

Virtual Environment as a Space of Shopping Center Customer Engagement

Grzegorz Maciejewski

dr hab., prof. UE, Department of Market and Consumption, University of Economics in Katowice, Poland
<https://orcid.org/0000-0002-1318-0747>

Piotr Krowicki

mgr, Faculty of Applied Sciences, WSB University, Dąbrowa Górnicza, Poland
<https://orcid.org/0000-0001-6891-2354>

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Abstract

Purpose: The aim of the article is to identify online customer engagement in shopping centers (SC).

Design/methodology/approach: The research was based on secondary and primary sources.

The secondary sources are the subject literature, while the primary sources were obtained through netnographic research carried out on the basis of the analysis of affiliate pages of the Facebook social platform and the Google review platform of the 25 largest Polish shopping centers.

Findings: The frequency of publishing posts by shopping malls and areas of customer engagement were identified. The research results show large differences between shopping centers in terms of customer engagement in a virtual environment and identify areas of customer engagement in shopping centers on the internet.

Research limitations/implications: The authors of the article are aware of the limitations of their research: the analysis of statements in social media does not have to overlap with oral statements in an offline real environment. Moreover, the research results presented should only be referred to the environment of Facebook and Google. However, the variety of social media is very large, and according to the literature on the subject, the type of medium can have a large impact on the CE phenomenon. The research could be expanded by making the analysis of the type of content published by shopping centers (e.g. news, entertainment posts, shopping posts, etc.), by dividing them into categories and drawing attention to the relationships between the type of content published and the level of engagement. It could also be interesting to identify the relationship between the level and areas of customer engagement and the generation of the shopping center.

Correspondence address: Department of Market and Consumption, University of Economics in Katowice, 1 Maja 47, 40-287 Katowice, Poland; Faculty of Applied Sciences, WSB University, Ciepłaka 1C, 41-300 Dąbrowa Górnicza, Poland, e-mails: grzegorz.maciejewski@ue.katowice.pl; pkrowicki@wsb.edu.pl.

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Originality/value: The analysis presented in the article is of great cognitive importance. As far as the authors of the article know, this is the first publication on the engagement of a shopping center customer. The obtained results may be helpful for managers of shopping centers: they draw attention to the scale and particular areas of this phenomenon

Keywords: areas of customer engagement, customer engagement, shopping center.

JEL: D12, M31, O33

Środowisko wirtualne jako przestrzeń zaangażowania klienta centrum handlowego

Streszczenie

Cel: identyfikacja zaangażowania klienta centrów handlowych (CH) w Internecie.

Metodologia: badania oparto na źródłach wtórnych i pierwotnych. Źródła wtórne stanowi literatura przedmiotu, natomiast źródła pierwotne zostały pozyskane w drodze badań etnograficznych, przeprowadzonych na podstawie analizy stron afiliacyjnych platformy społecznościowej Facebook oraz platformy recenzenckiej Google 25 największych polskich centrów handlowych.

Wyniki: zidentyfikowano częstotliwość publikowania postów przez centra handlowe i obszary zaangażowania klienta. Wyniki badań wskazują na duże różnice między centrami handlowymi w zaangażowaniu klienta w środowisku wirtualnym oraz identyfikują obszary zaangażowania klienta centrów handlowych w Internecie.

Ograniczenia/implikacje badawcze: autorzy artykułu są świadomi ograniczeń swoich badań: analiza wypowiedzi w mediach społecznościowych nie musi się pokrywać z wypowiedziami ustnymi w środowisku rzeczywistym offline. Ponadto, zaprezentowane wyniki badań dotyczą jedynie środowiska Facebook oraz Google. Różnorodność mediów społecznościowych jest bardzo duża, a typ medium może mieć duży wpływ na zjawisko CE. Rozwinięciem badań byłaby analiza rodzaju publikowanych treści przez centra handlowe (np. posty informacyjne, rozrywkowe, handlowe), ich kategoryzacja oraz zwrócenie uwagi na relacje pomiędzy rodzajem publikowanych treści a poziomem zaangażowania. Interesująca mogłaby być również identyfikacja związku pomiędzy poziomem i obszarami zaangażowania klienta a generacją centrum handlowego.

Oryginalność/wartość: zaprezentowana w artykule analiza ma duże znaczenie poznawcze. Zgodnie z wiedzą autorów artykułu, jest to pierwsza publikacja dotycząca zaangażowania klienta centrum handlowego. Uzyskane wyniki mogą być pomocne dla menedżerów centrów handlowych: zwracają uwagę na skalę oraz poszczególne obszary tego zjawiska.

Słowa kluczowe: centrum handlowe, obszary zaangażowania, zaangażowanie klienta.

1. Introduction

Shopping center is an important retail format. However, it is not only a consumption space, but it also is a tourist attraction and a destination where free time can be spent. Importantly, it is treated by visitors as a public space, and sometimes it even is identified with city centers. Thus, the shopping center is of great value to customers, and this in turn implies engagement.

In the processes of marketing communication, the customer is becoming more and more important, while the effectiveness of marketing messages is related to how credible the message is. The customer more and more often initiates contact with the company. Thus, he/she is no longer a passive

recipient of the message, and the market can be compared to a forum where customers become engaged in an active dialogue, and, at the same time, they become a source of competence for companies. It is crucial for the company to understand the purpose, meaning and quality of dialogue from the customer's perspective (Prahalad & Ramaswamy, 2000).

Since information and communication technologies (ICT) were developed and the related time and space barriers were removed, customers became more active. Thus, it can be seen that customer behavior evolved from reactive behaviors that were a reaction to marketing activities of enterprises to proactive behaviors which are initiated by the customers themselves and targeted at enterprises or other customers. Customers provide feedback to an enterprise, and, since enterprises understand the benefits of this activity, they themselves more and more often engage their customers.

Customers can be engaged in a real or in a virtual space. With nearly 3.6 billion internet users (Tsiotsou, 2020) and becoming the most popular source of information (Łysik, Kutera, & Machura, 2014), the internet has given power to clients. Virtual consumer communities play an important role (Mróz, 2013). Their inherent principle is the customers' participation and influencing the attitudes, opinions and decisions of other internet users. Each client can become a prosumer, a content creator, which, combined with actions based on values, is a pillar of modern marketing (Kotler, Kartajaya, & Setiawan, 2017). The client-prosumer gains his/her full subjectivity and becomes an actual partner of the enterprise (Maciejewski, 2016).

Aware of how important the social impact is, contemporary organizations pay more and more attention to the level of social media and the role of recommendation marketing. In 2014, Deloitte indicated that for 60% of people, reviews made by other customers, like recommendations made by family members, are a reliable source of information about products (Deloitte, 2014). Many enterprises use social media in order to keep their customers engaged (Omran, 2021). This trend also applies to the shopping center sector.

The basic content of this article has been divided into two parts: theoretical and empirical. In the theoretical part, the terms 'customer engagement' and 'shopping center' are identified, while in the empirical part, the research methodology and the results of the analysis followed by a discussion are presented. As the conclusions were formulated, the authors also used their own professional experience. In the article, the answers to the following research questions were attempted:

RQ1: What is the frequency of posts made by SC managers?

RQ2: How big are the differences in the engagement of an individual SC on the Facebook profile?

RQ3: What are the areas of SC customer engagement on the internet?

RQ4: Can the identified areas of shopping center customer engagement be linked to the factors of SC attractiveness presented in the literature on the subject?

The authors of the article use the terms ‘customer’ and ‘user’ interchangeably, referring to the user of online platforms, and also understand the terms ‘shopping center’ and ‘shopping mall’ as synonyms. In this study, Facebook and Google are treated as social media: Facebook as a social platform and a company’s business card together with customers’ opinions as a review platform (Mróz, 2013).

2. Literature Review

Shopping centers are an inherent element of the city and one of the most common formats of the retail market (Maciejewski, 2016). In the literature on the subject, there are many definitions of a shopping center, while the definition of the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) is referred to relatively often, according to which SC is ‘a complex of retail shops and various service enterprises, which is usually designed, planned, built and managed as one unit. In most cases, such complexes have their own parking lot. The entire complex, including the type of trade and the size of the outlets, was designed to meet the needs of the population within a given radius or specific customer base’ (Eurostat, 1993). Shopping centers perform various functions, including commercial and service, recreational, entertainment and even residential functions.

When discussing shopping centers, it is worth paying attention to the value of these facilities, which in turn is treated in the literature on the subject as an antecedent to the phenomenon of customer engagement (vaan Doorn et al., 2010). Value for the customer is related to the benefits and factors of attractiveness of a shopping center, and different approaches to these factors can be found in the literature on the subject. And so, for Teller, Elms and Reutterer (2008, 2010), the factors of SC attractiveness include atmosphere, retail tenant mix, merchandise value, ambience, accessibility, parking, personnel, orientation, infrastructural facilities, while according to El-Adly (2007), the essential benefits are comfort, entertainment, diversity, mall essence, convenience and luxury. In the literature on the subject, the concept of the SC value chain proposed by Mikołajczyk (2012) is also presented. The researcher treats the location, SC offer and resources as key success factors, while he identifies the main support actions with shaping relationships, space development and facility management. In the model, a very important role is played by the basic functions of tenants that are divided by Mikołajczyk (2012) into activities in commercial and in non-commercial services.

The goal of marketing 4.0. is ‘awakening consumer advocacy’ and, according to Kotler et al. (2017), increasing customer engagement requires multi-channel marketing that provides an integrated online and offline experience regardless of touchpoints. Taking care of the internet communities is important for many enterprises – the analysis of the opinions of internet

users is valuable, while the traditional methods of market research, e.g. telephone interviews, online surveys, do not always help in capturing the actual customer opinion.

In the literature on the subject, various approaches to defining the CE phenomenon can be seen. Researchers distinguish between cognitive, affective or behavioral approaches, which makes it difficult to develop a unified definition of this construct. Importantly, researchers identify differences in the subject, object, and context of the CE phenomenon (Ferreira, Zambaldi, & de Sousa Guerra, 2020).

The authors of the article are in favor of a narrow (behavioral) approach to *customer engagement* (Table 1) and thus, they treat CE as the customer's behavior that focuses on a brand or an enterprise and is not related to the purchase as well as results from motivational factors (van Doorn et al., 2010). According to the authors of this article, a multi-faceted approach can make CE blur with value co-creation or value creation. The behavioral interpretation of CE does not overlap with the constructs of affective and cognitive commitment or customer involvement (Harmeling, Moffett, Arnold, & Carlson, 2017). Importantly, the narrow approach to CE does not overlap with the behavioral approach of loyalty, i.e. the non-transactional nature of the *customer engagement* construct differs from the systematic approach to purchasing. According to the authors of the article, the transactional behavior of customers should be eliminated from the conceptualization of the CEB concept. Then, this approach does not overlap with the concept of relations with a customer and thus it applies only to intangible sources of customer value (Żyminkowska, Wiechoczek, Kieźel, & Żyminkowski, 2018).

Customer engagement in the online environment is gaining more and more interest from both academics and practitioners (Dessart, Veloutsou, & Morgan-Thomas, 2016). As the internet grew, customer engagement in social networks was becoming more and more important. The physical and cognitive effort of both entities of engagement (customer and enterprise) is smaller in the virtual environment. Thus, the internet increases the number of engaged customers (it also expands the number of potential customers) and has a positive impact on the speed and durability of this engagement (Zajkowska, 2018). Research presented in the literature on the subject is a stimulus for entrepreneurs to focus on the CE phenomenon on the internet: the features of posts on the brand's website and the perception of content have a positive impact on customer engagement (Wang, 2021). In other words, high-quality content on the internet can encourage customers to get engaged (Ashely & Tuten, 2015).

In the literature on the subject, no universal definition of CE on the internet has been developed (Brzozowska-Woś, 2020). The concept of online brand community engagement (OBC engagement) that involves the client's internal motivation to interact and cooperate with other community

members is relatively popular. The concept of OBC engagement assumes that members are interested in helping other members and open to cooperation as part of joint initiatives (Wirtz et al., 2013).

Author	Definitions of Term
van Doorn et al., (2010)	Customer behaviors that are brand- or business-focused and are not related to the purchase as well as are driven by motivational factors
Verhoef, Reinartz, & Krafft (2010)	Customer behaviors referred to a brand or company that go beyond transactions. They include word of mouth, blogging, posting ratings, etc.
Kumar et al. (2010)	Customer behavior referred to a brand or company that is driven by motivational factors. CE refers to the customer's interaction (of a transactional and non-transactional nature) with the company, with potential customers and other current customers of the company.
Jaakkola & Alexander (2014)	Behavior in which customers contribute voluntarily their resources focusing on the brand or company. CEB goes beyond what is fundamental to the transaction, appears in interactions between a specific object and/or entities, and is the result of motivational factors.
Harmeling et al., (2017)	The voluntary contribution of the client's resources to the company's marketing activities going beyond the financial customers.
Beckers, van Doorn, & Verhoef (2018)	CEB defined as in the idea of van Doorn et al. (2010), except that there is a distinction between client-initiated CEB and organization-initiated CEB
Żyminkowska et al., (2018)	Behaviors (excluding transactional behavior) of current and potential individual clients, focused on the enterprise and (or) its offer (including the brand), resulting from motivational factors.

Tab. 1. Definitions of CEB (Customer Engagement Behavior) found in the literature on the subject. Source: Own study based on: van Doorn et al., 2010; Żyminkowska et al., 2018; Harmeling et al., 2017; Jaakkola, Alexander 2014; Verhoef et al., 2010; Beckers, 2018; Kumar, 2010; Żyminkowska et al., 2018.

The customer, consumer and user can be the subject of engagement, while brands, products or even brand communities are the object (Dessart et al., 2016; Tsiotsou, 2020). It is also worth paying attention to various areas of customer engagement in the company's marketing activities. With the use of factor analysis, Kucia (2019) identified three areas of CE in relation to the brand and (or) the enterprise: 1) product development and usability, 2) order fulfillment and customer service, and 3) marketing and sales. According to the authors of the article, these areas can be identified with the factors of attractiveness of shopping centers (Table 2).

Author	Determinants
Bodkin & Lord (1997)	convenience, presence of a specific shop in the mall, services and prices
El-Adly (2007)	comfort, entertainment, diversity, mall essence, convenience, luxury
Venkateswarulu & Uniyal (2007)	appeal and convenience, amenities and atmospherics, ambience, personnel, parking and seating, restrooms, smell, security, size of store
Teller, Elms, & Reutterer (2008, 2010)	atmosphere, retail tenant mix, merchandise value, ambience, accessibility, parking, personnel, orientation, infrastructural facilities
Twardzik (2014)	The reasons why residents shop in shopping centers: There is a large variety of goods; There are low prices, discounts, promotions; You can buy everything under one roof; You can shop on weekends; There are convenient opening hours for the center; The goods are of good quality.
Wójtowicz (2015)	a wide range of goods and their price, doing comprehensive shopping, opening hours, available parking lot – parking spaces, multiple promotions, a wide range of services, good conditions for relaxation, safety, fashion for visiting the mall, friendly atmosphere, fashionable place, safety, good conditions for rest
Rochmińska (2015)	motives when selecting shopping centers, variety of goods, quality of goods, low prices, promotions, shops of various companies, professional service, service points, the possibility of spending free time, loyalty cards, entertainment offer
Dębek (2015)	aesthetics, atmosphere, convenience, commercial capability, layout, leisure potential, perceived safety, social positioning
Dziwulski & Ogrzebacz (2018)	a very wide range of goods, promotions, discounts, bargain sales, attractiveness of available goods, distance from the place of residence, level of customer's income

Tab. 2. Shopping centers attractiveness factors. Source: Own study based on: Rochmińska, 2015; Teller, Reutterer, 2008; El-Adly, 2007; Twardzik 2014; Dębek, 2015; Wójtowicz, 2015; Dziwulski, Ogrzebacz, 2018; Bodkin, Lord, 1997; Venkateswarulu, Uniyal (2007).

It is worth paying attention to how the operationalization of the CE phenomenon introduces order and how the forms of customer engagement are divided into customer-enterprise interactions and customer-customer interactions (Dessart et al., 2016). The issue of what the initiator of this phenomenon is and how CE is divided into actions initiated by the client and actions initiated by the enterprise is also interesting (Beckers, van Doorn, & Verhoef, 2018). In both cases, the CE phenomenon may take place in the internet environment, which was undoubtedly a catalyst for the development of CE in terms of behavior.

The emergence of social media used by as many as 80% of internet users was of great importance for the development of CE (Sobieszek, 2015). The universal nature of these platforms is based on the access to the exchange of insights and recommendations (Włodarczyk, 2021) which may constitute the so-called 'Zero Moment of Truth' for the visitor, i.e. the key moment when the consumer comes into contact with a given brand (Lecinski, 2011). The features of these new media (multimedial nature, interactivity, accessibility, social aspect and individualization) make them perfect to engage current and potential customers (Wiechetek, 2019; Witczak, 2018). It is worth noting that Ashley and Tuten (2015) treated social media as the fifth 'P' (marketing platform) in the classic marketing mix.

The COBRA (consumer's online brand-related activities) model, known in the literature on the subject, is a behavioral construct that is related to customer engagement with social media brand-related content (CESBC). The COBRA model was first introduced into the literature by Shao (2009), while Muntiga, Moorman and Smit (2011) continued their research in this area. This model can be reduced to a *continuum* of three levels of customer activity in a virtual environment: consumption, contribution and content creation. Consumption precedes contribution, which in turn is a predecessor to user generated content (UGC). Contributory activity plays the role of an intermediary between the consumption of content and the greatest degree of engagement, i.e. content creation (Schivinski & Christodoulides, 2016). The electronic Word-of-Mouth (eWOM) that involves positive or negative opinions of potential, current and former clients which are shared with many people and institutions via the internet (Hennig-Thurau, Gwinner, Walsh, & Gremler, 2004) is of vital importance. In the literature on the subject, discussions about the differences in the meaning of positive and negative comments can be found. For example, according to Purnawirawana, Eisend, de Pelsmacker and Dens (2015), negative opinions have a greater impact on the attitude towards the organization's brand and on making a purchase decision than traditional media.

The research results obtained so far show that customers engage in those forms of online activity that do not require too much of their dedication. These are usually the so-called likes of enterprises, brands, products, photos, posts, and relatively rarely users engage in providing opinions, filling out questionnaires, giving advice, participating in discussions or tasks on crowdsourcing platforms (Kieźel & Wiechoczek, 2016).

Kumar (2010) introduced the concept of 'customer engagement value' to the literature on the subject, which is a measure of the value generated as a result of co-creation. This construct consists of: 1) customer lifetime value; 2) customer referral value; 3) customer knowledge value, i.e. ideas for product improvement and innovative solutions, and 4) WOM (customer influencer value). According to the authors of this article, the Kumar model has a high application value and clearly shows the benefits of CE for enterprises.

3. The Research Method and Description of the Research Sample

In the research, it was assumed that company profiles within social media were a factor of engagement (Ostrowski, 2020), while the Facebook and Google platforms were included among the main communication channels of a shopping center. The method of netnography was used, which focused on a discrete and non-participatory (passive) form of observation of the shopping center customers' behavior on the Internet (Kozinets, 2015).

The empirical research was conducted in July and August 2021, and its procedure was divided into two stages. At the beginning, 25 of the largest shopping centers in Poland were identified (they were selected on the basis of statistics kept by the Polish Council of Shopping Centres) and their affiliate pages (public profiles) on the Facebook social platform were analyzed. At this stage of the research, the number of user reactions (likes) could be identified and attention was drawn to how much the SCs were engaged in running the Facebook social platform. The post with the greatest engagement was identified on each affiliate page taking into account the sum of all reactions (likes, shares, user comments). The subject of the research were posts published by shopping centers in the period April 1, 2021 to June 30, 2021.

In addition, customer reviews were analyzed in terms of content on the affiliate accounts (the so-called business cards) of the Google review platform. Once the pilot stage was completed (analysis of accounts of five shopping centers), 20 areas of customer engagement in shopping centers were selected, and the actual research (analysis of all 25 shopping centers) ended with the identification of 27 areas of SC engagement. In total, 250 comments were analyzed. Five comments with a positive overtone (the so-called 'best reviews') and five comments with a negative overtone (the so-called 'worst reviews') were analyzed for each shopping center. There were usually several areas of engagement in each comment. In total, 566 factors were analyzed, which were later classified into 27 areas of shopping center customer engagement. In the study, the total number of opinions of individual shopping center accounts on the Google review platform was also identified.

4. Results

The study showed that the Facebook social platform was extensively used by the centers surveyed. All of the 25 shopping centers analyzed are present in this medium. Westfield Arkadia, the second largest such facility in the country, has the largest number of likes on the affiliate site. It is worth noting that Westfield Arkadia also has records of a very large number of customer opinions on the Google review platform. In this respect, it ranks third, right after Manufaktura in Łódź and Złote Tarasy in Warsaw (Table 3).

No.	Name of SC	Location	Area in m ²	Opening Date	Facebook: number of likes	Google: number of opinions
1	Westfield Arkadia	Warszawa	117 000	2004	272 794	53 616
2	Galeria Mokotów	Warszawa	68 500	2000	153 757	27 191
3	Manufaktura	Łódź	125 699	2006	143 518	61 080
4	Złote Tarasy	Warszawa	66 400	2007	129 479	60 481
5	Posnania	Poznań	100 000	2016	124 611	30 285
6	Silesia City Center	Katowice	86 000	2005	106 272	25 833
7	Bonarka City Center	Kraków	92 000	2009	98 990	27 818
8	Magnolia Park	Wrocław	98 700	2007	83 062	28 457
9	Blue City	Warszawa	84 000	2004	77 788	23 614
10	Riviera	Gdynia	70 550	2013	73 973	21 557
11	Port	Łódź	103 000	2010	60 025	19 948
12	Wroclavia	Wrocław	64 000	2017	54 299	40 059
13	Matarnia	Gdańsk	77 778	2005	53 398	12 347
14	Galeria Echo	Kielce	71 642	2002	49 413	14 003
15	Atrium Felicity	Lublin	75 000	2014	44 402	15 937
16	Wola Park	Warszawa	77 000	2002	44 263	20 706
17	Europa Centralna	Gliwice	67 000	2013	41 285	10 787
18	Galeria Północna	Warszawa	64 500	2017	41 057	15 930
19	Janki	Janki	100 000	1999	38 787	10 732
20	Aleja Bielany	Wrocław	145 000	2004	36 793	16 645
21	Galeria Młociny	Warszawa	75 000	2019	34 512	11 437
22	Karolinka	Opole	70 000	2008	33 427	7 323
23	Atrium Promenada	Warszawa	93 000	1996	28 647	14 721
24	Homepark Targówek	Warszawa	90 600	2006	20 901	9 818
25	Galeria Olimp	Lublin	63 000	2000	9 630	9 860

Tab. 3. Number of selected user reactions on affiliate pages of shopping centers. Source: Own study.

The largest number of posts on the Facebook platform was published by Galeria Echo in Kielce, Magnolia Park in Wrocław and a relatively smaller by SC Karolinka in Opole. It is worth paying attention to how frequently

posts are published: the average daily activity is 1.12, and to the fact that in the analyzed period, Janki, Posnania and Europa Centralna developed posts with the highest sum of reactions (Table 4).

No.	Name of SC	Location	Number of Premises (Tenants)	Number of Posts	Average Daily Activity	Sum of Reactions Under the Most Popular Post
1	Galeria Echo	Kielce	250	232	2.55	302
2	Magnolia Park	Wrocław	260	152	1.67	434
3	Karolinka	Opole	122	143	1.57	201
4	Atrium Felicity	Lublin	122	139	1.53	146
5	Galeria Młociny	Warszawa	200	139	1.53	430
6	Galeria Północna	Warszawa	200	129	1.42	371
7	Bonarka City Center	Kraków	230	127	1.39	749
8	Manufaktura	Łódź	260	116	1.27	783
9	Blue City	Warszawa	200	115	1.26	516
10	Port	Łódź	150	112	1.23	504
11	Atrium Promenada	Warszawa	160	102	1.12	357
12	Silesia City Center	Katowice	310	101	1.1	877
13	Riviera	Gdynia	250	100	1.1	485
14	Janki	Janki	140	97	1.06	1567
15	Homepark Targówek	Warszawa	33	93	1.02	119
16	Posnania	Poznań	220	88	0.97	1475
17	Aleja Bielany	Wrocław	200	79	0.87	100
18	Matarnia Park Handlowy	Gdańsk	80	77	0.85	104
19	Wroclavia	Wrocław	190	75	0.83	419
20	Europa Centralna	Gliwice	79	69	0.75	1067
21	Galeria Mokotów	Warszawa	251	66	0.72	734
22	Westfield Arkadia	Warszawa	234	56	0.62	733
23	Galeria Olimp	Lublin	260	54	0.60	105
24	Wola Park	Warszawa	200	51	0.56	245
25	Złote Tarasy	Warszawa	200	48	0.53	354

Tab. 4. Activity of shopping centers and their clients on affiliate pages on Facebook. Source: Own study.

In the research on user behavior on the Google platform, areas of shopping center customer engagement were identified (Table 5). The size of the shopping center (the number and selection of shops and service points in the shopping center) turned out to be the most often commented area. This factor was present in almost 40% of comments. The way the building looked came second, and how easily cars could be parked in the parking lot came third.

No.	Engagement Area	„+”	„-”	Number of Opinions with Commented SC Area (N=250)
1	The size of the shopping center (the number and selection of shops and service points in SC)	83	15	98
2	The appearance of the building	42	7	49
3	How easily cars can be parked in the parking lot	35	10	45
4	How easily you can move around in SC	24	15	39
5	The number of customers in the shopping center	22	15	37
6	The sense of security, professionalism of security staff	5	32	37
7	Popularity, brand of the shopping center, relation (comparison) to other shopping centers	21	10	31
8	Food zone – number of restaurants and quality of the offer	26	3	29
9	Location and easy access (pedestrians) to SC	21	6	27
10	Additional amenities in SC	23	3	26
11	Wide range of goods in shops. Selection and quality	11	10	21
12	Quality of service for SC tenants' employees in general	6	15	21
13	Ambience	7	8	15
14	Clean toilets, halls of the center and parking lot, professional cleaning service	7	5	12
15	Product prices and promotions in shops	4	8	12
16	A cinema as part of the shopping center	10	1	11

Table cont.

No.	Engagement Area	„+”	„-”	Number of Opinions with Commented SC Area (N=250)
17	The amount of the car parking fees	5	5	10
18	Professionalism of SC employees, contact with SC, updating the website	0	8	8
19	Music in the shopping center	3	4	7
20	The type of the client	2	5	7
21	Air conditioning	2	4	6
22	The type and frequency of events organized in the center	5	0	5
23	Technical condition of the building	0	5	5
24	Order of the range of goods and arrangement of premises	2	1	3
25	Pet-friendly policy	1	1	2
26	Materials promoting the center	0	2	2
27	Shopping center opening hours	0	1	1

Tab. 5. Shopping center customer engagement areas on the internet. Source: Own study.

Customer opinions on the Google review platform were divided into positive ‘+’ and negative ‘-’ opinions (Table 5), since each area of engagement can be identified with a specific evaluation factor of a given shopping center, and it usually has a positive or a negative overtone. By using this type of classification, areas of engagement it were indicated that generate positive comments and that generate negative ones. In this way, it can be concluded that the appearance of the building or the food offer more often receives positive opinions, while service of SC tenants’ employees is the area of engagement that more often generates negative comments.

5. Discussion

The netnography results concerning comments published by customers on the Google review platform should be considered interesting, since the areas of customer engagement can be compared to the factors that determine the value of an SC. Interestingly, the location and easy access (also for pedestrians) to the shopping center turned out to be a secondary SC area, while the appearance of the building and easy access to a parking lot can be classified as important areas. These results are worth comparing with the research by Mikołajczyk (2012) in which the location of a shopping

center turned out to be the most important factor in creating the value of an SC and with a statement often found in the literature that the location of a facility is the most important determinant of its success (Łukasik, 2010). High position of the number of customers and the sense of security in an SC is also significant. These factors are not present in the research done by Mikołajczyk (2012). However, a sense of security is present in the later research by Heffner and Twardzik (2015), Mikołajczyk (2016) and Szymańska and Płaziak (2020), which allows us to draw a conclusion about how important longitudinal studies are in the area of the analysis of SC attractiveness factors. It is also interesting how rarely marketing events or the quality of customer service are commented on. However, it is not surprising that the research results show the highest position of the size of a shopping center. The literature on the subject states that the size of the retail outlet is an important factor in choosing the place of purchase (Maciejewski, 2017, 2018).

The number of likes on the affiliate website is relatively high. The average result is greater than the comparable results of the surveyed Polish university libraries (Bikowska, 2015) or Warsaw theatres (Wróblewski, 2017). It is also worth noting that the frequency of publishing posts is also relatively high (1.12). It is highly likely that managers of the surveyed shopping centers plan to make one post a day, while the surplus is likely to result from the need to communicate an unplanned new content.

It is important that the brand reminds us frequently enough of its existence (Siuda & Grębosz, 2017), while the authors of the article are not convinced that the posts published daily would have tangible results. However, it should be noted that shopping centers do not publish only posts strictly related to the brand of a specific SC, and very often information about the offer of individual tenants of a given shopping center is provided, paying regular contributions to the so-called marketing fund. A large number of tenants (premises) of the surveyed shopping centers has a large impact on the amount of content published on affiliate pages of the Facebook platform.

6. Conclusions

This text presents the issue of how customer engagement is built by shopping centers in a virtual environment and draws attention to the areas of SC customer engagement on the internet, as exemplified by Facebook and Google platforms.

Customer interactions in relation and with respect to brands have a greater impact compared with traditional forms of advertising (Villaneuva, Yoo, & Hanssens, 2008) and it is due to social media that enterprises, including shopping centers, receive a very large benefit in the form of free word-of-mouth. To effectively implement marketing communication,

creation of valuable posts and users' engagement are required to disseminate content to their friends. Thus, it is worth paying attention to the content, because the subject of the message on the internet determines interactivity (Marquardt & Losa-Jonczyk, 2018). Tools for monitoring content on the internet, in particular for monitoring social media (e.g. Sotrender, Brand24 or Google Analytics), can become very helpful. It is worth remembering that Facebook and Google are virtual environments with recommendations, important in the process of making a decision to purchase. Word-of-mouth marketing is defined as trustworthy and, according to the research, has a greater impact on purchasing decisions than other instruments of marketing communication (Wolny & Mueller, 2013).

Shopping centers find conducting marketing activities in the area of social media necessary. With these activities, marketers learn what their customers think about a brand. It is an opportunity to learn more than in the case of traditional methods of collecting information (Pacha, 2010). Importantly, customers who engage on the Facebook social network show greater loyalty and are more likely to visit physical shops (Carlson & de Vries, 2014), which is significant for all shopping centers where footfall in the facility is one of the most important sources of successes.

Social media aggregate the voice of the customer and at the same time stimulate the phenomenon of customer engagement. CE can take an active form (page rating, post rating, commenting or sharing content) or a passive form that is limited to watching affiliate pages. This is all the more important as the employees of shopping centers usually do not have direct contact with the customers of the facility, and the immediate reaction of customers on portals becomes a valuable resource. The acquired knowledge may be helpful in building lasting relationships and creating an attractive offer. Importantly, customer engagement in social media can inspire entrepreneurs to introduce innovative solutions (Grębosz, Siuda, & Zymaniński, 2016; Ziemia & Eisenhardt, 2019).

Unfortunately, for entrepreneurs, social media are still more of an image-building tool than a platform intended to aggregate customer recommendations and comments (Mazurek-Łopacińska & Sobocińska, 2014). CE, especially content creation, should be one of the priorities of shopping center managers. Such activities build customers' trust and have a positive impact on their purchasing decisions (Potępa, 2015). It is therefore reasonable to create a communication strategy that will engage customers based on valuable content. Communication in social media should therefore be primarily of engaging nature. The more so that the time of the pandemic has become a catalyst for the digitization of the economy and it translated into an increased time spent with a mobile phone or in front of a computer. The COVID-19 pandemic and the risk of dead malls are not the best prognosis for the shopping center sector, therefore SC managers should focus on customer engagement.

The authors of the article are aware of the limitations of their research: the analysis of statements in social media does not have to overlap with oral statements in an offline real environment (Fay & Larkin, 2017). Moreover, the research results presented should only be referred to the environment of Facebook and Google. However, the variety of social media (Tsiotsou, 2020) is very large, and according to the literature on the subject, the type of medium can have a large impact on the CE phenomenon (Eriksson, Sjöberg, Rosenbröijer, & Fagerström, 2019). The analysis of fan engagement also lacks an indication of the footfall. If this indicator had been known, the ratio of the number of likes to the number of people entering the facility who are potential recipients of marketing communication on Facebook could have been identified. Unfortunately, these data are the most common business secrets.

Although the presented results are not the results of representative studies, they can be treated as a stimulus for further discussions. The research could be expanded by making the analysis of the type of content published by shopping centers (e.g. news, entertainment posts, shopping posts, etc.), by dividing them into categories and drawing attention to the relationships between the type of content published and the level of engagement. It could also be interesting to identify the relationship between the level and areas of customer engagement and the generation of the shopping center.

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