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**IDENTIFICATION OF CLIENT SATISFACTION  
ATTRIBUTES AS A FACTOR OF ENTERPRISE  
COMPETITIVE ADVANTAGE**

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Key words: client satisfaction, client satisfaction attributes.

Abstract

The paper presents the results of won studies on identification and assessment of client satisfaction attributes that can influence the level of client satisfaction with a food product in studied Polish food industry enterprises.

Client satisfaction study currently forms the base for specifying and determining the product satisfaction attributes important for the client that become an important factor for achieving a competitive advantage by the enterprise. Knowledge of client satisfaction attributes allows effecting targeting of the internal processes in the enterprise to achieve effective client focus.

**IDENTYFIKACJA ATRYBUTÓW SATYSFAKcji KLIENTA CZYNNIKIEM PRZEWAGI  
KONKURENCYJNEJ PRZEDSIĘBIORSTWA**

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Słowa kluczowe: satysfakcja klienta, atrybuty satysfakcji klienta.

Abstrakt

W artykule zaprezentowano wyniki badań własnych dotyczących zagadnienia rozpoznania i oceny atrybutów satysfakcji klienta z produktu, w polskich przedsiębiorstwach przemysłu spożywczego.

Badanie satysfakcji klienta jest aktualnie podstawą sprecyzowania i ustalenia istotnych dla klienta atrybutów satysfakcji z produktu, które stają się ważną przesłanką zdobycia przewagi konkurencyjnej przedsiębiorstwa. Znajomość atrybutów satysfakcji klienta z produktu pozwala ukierunkować własne wewnętrzne procesy przedsiębiorstwa, w celu skuteczniejszej jego orientacji na klienta.

## **Introduction and goal of the study**

In contemporary business processes we deal with increasingly aware and demanding clients. Enterprises are forced to supply products of quality not only satisfying but even exciting the clients. High quality of products is treated as an important competitive strength of every enterprise. As a consequence, Polish food industry enterprises realized relatively quickly that they should include quality systems in their management structures to effectively and efficiently implement their production functions and assure quality of product. Those systems, through their requirements, force the organizations implementing them to apply approaches taking into account the issues of client satisfaction measurement.

Client satisfaction study is a tool allowing acquisition of precious information the enterprises are frequently unable to obtain otherwise (DEREK 2004). That information is the base for specification and determination of product satisfaction attributes important for the client, which becomes an important message for the enterprise in maintaining the attributes indicated by the client at the level highly satisfying to the client and to the degree higher than the potential competitors. Knowledge of client satisfaction attributes allows effective targeting of internal processes in the enterprise to achieve efficient client focus.

This paper, as a consequence of the above, presents, on the basis of the results of own studies, the results of identification and assessment of client satisfaction attributes that can influence the level of client satisfaction with a food product in Polish food industry enterprises covered.

## **Methodology**

55 enterprises that declared conducting client satisfaction measurement participated in the study. The organizations covered operate in the food industry sector and possess certified quality systems. According to the European Classification of Activities in force as of January 1, 2001, the study covered enterprises classified in section D – industrial enterprises, subsection DA, division 15 – manufacturing of food products and beverages from the area of entire Poland according to that classification (based on employment) classified as medium and large enterprises<sup>1</sup>. The organizations covered operate mainly in the regional and national market.

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<sup>1</sup> According to the European Classification enterprises employing over 250 employees are large and those with 50 to 250 employees are medium enterprises.

The study was conducted according to the postal questionnaire methodology. Plenipotentiaries for the quality system from the enterprises covered presented their opinions by completing the questionnaire.

The assessment of activities conducted in the area of client satisfaction attributes identification was scored by the management according to the scale from 0 to 5 where 0 represented absence of such activities, 1- presence but to a very limited extent, 2 – presence to a limited extent, 3 – presence to a medium extent, 4 – presence to a large extent and 5 – presence that was highly extensive.

The respondents ranked the individual client satisfaction attributes according to the scale from 1 to 5 where 1 represented no importance of a given attribute, 2 – low importance of it, 3 – moderate importance, 4 – meant that it was important and 5 that it was very important.

The resulting scores obtained from individual enterprises were averaged to the format of arithmetic average.

### **Identification of client satisfaction attributes**

Client satisfaction measurement is currently becoming an excellent tool allowing accurate identification of characteristics of products for which the clients will be willing to pay and which ones are less important for them. A contemporary enterprise is facing the necessity of determining in the most accurate ways the product attributes satisfying the clients more than those offered by the competitors.

Satisfaction generation models were developed for full understanding of the mechanism generating the feeling of satisfaction or its lack in a client in a specific situation. One of such models is the one developed by Dr. Noriaki Kano, who looked at the issue from product point of view, i.e. the role of certain attributes of goods and services and their influence on the generation of consumer satisfaction (Fig. 1). He simply determined to what extent those characteristics are able to fulfill clients' expectations in a satisfying way. That model helps immensely in identification of the more and less important attributes of client satisfaction (HERMAN, HUBER 2000).

The author of that model identified three categories of attributes or otherwise needs of the clients related to product:

- expected or basic attributes (*the must be, basic needs*); those are the elements of service or product that are necessary to secure fundamental benefits from purchasing of a given item. They are obvious for the client and do not require any further identification. The characteristic feature is that when those attributes are present and the related expectations are fulfilled,

consumers do not notice them. Their absence, on the other hand, causes immediate disappointment of the client.

– characteristic or qualitative attributes (*performance needs*); they focus on the quality aspect of product and form the linear relation between the level of satisfying them and the satisfaction with their presence. If those attributes are present, satisfaction appears; the stronger it is the higher dose of the attribute is supplied. Lack of satisfaction of those expectations results in appearance of lack of satisfaction or, in drastic cases disappointment.

– entrancing attributes (*the attractive, excitement needs*); very often not realized by the clients. Consumers are not focused on satisfying them because very often they are unaware of the possibilities of satisfying such expectations. When they are not satisfied the situation does not result in any negative consequences, however, supplying attributes that unveil and satisfy those needs can result not only in satisfaction but also entrancement.

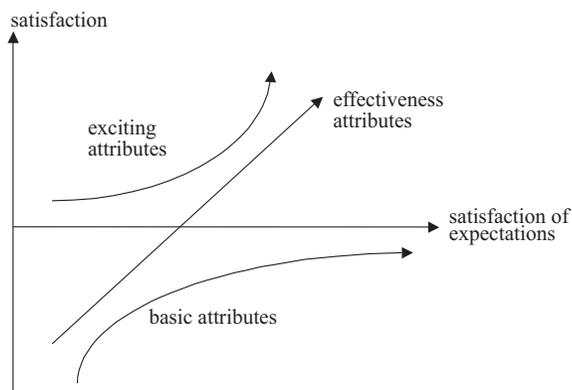


Fig. 1. Konsumer satisfaction model by Kano

Source: Based on EWANS, LINDSAY (1989, p. 149), ZALEWSKI, 2002, p. 32.

Practical applicability of that model includes, among others, the possibility of determining which product characteristics are of key importance in development of positive client perceptions. This offers the possibility of effective product competition. The important aspect of that model is that it considers variability of characteristics over time. The characteristics that, e.g. yesterday represented a major achievement today are quite obvious. On the other hand, certain limitations exist (ZALEWSKI 2002). The model does not answer the question of what guides the consumers in identification of importance of attributes; why they are important for them and what are their purchasing aims. In further analysis other client satisfaction models and methods of study

should be applied as correctness of that type of study requires complementarity of the measurement; also, the participation of individual qualitative parameters and other factors in purchase decision taken by the client depends on the product type.

The *theory of three client satisfaction factors* (i.e. Kano Model) inspired conducting the study to identify and assess the attributes of client satisfaction with a food product.

### **Assessment of attributes of client satisfaction with a product – results of study**

The results obtained from the conducted study indicate that the analyzed enterprises identified the basic client satisfaction attributes for their products at a medium level (average score 3.28). The individual scores per activity are summarized in Table 1.

Table 1

Assessment of activities in identification of client satisfaction attributes

Identified activities	Average score
Management identifies new trends concerning client needs and satisfaction	4.29
Management is convinced about the importance of client satisfaction measurement	3.99
Complaints database is maintained	3.59
Through satisfaction measurement clients are involved in development of new products and processes	2.95
Suggestions by clients are used in improving the client focus	3.38
Client satisfaction is a component of enterprise strategy	3.90
All employees know attributes of optimal client satisfaction	2.98
Attributes of optimal client satisfaction are known	3.28

*Source:* own work based on the questionnaire-based study results.

Employees of enterprises covered had low knowledge of client satisfaction attributes (average score 2.98), which must be considered a rather difficult situation that requires urgent change as client personalization possible through higher involvement of employees in the process of winning and retaining clients is a very important factor influencing satisfaction of client expectations.

Scores of individual client satisfaction attributes are summarized in Table 2. Enterprises covered considered hygienic-nutritive values (average score 4.39), followed by sensor values (average score 3.95), commercial values (average

Table 2  
Summary of scores of the identified client satisfaction attributes in enterprises covered

Client satisfaction attributes (product value determinants)	Average attribute score in enterprises covered	Average attribute score as compared to the strongest competitor
<b>A. General product presentation</b>	<b>3,67</b>	<b>4,03</b>
Color	4.17	4.50
Shape	3.57	4.36
Surface presentation	3.74	4.17
Product unit size	3.54	3.50
Cross section looks	3.20	3.11
<b>B. Sensor values</b>	<b>3.95</b>	<b>3.81</b>
Taste	4.71	4.67
Flavor	4.49	4.25
Tenderness	3.69	3.10
Sweetness	3.79	3.50
Sourness	3.58	2.89
Saltiness	3.41	3.00
Bitterness	3.53	2.89
Humidity	3.80	3.44
Aroma	4.15	3.90
Hardness	3.57	3.44
<b>C. Hygienic-nutritive values</b>	<b>4.39</b>	<b>4.37</b>
Microbiological safety of product	4.91	4.75
Chemical safety of product	4.94	4.83
Nutritive value	4.03	3.83
Raw material	4.06	4.25
Additions	4.0	4.18
<b>D. Commercial values</b>	<b>3.78</b>	<b>3.96</b>
Price	4.24	4.45
Product quality	4.32	4.75
Product brand	3.91	4.25
Package type	3.82	3.91
Package functionality	3.71	3.75
Product shelf life	3.88	4.08
Ease of storage	3.74	3.92
Ease of preparation for consumption	3.27	3.27
Multiplicity of applications	3.15	2.75

Source: Own work based on the questionnaire-based study results.

score 3.78), and general product looks (average score 3.67) to be the most important client satisfaction attributes.

In the group of hygienic-nutritive values, all values were considered important. In the group of sensor values the taste and flavor were considered the important client satisfaction attributes. Among the commercial values product price and its quality were considered important for client satisfaction. Among the factors representing the general looks of the product only the color was considered an important indicator of product value.

Comparing the product value scores with the same attributes of product by the strongest competitor the enterprises were definitely afraid of competition in general looks of the product and its commercial values. Among the commercial values the threat noticed by the enterprises covered was the brand of a strong competitor.

As a result of the conducted study actions were defined that enterprises covered declared to implement to increase client satisfaction with their products (Fig. 2.).

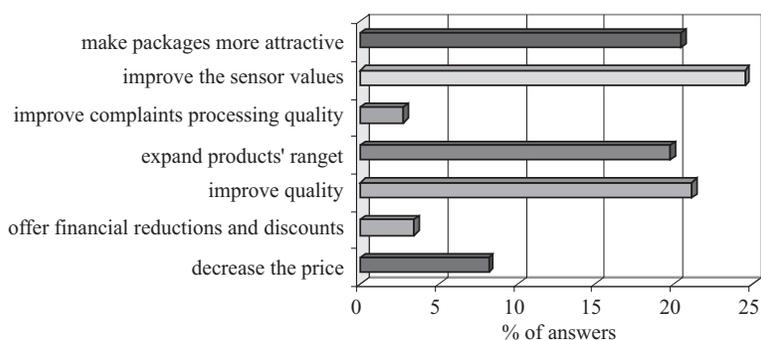


Fig.2. Indication of activities aimed at increasing client satisfaction

Source: Own work based on the study results.

Improving the sensor values (24.49% of answers), product quality improvement (21.09% of answers), making the package more attractive (20.41% of answers) and expanding the products; range (19.73% of answers) were indicated as the most important actions to be taken.

## Conclusion

Recapitulating the above study it should be pointed out that client satisfaction studies are currently becoming an important instrument allowing effective identification of important client satisfaction attributes. Knowledge of

those attributes allows enterprises focusing of efforts on achievement of product characteristics in highest demand among the clients. Accurate determination of client satisfaction attributes results in market success of the entire enterprise. The enterprises covered indicated expanding sensor and hygienic-nutritive values as well as product quality improvement as the most important elements of competitive advantage determining to the highest extent the level of client satisfaction. Polish food industry enterprises should aim in particular at good identification of client satisfaction attributes to match the increasingly strong competition in the market of food products.

Translated by JERZY GOZDEK

Accepted for print 14.11.2007 r.

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