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The Real and the Postulated Market Role of Polish Final Buyers

Summary

Article's goal: the main research goal of this article was identification and analysis of the real market role played by Polish final buyers and their expectations in this regard.

Research approach: to achieve the main goal, the author used the analysis of findings of primary surveys conducted by the questionnaire method.

Basic research findings: based on the findings of primary surveys, the author drew the conclusion of very limited real market role of respondents treated by offerers like tolerated customers or in a worse way. At the same time, respondents' expectations related to their market role were bigger. The visible marketing gap exists which makes it impossible to build the marketing partnership between final buyers and offerers.

Practical implications: results of the analysis of the real market role of customers and their expectations in this scope should direct offerers' marketing activities what is the key factor of implementation of the assumptions of the holistic marketing orientation.

Social implications: the knowledge about the existing mentioned gap makes it possible for offerers to manage efficiently and effectively the relations with final buyers as well as to shape properly and use their marketing potential in the favourable way for both sides.

Key words: final buyer, marketing, market role, marketing partnership, prosumer.

JEL codes: M31

Introduction

Offerers still frequently seem to forget that the role of the purchaser is one of the key market roles in the market of consumer goods and services. It can be, however, played in different ways, which results from the level of market activity of a particular person, and, at the same time, from the range of their engagement. In practice, the fulfilment of the purchaser's role understood as buying products available on the market reflects the lowest level of market activity, since the range of engagement is then limited only to the activities that are directly connected with the decision-making process of purchase. On the other, opposite edge of the scale of market activity, there is the prosumer's role played in a broad sense, because the objective range of the recipient's engagement, apart from activities connected with the decision-making process, also includes an active participation in preparing all elements of the market offer, i.e. not only the product itself but also its marketing attributes, promotional incentives, etc.

The market role played by a particular person depends on various factors, which generally can belong to one of two basic groups:

- 1) external factors, which can be divided into:
 - factors completely dependent on the offerer – a form of a marketing impact applied by the offerer, etc.
 - factors independent of the offerer – models of other people, including those considered to be the purchaser's authorities, etc.
- 2) internal factors, which can be divided into:
 - factors partially dependent on the offerer – the character and the force of relations with the purchaser, subjective feelings of the purchaser, reflecting the relations between the purchaser and the offerer, etc.
 - factors independent of an offerer – personal features of the purchaser, their system of values, their attitudes, etc.

The most favourable solution, both for the offerer and the purchaser in the long-term is, undoubtedly, the latter's playing the role of the prosumer in the broad sense, as this allows for optimising the adjustment of the values of all the elements of the marketing offer to his/her fast-changing expectations; thus the enlargement of the perceived ability of the offer to fulfil those expectations in a way satisfactory for the recipient. As a prosumer, he/she becomes the offerer's strategic marketing partner, co-operating in all marketing activities.

Marketing attitudes and behaviour of the purchaser constitute the basic measurement of efficiency and effectiveness of actions taken by the offerer, deciding about his/her market future. They are beneficial if the purchaser expresses contentment or even satisfaction (Edvardsson et al. 2000) thanks to interacting with the particular offerer. Thus, in the literature on the subject, the necessity of cohesive and comprehensive creation of relations with individual purchasers in the long term is emphasised, which makes one of the major assumptions of the relationship marketing (Bolton, Bhattacharya 2000; Kanagal 2011; Grönroos 1994; Gummesson 1994; Baruk 2008; Gordon 2001; Otto 1999; Kotler, Keller 2007) [by some authors it is even identified with the main aim of operations under relationship marketing (Sirdeshmukh et al. 2002)], or customer relationship management (Morris 1994; Ryals et al. 2000; Payne, Frow 2005; Reinartz et al. 2004; Rigby et al. 2002). These operations result in arousing loyalty among purchasers towards the offerer, the brand and/or products. Unfortunately, it is the rational dimension of loyalty based on clearly economic premises [measurable benefits (McMullan, Gilmore 2008)] that is exposed the most frequently, whereas its emotional dimension (non-measurable benefits), which, after all, determines the authentic attachment to a particular supplier, is treated marginally.

The high level of ethics, which the offerer should incorporate into the organisational culture as the fundamental value ("the king of marketing" as writes Ch. Arnold (2010)), tending to attract purchasers who share the same values, and, thereby, identify with them, is the main condition to arouse emotional loyalty. Such activities can result in establishing a community of loyal final purchasers who do not only feel emotional bond with the offerer, repeating the purchase of products supplied by him/her, but, simultaneously, promote the offer among other participants of the market under word-of-mouth marketing, which is considered to be much more trustworthy than other forms of promotion used by companies. This

can be achieved through market education of purchasers and through motivating them to get involved in the process of creating quality standards of the market offer, both of the products and other elements; however, most of all, through presenting loyalty towards purchasers whose indication is ethical behaviour towards them.

The offerer's loyalty towards recipients constitutes, therefore, the condition to arouse their commitment (Ingram et al. 2005), and, in consequence, emotional loyalty, owing to which they become open to share their marketing potential with the offerer, playing the role of prosumers. The phenomenon of prosumption is, obviously, not new, as it has been present since 1980 when A. Toffler (1980) introduced it into the literature on the subject. Still, it has not been explicitly defined or interpreted. Some authors are the proponents of a narrow sense of presumption, limiting it mostly to the offerers' getting purchasers involved in creating the market offer, whereas other authors (Lattemann, Robra-Bissantz 2005) understand the term of prosumption in a much broader sense, including also the generating of specific opinions about the supplier and the active search for them in the presumptive activity of purchasers. In order to achieve such a state it is necessary to individualise mutual relations, enabling the mutual creation of factors valuable both for the recipients and the offerer who fulfil the role of equal market partners. The recipients' market role broadens distinctly in this case; apart from playing the role of the addressees of marketing activities as well as their purchasers and/or consumers, they simultaneously play the role of co-creators, or even initiators of various forms of marketing activity, participating in all sub-processes of the integrated system of generating values together with the offerer. This is equivalent with the so-called complete purchase integration (Lattemann, Robra-Bissantz 2005). On the other hand, some authors treat in a way marginally the role of purchasers as participants of marketing actions taken by the offerer, especially in the food market, exposing much more distinctly the necessity of their participation in activities from different areas. For example, Ch. G. Iwu writes about purchasers' activity expressed by their participation in the conceptive, productive and, possibly, marketing activity (Iwu 2010). Mentioning marketing in the last position does not reflect the authentic marketing orientation but rather indicates its inferiority against the productive sphere, contrary to the assumptions of modern marketing concepts, including, *inter alia*, the holistic concept which was introduced into the literature on the subject by P. Kotler and K.L. Keller (2007). The results of primary and secondary research indicate the existence in practice of a bigger and bigger gap between the postulated state (resulting from these assumptions) and the real state both abroad (Kumar, Shah 2009) and in Poland (Baruk 2013). That's why the main research goal of this article is to identify and analyse the real market role played by Polish final buyers and their expectations related to it.

The respondents' opinions about the market role attributed by offerers to final buyers

Therefore, the degree of readiness of both parties to undertake partner co-operation should be defined, which is reflected in the purchasers' openness to new marketing solu-

tions, which in the Polish market, especially in the food market, includes the co-creation of a market offer in the broad sense, whereas in the case of offerers, it includes the purchasers' subjective assessment of the role attributed to them by offerers.

The condition for the presumptive partnership between the offerer and the recipient to arise is the open attitude of both parties towards each other and towards new solutions, instead of the attitude of withdrawal and passivity. Without such a change, there is no possibility to build relations, which are characterised by long-term value reflecting, *inter alia*, the mutual benefits achieved by both partners. The following question may arise, whether purchasers themselves feel ready to change their market role played so far. The answer to this question can be found in results of the research carried out in the year 2012. The survey was conducted as a direct questionnaire, and it comprised 910 respondents representing Polish final purchasers (Białoskurski 2012).

Although even 17.2% of the respondents claimed (Table 1) that they belonged to the innovators in the food market, that is to the segment of purchasers searching for new solutions, who guide the behaviours of other recipients (whereas, according to Rogers's assumptions, it is definitely a smaller group (only 2.5%)), the largest part of the respondents comprised the so-called laggards whose share in the whole population of respondents was more than twice as big as the innovators mentioned above. The results of the research indicate that the degree of readiness of Polish purchasers for active co-operation with offerers is still quite low. This is also proved by more than twice as big percentage of the people who described themselves as laggards, compared to their number in the Rogers's model.

Table 1

Respondents' self- assessment concerning their attitudes towards new marketing solutions on the market versus Rogers's model (in %)

A group of purchasers	Respondents' response (in %)	Rogers's model (in %)	Difference (in %)
Innovators	17,2	2,5	14,7
Early adopters	18,7	13,5	5,2
Early majority	15,0	34,0	-19,0
Late majority	13,6	34,0	20,4
Laggards	35,5	16,0	19,5

Source: Author's study on the basis of S. Białoskurski, *Marketing lateralny w procesie kształtowania wizerunku produktów spożywczych*, non- published doctorate thesis.

The results reflecting the self-assessment of the respondents' openness to novelties make a mirror image of the Rogers's model, which means that the respondents presented opposite attitudes than those presented in this model. Thus, the conclusion can be drawn that Polish purchasers are much less likely to be open to new solutions, at least in the food market, which obviously hinders, or even makes it impossible to build partnership relations with offerers, which would allow for implementation of the assumptions of the presumptive marketing orientation.

The quality of marketing relations between the purchasers and the offerers can therefore be described as low, as these are the relations based on the domination of one party, which does not only still impose the conditions of the exchange, but does not play the role of the market educator, either, which it should play in order to fulfil the function of creating the purchasers' market awareness. Undertaking comprehensive and coherent marketing actions to activate them would allow for changing the close attitude into the open one whose application is essential for their taking the role of active prosumers. Conservative attitudes of Polish purchasers result to a high degree from negative experience [a purchaser must gain positive experiences in contacts with a particular offerer even twelve times to blot only one negative experience with the offerer out of their memory (Smith, Bolton)] obtained in their contacts with offerers (especially food offerers), which, additionally, sets their standards high in terms of changing their current image.

The starting point in the process of reorientation of the contemporary offerers aiming at the authentic empowerment of purchasers and establishing with them a long-term co-operation should be the identification and analysis of purchasers' opinions and expectations concerning, *inter alia*, the role attributed to them by offerers, the significance of positive relations with offerers, the scope of actions taken by offerers in order to build relations with purchasers, as well as the offers of activities enabling offerers to change the orientation into the partnership marketing orientation.

The research¹ conducted shows that definitely the largest group of the respondents felt that they were treated both by producers and traders as tolerated customers, whereas in the case of relations with producers, 8% more respondents claimed that such a role was attributed to them (Table 2).

Table 2
Respondents' opinions on their marketing role in relations with offerers (in %)

Opinion on the role attributed to respondents by offerers	Responses (in %)		Difference (in %)	Averaged responses for both groups of offerers (in %)
	Relations with producers	Relations with traders		
Appreciated partner	14	18	-4	16.0
Inspirer	5	7	-2	6.0
Tolerated customer	70	62	+8	66.0
Neglected petitioner	10	9	+1	9.5
Unwanted intruder	1	4	-3	2.5

Source: Author's study based on the results of a questionnaire survey.

¹ Primary research was conducted in the second half of the year 2013, and the questionnaire method was used. The survey comprised 500 respondents from Poland, and 66% of them were women. All of the respondents were adults, with 65% of them between 20 and 40 years old, and 30% - between 41 and 60 years old. In total, 92% of the respondents completed at least secondary education, including 60% being a high school graduates. On the basis of the values of the majority of the respondents it can be assumed that their degree of market awareness was relatively high, which makes it easier to assess their current market role, making them, simultaneously, potentially valuable partners for offerers.

Altogether, even 81% of the respondents claimed that producers attribute to them one of the roles that has nothing to do with the marketing approach. 70% of the people stated that they are just tolerated customers for the producers, every tenth respondent felt a neglected petitioner, and every hundredth person even had the feeling of being downgraded to the role of an unwanted intruder. However, in the case of relations with traders, slightly fewer respondents in total (75%) perceived their market role as no better than a tolerated customer, but, on the other hand, four times as many respondents felt an unwanted intruder, compared to the feelings connected with their relations with producers, which reflects the authentic level of these relations, definitely different from the declarations announced by the traders.

As it results from Table 2, although the role of an appreciated partner, which is the role where each offerer thinking long-term should place purchasers, took the second position in hierarchy, in the case of relations with producers even five times fewer respondents had the feeling of fulfilling this role; however, in relations with traders, comparing to the role of a tolerated customer, even 3.5 times fewer respondents claimed they fulfilled it. The role of an appreciated partner should be treated as a target level of mutual relations whose achievement is possible only when the recipients are perceived as a valuable source of inspiration, enabling them to generate and develop original marketing solutions. It appears, though, that according to a three times smaller (compared to the role of partners) part of the respondents, both the producers and the traders attributed to them the role of initiators, although a slightly bigger percentage of the surveyed claimed that it is the traders who see the role of appreciated partners and initiators in them. What is more, the feeling of playing the role of a neglected petitioner both in the relations with producers and with traders was noted by a bigger percentage of the respondents than the feeling of playing the role of an initiator, and it was twice as big as in the case of the relations with producers and by 2% bigger in the case of the relations with traders.

It can therefore be stated that the self-assessment conducted by the respondents on the market role attributed to them by offerers (the hierarchy of roles really played by the surveyed was identical in the case of producers and traders) reflects the real level of mutual relations, and so, the approach represented by them towards the recipients, which definitely differs from the marketing orientation, not only the modern one but also classic. It is, thus, not surprising that purchasers themselves present passiveness more and more frequently, or even discouragement, as they notice a distinct gap between the offerers' declarations (e.g. in media messages) and their real performance, based in practice on marginalising the role of purchasers and on their objectification. It can be assumed that such an approach is all the more severe that, according to the majority of the respondents, good relations with offerers are considered as at least important.

The respondents' expectations related to actions of offerers in order to increase the market role of final buyers

Taking actions that correspond to the recipients' expectations by the offerers would obviously help to improve the relations with purchasers. The results of the research indicate

that these expectations are diverse for the producers and for the traders. Out of nine actions estimated, three gained at least 1/3 of responses when it comes to building good relations by producers, and only one when it comes to building good relations by traders; and it is worth emphasising that none of the activities was mentioned by more than a half of the people (Table 3). The respondents expected above all that producers would build clubs of regular customers (this was the only activity mentioned by more than 40% of respondents), whereas, according to the biggest part of the surveyed, traders should send to their customers business newsletters informing about the company's performance (in the case of relations with producers, this activity was placed in the third position, although for both groups of offerers it was indicated by 33% of the respondents, respectively). An identical number of the respondents in both cases mentioned also the need for building a brand's friendship club of a particular offerer; however, this amounted to over twofold smaller percentage of the respondents (16%).

Table 3

Respondents' expected actions that should be taken by offerers in order to increase the market role of final buyers (in %)*

The action influencing on increase the market role of final buyers	Relations with producers		Relations with traders		Difference	
	responses (in %)	position	responses (in %)	position	in %	in position
Building a regular customer's club	42	1	31	2	+11	-1
Creating an original advertising campaign	34	2	24	3	+10	-1
Sending customers a business newsletter informing about the company and its offer	33	3	33	1	0	+2
Creating free helpline for customers	28	4	20	4	+8	0
Organizing charity actions	24	5	17	5	+7	0
Incorporating customers into preparing products and other elements of the offer	17	6	12	7	+5	-1
Organizing family picnics	16	7	17	5	-1	+2
Creating a brand's friendship club of a particular producer/ trader	16	7	16	6	0	+1
Sending wishes to customers e.g. for birthday, Christmas, etc.	8	8	20	4	-12	+4

*Responses in % do not sum up to 100, as the respondents could indicate more than one response.

Source: Author's study based on the results of a questionnaire survey.

The greatest differences in percentage (of at least 10%) concerned three actions. These were: sending customers wishes on important occasions (the difference of 12%), building a regular customer's club (the difference of 11%), and creating an original advertising campaign (the difference of 10%). The first of the above-mentioned actions took the final position with reference to producers (and it was the only one indicated by less than 10%), yet it turned out to be much more important with reference to traders, as it took the fourth position,

alongside with creating a free helpline for customers (both actions were indicated by 20% of respondents). It can therefore be stated that actions taken in practice by traders suited the respondents' expectations better than the actions taken by producers. Building a regular customer's club and creating an original advertising campaign were, according to the respondents, much more important in the case of building good relations with producers (taking the differences in percentage into consideration), although in the hierarchy of actions, in the case of both groups of the offerers, they were located in similar positions (taking the differences in positions into consideration).

Taking into consideration the results presented in Table 3 it can be stated that the actions connected with maximising the respondents' marketing activity, and thus with attributing to them the role of authentic partners by the offerers, were relatively less important for the surveyed. It results probably from a peculiar lack of faith of the respondents in the authenticity of such a big change of offerers' attitude, who still see in them rather customers (or even intruders), which is proved by the above-mentioned feelings of the respondents connected with the marketing role attributed to them by producers and traders. Incorporating customers into the process of preparing and creating a market offer took only the sixth position in the case of building relations by producers (outstripping three other actions), whereas with reference to building relations by traders it took the final position (being mentioned by almost twice as few people as the typical actions such as creating a free helpline or sending wishes to customers).

It cannot be overlooked that, with reference to building good relations by producers, almost 1/5 of the people expected the possibility to participate in the creation of a market offer, i.e. they still presented a rather open attitude towards active co-operation with producers. It should be interpreted by the latter as a clear signal sent by the unappreciated recipients confirming their potential readiness to fulfil the role of partners who share their marketing potential with producers.

Conclusion

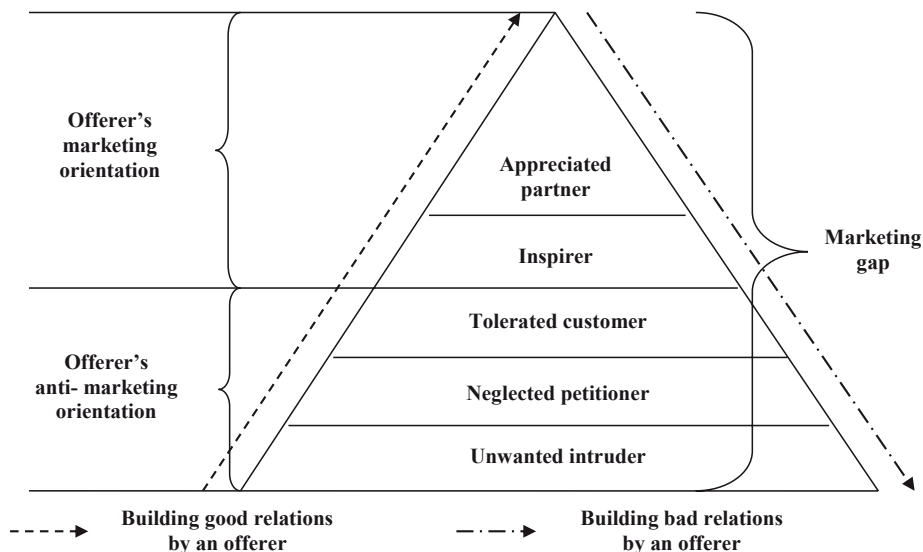
The results of the analysis show that offerers do not appreciate purchasers as their potential market partners, seeing in them rather just addressees of the offer, dependent on its suppliers. It is confirmed by the respondents' feelings concerning the role attributed to them by offerers, which is frequently reduced to the role of customer, or even intruder. This proves the existence of an obvious gap between the assumptions of both classic and modern marketing concepts which display the superior significance of purchasers, and the offerers' actions (Figure 1).

On the basis of above-mentioned discussion it can be stated that nowadays the authentic marketing partnership between offerers and Polish purchasers, especially in the food market, actually does not exist. This causes that they do not play the role of prosumers, to which they are not prepared (Figure 2). What is more, both parties do not currently present their readiness for such partnership to appear. The basic conditions to enable it in the nearest future

are not fulfilled, which makes both parties face its negative consequences. Purchasers do not express satisfactory openness to new solutions, to which active co-operation with offerers belongs, whereas offerers still do not display satisfactory activeness within the realisation of educational and social functions; they frequently even take actions against the rules of business ethics, which contributes to the enlargement of the psychological distance between them and the purchasers. Such behaviour makes the recipients feel as unwanted customers, not as valuable partners of offerers, which, additionally, blocks the possible changes in their attitudes towards them.

Figure 1

The model of building relations with purchasers fulfilling the role of the offerers' partners



Source: Author's study.

This can be called a vicious circle effect. To break it, both parties are obliged to understand that co-operation would help to achieve much more than rivalry, especially that the benefits resulting from such co-operation are long-term, not just temporary. For many offerers, especially those functioning in the Polish market, the co-operation with purchasers seems to be a novelty. Therefore, they should also get their attitude reoriented, becoming open to recipients, thanks to which their actions will enable them to achieve not only their own aims, but also the purchasers' pursuits, which will even more strengthen their marketing partnership.

Such a change should be of a revolutionary nature, and it should begin with learning the purchasers' real marketing aspirations, which are reflected in, *inter alia*, their expectations

Figure 2**Matrix of the openness of potential marketing partners**

The degree of offerers' readiness for marketing partnership	High	<p><u>The role of a purchaser</u> (ineffective motivating the purchasers - potential marketing rivalry)</p>	<p><u>The role of an authentic prosumer</u> (similarity of aims and action – marketing partnership)</p>
	Low	<p><u>The role of a traditional purchaser</u> (divergence of aims and actions – marketing rivalry)</p>	<p><u>The role of a potential prosumer</u> (suppressing the purchasers' initiative – potential marketing rivalry)</p>
		Low	High
		The degree of purchasers' readiness for marketing partnership	

Source: Author's study.

concerning actions that in the process of building relations should be taken into consideration by offerers. This will make it easier to play the role of appreciated partners both by offerers and purchasers, supporting the optimal (beneficial for both parties) usage of their marketing potential.

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Rzeczywista i postulowana rola na rynku polskich nabywców końcowych

Streszczenie

Cel artykułu: głównym celem badawczym w artykule była identyfikacja i analiza rzeczywistej roli rynkowej odgrywanej przez polskich nabywców końcowych oraz ich oczekiwań w tym zakresie.

Podjęcie badań: aby osiągnąć główny cel, autorka zastosowała analizę wyników badań pierwotnych przeprowadzonych metodą ankietową.

Podstawowe wyniki badań: na podstawie wyników badań pierwotnych autorka wyciągnęła wnioski co do nader ograniczonej rzeczywistej roli rynkowej respondentów traktowanych przez oferentów jako klientów ledwie tolerowanych albo w sposób jeszcze gorszy. Równocześnie oczekiwania respondentów dotyczące ich roli na rynku były większe. Istnieje zauważalna luka marketingowa, która uniemożliwia budowanie partnerstwa marketingowego między nabywcami końcowymi a oferentami.

Implikacje praktyczne: wyniki analizy rzeczywistej roli rynkowej klientów i ich oczekiwań w tym względzie powinny ukierunkować działania marketingowe oferentów, co jest kluczowym czynnikiem realizacji założeń holistycznej orientacji marketingowej.

Implikacje społeczne: wiedza na temat istniejącej wspomnianej luki umożliwia oferentom efektywnie i efektownie zarządzać relacjami z nabywcami końcowymi, jak również właściwie kształtować i stosować ich potencjał marketingowy w sposób korzystny dla obu stron.

Słowa kluczowe: nabywca końcowy, marketing, rola rynkowa, partnerstwo marketingowe, *prosument*.

Kod JEL: M31

Действительная и постулированная роль на рынке польских конечных покупателей

Резюме

Цель статьи: основная исследовательская цель автора статьи – выявить и анализировать действительную рыночную роль, которую играют польские конечные покупатели, и их ожидания в этом отношении.

Исследовательский подход: чтобы достичь основной цели, автор использовала анализ полученных результатов первичных исследований, проведенных по анкетному методу.

Основные результаты исследований: на основе результатов первичных исследований автор сделала вывод о весьма ограниченной действительной роли на рынке респондентов, воспринимаемых офферентами в качестве еле терпимых клиентов, или же еще хуже. Одновременно ожидания респондентов в отношении их роли на рынке были выше. Существует заметная маркетинговая брешь, которая сводит на нет формирование маркетингового партнерства между конечными покупателями и офферентами.

Практические импликации: результаты анализа действительной рыночной роли клиентов и их ожиданий в этом отношении должны помочь управлять маркетинговыми действиями офферентов, что является основным фактором осуществления предпосылок холистической маркетинговой ориентации.

Социальные импликации: знания насчет существующей вышеупомянутой брешы дают возможность действенно и эффективно управлять отношениями

с конечными покупателями, а также правильно формировать и использовать их маркетинговый потенциал выгодным для обеих сторон образом.

Ключевые слова: конечный покупатель, маркетинг, роль на рынке, маркетинговое партнерство, просьюмер.

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