an important hint for manufacturers that a further application thereof may have caused negative sales effects as own experience gained by respondents for every third of them was a crucial decision-making factor affecting their purchasing decisions concerning food products.

Respondents also displayed quite a high sensitivity to the directed to the controversial advertising activities considering most of them as non-ethical, though, unlike in case of the product-related activities, they rather did not think that producers should be punished for them. Moreover, in 2012, there grew the percentage of individuals considering many of those activities as indeed non-ethical but not requiring application of sanctions against producers. However, on the other hand, there definitely decreased the share of respondents who think that the advertising activities in question can hardly be explicitly coined as non-ethical, what is confirmed by a certain tightening of opinions and, *eo ipso*, deepening radicalism of respondents' attitudes towards the advertising messages reaching them. This evidences the necessity to apply them cautiously by producers in order not to build negative experience of the customers who did not indeed display such high sensitivity to these activities as in case of the product-related activities; nevertheless, they also changed their attitudes towards them from less to more unambiguous.

The research findings show that the least radically respondents evaluated unfair producers' activities related to packaging, most of which were considered in 2012 by more than 10% of individuals as fully ethical, two of which were assessed so by more than 70% of the interviewees. Taking, at the same time, into account the fact that two years earlier, in case of most packaging-related activities nobody considered them as fully ethical, one may state even growth of liberalism of the respondents, hence the decline in their sensitivity to unfair activities related to packaging, what differs these activities from the one from the two remaining groups. Of course, this does not mean that producers may feel owing to that impregnable having permission to apply such stimuli. However, it is important that application thereof should not entail such negative sales consequences as in case of advertising activities and particularly product-related ones.

Producers should, therefore, particularly take care of food products composition, avoid in advertising them whatever elements suggesting lack of respect for man and not mislead customers through application on their packaging of verbal and/or non-verbal markings indicating that the product has certain features which it actually does not have. Of course, the ultimate state should be a complete elimination of whatever activities causing negative opinions even in part of customers as, despite a relatively lower respondents' sensitivity to unfair or controversial packaging-related activities, none of them was, after all, considered by all the interviewees as fully ethical. The only activity, not only among the packaging-related activities in question, but among all the activities presented in the article, which were not in 2012 considered by any respondent as non-ethical, was adding useless free goods to the product packaging. As much as 89% of people considered them as even fully ethical, though two years earlier that percentage accounted for 31%. Hence, it is worth remembering that there change not only customers' needs but also their attitudes towards various activities of offerers who, not being able to foresee in advance if the change of customers' attitude towards a specific form of impact is negative or positive, or how quickly it occurs, should all the more strive to achieve the said ultimate state for which specific is application of exclusively explicitly ethical activities.

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## **Zmiany postaw polskich nabywców wobec nieetycznych działań producentów żywności**

### **Streszczenie**

W artykule zaprezentowano opinie i postawy nabywców wobec nieuczciwych działań producentów żywności. Wskazano na lukę między teoretycznymi założeniami odnoszącymi się do partnerstwa z klientami a praktycznymi działaniami producentów. Na podstawie wyników badań terenowych dokonano analizy postaw respondentów wobec trzech grup działań rynkowych (odnoszących się do produktu, jego opakowania i reklamy). Dokonano również analizy zmian postaw respondentów od roku 2010 do 2012. Stanowiło to główny cel rozważań. Podstawowe wyniki dotyczyły poziomu radykalizmu w przypadku postaw wobec działań związanych z produktami oraz wzrostu poziomu tolerancji w przypadku postaw wobec działań odnoszących się do opakowań, tym niemniej nadal większość respondentów uznawała te bodźce za nieetyczne. Zmiany w postawach nabywców powinny być wskazówkami dla producentów, by zbliżać się do zasad orientacji marketingowej.

**Słowa kluczowe:** nabywca końcowy, producent, etyka, marketing, partnerstwo.

**Kod JEL:** M31

## Изменения отношения польских покупателей к неэтическим действиям производителей продуктов питания

### Резюме

В своей статье автор представила мнения и отношения клиентов к нечестным действиям производителей продуктов питания. Указывается разрыв между теоретическими предпосылками, относящимися к партнерству с клиентами, и практическими действиями производителей. На основе результатов полевых исследований выявили и провели анализ отношений респондентов к трем группам рыночных действий (относящихся к продукту, его упаковке и рекламе). Провели тоже анализ изменений в отношениях респондентов от 2010 г. до 2012 г. Это была основная цель статьи. Основные результаты относились к уровню радикализма в случае отношения к связанным с продуктом действиям и повышения уровня толерантности в случае оношения к действиям, связанным с упаковкой; тем не менее большинство респондентов воспринимали эти стимулы как неэтические. Изменения в отношении покупателей должны стать для производителей указаниями, чтобы приблизиться к правилам маркетинговой ориентации.

**Key words:** конечный потребитель, производитель, этика, маркетинг, партнерство.

**Код JEL:** M31

Artykuł nadesłany do redakcji w październiku 2013 r.

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