

B2B Relationship
Marketing
Management
in Trade Fair Activity

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By

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and Marcin Gębarowski

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INTRODUCTION

The book investigates the role of trade fairs with regard to business-to-business (B2B) relationship marketing management in the era of the world economic crisis using the example of the retail real estate industry. A vital issue tackled in this book refers to the exploration of the characteristics of retail real estate trade fairs from the perspective of creating conditions favourable for developing business relationships. Furthermore, the book also aims to explore marketing activities taken during trade fairs, which are particularly relevant in respect of relationship marketing management, such as experiential marketing and trade fair conversation. The utilisation of B2B relationship marketing management in trade fair activity, presented in this book, was put forward on the basis of four-stage primary research carried out in the retail real estate industry over a period of two and a half years, and including 7 trade fair events. The peculiarity of the retail real estate industry influences the conditions of, and requirements for, effective relationship management in the trade fair activity process.

The issues of B2B management and B2B marketing are generally of increasing interest. This is not only owing to the needs of practitioners and theoreticians representing the B2B sector, but also because of the more and more important trend of applying B2B concepts to B2C markets. The retail real estate industry is an example and a specific context for researching relationship marketing management in trade fair activity. With regard to the above-mentioned industry, the trade fair is one of the most important marketing tools in relationship management, which means that it is an important topic and thus worth writing about. Retail real estate is huge business with “big” money. Many entities are involved in it, being very interested in building, maintaining and strengthening business relationships.

Contemporary trade fairs provide their participants with something which cannot be ensured through other marketing communication instruments. A basic benefit to the exhibitors and visitors is the opportunity to have face-to-face meetings and to present the offer by appealing simultaneously to all the five senses. It can thus be assumed that trade fair performances – unlike any other medium (the radio, the press, television, printed materials, etc.) – are suitable for reflecting the

atmosphere of shopping centres. This observation refers to the special role that well organised trade fairs can play in the retail real estate industry.

In the retail real estate industry, the dominant type of business activity is services with intense contact, which are rendered in the B2B market. Owing to the peculiarity of complex service-based relationships with intense mutual interactions, the necessity for long-term relationship management is an essential matter when running a business activity in the retail real estate industry. The present situation in that industry is still the result of the world economic crisis. This intensifies the need for building credibility, especially in relation to new projects, and for developing relationships based on trust and relational loyalty (Juntunen 2010). This is relevant, in particular, from the perspective of developers making and keeping promises (Grönroos 2009) in the process of relationship management with tenants in the context of a noticeable negotiating advantage of the tenants over the developers. It is one of the consequences of the World Economic Crisis, which began in 2008.

The situation in the retail real estate industry, the specific context of B2B services in that industry, and the necessity of using the concept of business project management (Meng 2010; Valverde 2011) influence the conditions of, and requirements for, effective relationship management in the trade fair activity process. The uniqueness of the present situation, which exists in the industry under consideration, and its influence on industry participants, as well as the special context of B2B services have an impact on the need for, and requirements of, participation in industry-related trade fairs, and affect relationship marketing management by trade fair participants.

The book has international applicability and reach. First of all, the issue of relationship marketing management in trade fair activity tackled in this book refers to enterprises operating in the retail real estate industry, which are mainly international concerns conducting business activities on the European, and even the global scale. Furthermore, in the industry under analysis shares in the European market are highly concentrated in a relatively low number of dominant enterprises, which represent such industry specialisations as, for example: developers, investors, anchor tenants, and leasing agencies. A unique characteristic of the industry in question is that it is reactive to the condition of the global economy, for instance, the influence of the world economic crisis in 2008. Various local markets in Europe very promptly react to the global and European economic situation. Therefore, the level of internationalisation of enterprises that are present in the industry is very high.

Secondly, the international applicability and reach of the book results from the fact that empirical researches are of an international nature. Trade fairs are not easily studied from behind a desk, with just a dataset and techniques of correlation analysis. Instead, it is an area of study which requires extensive fieldwork (Solberg Søylen 2013). As has already been mentioned, the researches referred to relationship marketing management in trade fair activity and were conducted in relation to the European market, with special attention given to the region of Central and Eastern Europe, and particularly the Polish market. The research carried out in connection with the European market took place during a MAPIC trade fair in Cannes, France. Whereas the research orientated towards Central and Eastern Europe, particularly towards Poland, was done at a Shopping Centre Forum trade fair in Warsaw, Poland. The duration of the research was two and a half years – from September 2011 to February 2014. In total, 7 trade fair events were included in the scope of the research. The researched objects were trade fair personnel at a managerial level, who, in their enterprises, were usually responsible for expansion and development. With regard to tenants, the research predominantly investigated the chains of international retail trade enterprises. Similarly, the majority of service providers were chains of specialist enterprises operating on a global scale, such as financial institutions, leasing agencies and legal advisors. In the case of developers, the research encompassed both enterprises that had considerable experience of developing retail real estate projects in various European markets, and companies with little experience which operated on a local scale.

The book consists of 7 chapters. Chapter 1 is of a theoretical nature and refers to the reality of trade fairs and the trade fair activity of B2B enterprises. This chapter also presents theoretical aspects of methods employed in order to research trade fair activity, mainly the mystery visitor, which is a variant of participant observation. Chapter 2 is devoted to assumptions of the methods implemented for the authors' own research on relationship marketing management in trade fair activity in the retail real estate industry, and presents those methods in detail. Chapter 3 puts forward a model of managing retail real estate trade fair participants' relationships with customers and other trade fair participants. Four-stage research made it possible to propose this model. Various model components and their connections were explored at different stages of the research. The model presented in this chapter contains two basic areas. The first area constitutes an analysis of the situation of a trade fair participant, whereas the other one consists of planning, implementing and controlling the effects of using the concepts, tools and activities of the

relationship marketing management of participants involved in a retail real estate trade fair. This chapter also presents the first area comprised in the model. The subsequent four chapters continue with the presentation of the model elements, as well as show the results of primary research. Chapter 4 presents the issue of trade fair activity management in a project life cycle. Results obtained while researching shopping centre developers are shown in relation to the subject of this chapter. Chapter 5 is dedicated to the problem of relationship marketing management in B2B services, where special attention is given to the concept of promise management in business relationships. The chapter demonstrates results achieved through a case study method applied in order to research the developer of a large shopping centre. Chapters 6 and 7 concern the application of the concepts of experiential marketing and a trade fair conversation in relationship management in trade fair activity. Moreover, the results of the research pursued during the MAPIC trade fair in Cannes, France, and at the Shopping Centre Forum trade fair in Warsaw, Poland are revealed. The effects and managerial implications of the applicability of B2B relationship marketing management in trade fair activity are discussed in all the four chapters mentioned above.

The primary purpose of the publication is to present the role of trade fairs with regard to business-to-business relationship marketing management in the era of the world economic crisis using the example of the retail real estate industry. Furthermore, this book also aims to explore marketing activities taken during trade fairs, which are particularly relevant in respect to relationship marketing management, such as experiential marketing and trade fair conversation. The secondary purpose is the exploration of the characteristics of retail real estate trade fairs from the perspective of creating conditions favourable for developing business relationships. Another secondary purpose is the presentation of the methods of relationship marketing management for other industries.

The following can be identified as the new contributions of the book to the field:

- support of the relationship management of companies operating in the retail real estate industry,
- a more careful look at experiential marketing from the perspective of using that concept in trade fair activity,
- the implementation of the proposed approach to relationship marketing management in trade fair activity as a general rule, and not only in connection with the retail real estate industry,
- the utilisation of the proposed approach to the management of large, complex and long-term business projects,

- the proposals contained in the book may be applied by specialists who deal with trade fair marketing, both practically and theoretically, or may be a source of inspiration for them.

The book is addressed to practitioners, academics and students. Different specialisations of practitioners will use the publication as an inspiration and a practical guide for improving performance in business relationship management using trade fairs. The specific specialists are:

- specialists and managers from real estate agencies, especially retail real estate,
- specialists and managers working for developers, especially in the commercialisation of real estate space and promotion,
- managers responsible for retail real estate business project management,
- retail tenants' expansion specialists and managers,
- other participants of the retail real estate sector, such as: financial institutions, legal advisors, architects and construction companies,
- real estate media specialists and managers – secondary audience,
- organisers of trade fairs, not only for the real estate market but in general - specialists and managers – secondary audience,
- specialists and managers in companies responsible for trade fair activity – secondary audience.

It can be said that on the one hand it is a niche book, dedicated to the real estate industry, and specifically to the retail real estate industry. On the other hand, that industry can be treated as an example context for researching relationship management in trade fair activity, and a wider perspective on the researched phenomenon is thus available. This means the exploitation of the propositions contained in the book in other industries.

The book is the first ever product of this kind. First of all, there is no publication on trade fairs in the retail real estate industry. Trade fairs are a crucial marketing tool for the relationship management of companies operating in this sector. The book also presents an approach to the management of activity with regard to a series of cyclical trade fairs within a project life cycle, and it is a new approach in the publishing market. In the logic of the management of long-term projects, an essential issue is managing the participation in a series of trade fair events throughout a project life cycle (Westland 2006; Lester 2007).

Another unique characteristic is that it is the first ever book dedicated directly to the connection between two serious marketing concepts, i.e. relationship marketing management and trade fair activity management. Furthermore, yet another distinctive element is the presentation of

relationship marketing management in trade fair activity within the context of the World Economic Crisis phenomenon, which began in 2008. The book explores the exploitation of experiential marketing and the fair trade conversation in relationship management in trade fair activity. Although some authors (Rinallo, Borghini, and Golfetto 2010; Kirchgeorg, and Ermer 2012) have written about experiential marketing in the fair trade context, there is still a gap in the perspective on trade fairs.

What is also unique is that the book features the development of a theoretical approach to the research method of the mystery visitor in a trade fair environment, which has not been done before. Also, the application of that research method in trade fairs is presented together with results. An important feature of the book is that the authors are experienced both theoretically and practically in the subject matter of the book.

Dr Dariusz Siemieniako is an Assistant Professor at the Faculty of Management of Białystok University of Technology in Poland. He was an Adjunct Senior Lecturer in the Department of Marketing, Griffith University in Brisbane, Australia. Dariusz Siemieniako's current research focuses on issues concerning, among other things, customer loyalty in the services context and B2B relationship management. In his work, he employs a relational marketing approach in complex services. He has published in quality journals, including *Journal of Marketing Management*, *Qualitative Marketing Research*, *Journal of Consumer Marketing*, and *Journal of Customer Behaviour*. Dr Dariusz Siemieniako has experience of working as a consultant and a manager in developing retail real estate projects. He has worked for almost 9 years, being involved in three real estate development projects. The last project in which he was involved related to a big hybrid of a shopping centre and a retail park. He was engaged in this project for more than 5 years, working as an expert and a Member of the Management Board of the developing company.

Dr Marcin Gębarowski is an Assistant Professor at the Department of Marketing, Faculty of Management, Rzeszów University of Technology in Poland. For many years Marcin Gębarowski has been dealing with exhibit marketing, and the scope of his scientific interest has included marketing communication. However, special attention is given to the area of exhibit marketing and experiential marketing. He attempts to combine both fields, and that is the main concern of his current research. Since 2010 he has been a partner and a consultant of the Polish Chamber of Exhibition Industry – the only Polish institution to which trade fair organisers and other companies that form the trade fair market belong. As a representative

of the Chamber he co-ordinates trade fair education in Poland at the higher education level. Marcin Gębarowski was an expert of *stoisko.pl* (the leading Polish Internet exhibition portal), and in the years 2009-2010 he was a member of the Editorial Board of “Targi” (a magazine about trade fairs). He conducted many business trainings devoted to exhibit marketing.

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CHAPTER ONE

CONTEMPORARY RETAIL REAL ESTATE TRADE FAIRS AND METHODS OF RESEARCHING THE MARKETING ACTIVITY OF EXHIBITORS

MARCIN GĘBAROWSKI

1.1. Retail real estate trade fairs in respect of trade fair classification

Trade fairs, organised cyclically, constitute the climax of the marketing activity of exhibitors, and engage a lot of people and allocate substantial financial resources to be properly prepared for participation in those events. Trade fairs create possibilities for face-to-face meetings among exhibitors representing many industries, because nowadays, every area of the economy has its own industry-specific exhibition events. Thousands of trade fairs are held worldwide every year, and they have diversified forms. Having considered such diversification, several classifications of the events in question have been developed. In the context of the matters discussed in this book, retail real estate trade fairs must be included in the proposed typologies.

The literature offers an approach according to which the geographical criterion is taken into consideration to classify trade fairs. In that respect, the following trade fair events are distinguished: local, regional, national, and international (Wojciechowski 1986; Cotterell 1992). Moreover, it is noteworthy that currently – according to UFI standards (The Global Association of the Exhibition Industry) – to be recognised as an international trade fair, the number of direct foreign exhibitors must be at least 10% of the total number of exhibitors, or the number of foreign visits or visitors must represent at least 5% of the total number of visits or visitors, respectively (UFI 2015).

Some authors put forward other divisions of exhibition events, and refer to vertical and horizontal trade fairs (Dekimpe et al. 1997; Herbig, O'Hara, and Palumbo 1997; Onkvisit, and Shaw 2007). Vertical trade fairs are also known as general fairs, whereas horizontal trade fairs are specialised ones (Gosztonyi 1997). Following this approach, additional subgroups of events are also sometimes indicated (Banting, and Blenkhorn 1974; Chapman 1995). In vertical trade fairs different industries present their goods and services to target groups belonging to one single field of activity (these events are very narrowly targeted and attract a specific type of visitor). In horizontal trade fairs, on the other hand, exhibitors from one single industry exhibit their products and services to professional target groups, such as sales agents or distributors from different industries (De Pelsmacker, Geuens, and van den Bergh 2010).

In one of the newer and more detailed classifications (Kirchgeorg 2005), various forms of trade fairs are identified. With regard to geographic scope, the following were discerned: international trade fairs, national trade fairs and regional trade fairs. As a part of the same typology, with respect to the scope of industry coverage, some other forms were proposed, such as general trade fairs, specialised trade fairs (mono-industry trade fairs), multi-industry trade fairs and corporate trade fairs. Another criterion for division is related to the types of goods displayed, and in that respect the following varieties are mentioned: trade fairs for capital goods (business-to-business trade fairs), trade fairs for consumer goods (public or consumer trade fairs), and mixed trade fairs (combined trade fairs). The fourth reference criterion is laid down in connection with the importance of an exhibition event for a particular industry, which makes it possible to distinguish premier trade fairs and secondary trade fairs. The next criterion for division refers to sales, which can be generated, among other things, through participation in trade fairs. Considering that aspect, two types were put forward: export trade fairs, as well as import trade fairs. The last criterion for classification was based on a view, according to which exhibition events were perceived as a communication medium, and in that respect traditional physical trade fairs and virtual trade fairs were pointed out.

The research results presented in this book stem from the analysis of empirical material collected during a MAPIC trade fair and a Shopping Centre Forum (SCF) trade fair. Both events centred on retail real estate. MAPIC trade fairs are held every year in Cannes, France, whereas SCF events are organised twice a year (an autumn fair and a winter fair) in Warsaw. MAPIC is considered to be the greatest retail real estate

exhibition event worldwide, while SCF is the biggest meeting point for the shopping centre industry in Central and Eastern Europe.

In the light of the above-mentioned classifications of exhibition events, MAPIC and SCF must be perceived as vertical, mono-industry, business-to-business, premier, export and import, traditional physical trade fairs. The difference between MAPIC and SCF is in their international significance, and what is more, one of the SCF fairs, when compared with typical trade fairs, is staged in a slightly unusual form. MAPIC is an international event, which plays a leading role with regard to its industry (in a global dimension). SCF, on the other hand, is a trade fair that creates an impact in one of the European regions. Furthermore, MAPIC takes the form of a typical exhibition event (during which presentations are made at booths), whereas the winter version of SCF is held at a hotel, and exhibitors do not use standard booths.

Both the trade fair organised in Cannes and the trade fair held in Warsaw refer to the retail real estate industry. Therefore, they have unique characteristics which differentiate them from events staged for other industries. Among such trade fair features, the following must be indicated (Gębarowski, and Siemieniako 2015a):

- the intangible nature of presented offers – as a consequence of that, exhibitors attach greater importance to the use of experiential marketing (e.g. they want to create the atmosphere of a shopping centre at their booths);
- special emphasis is placed on building relationships with trade fair participants, and the form of offer presentation is determined to a large extent by the concept of promise management;
- exhibitors are orientated more towards business meetings with existing partners than with new ones – many conversations are thus arranged before trade fairs (such an approach results from the configuration of power among developers, tenants and service providers in the market, and stems from the specialist nature of trade fairs);
- participation of exhibitors (particularly developers) and visitors in trade fairs is often included in long-term marketing activities – connected with the execution of a development project life cycle and the implementation of other projects (for example introducing a new shop format into the market);
- results obtained in connection with exhibition activity are greatly influenced by trade fair-related accompanying events – meetings which happen, in a sense, during trade fairs;

- exclusivity and the “posh” nature – are the features resulting greatly from the fact that the subject of trade fairs is very narrow, prices of trade fair tickets are high, and events are organised at prestigious locations (e.g. MAPIC events are staged at *the Palais des Festivals* in Cannes, and SCF at *the Hilton Warsaw Hotel*);
- being a barometer of the condition of the industry – trade fairs are very sensitive to the economic situation in the retail real estate market.

The characteristics of retail real estate trade fairs mentioned above create unique conditions for conducting marketing activity, including, first of all, performing actions aimed at building long-standing business relationships between exhibitors and visitors. The unique nature of retail real estate trade fairs was investigated on the basis of the research results demonstrated in this book.

1.2. Multifunctionality of retail real estate trade fairs

A common opinion that was expressed in the literature for many years was that trade fairs had significant influence on the industrial purchasing process (Foltyński, and Wojciechowski 1975; Moriarty, and Spekman 1984; Kerin, and Cron 1987; Bello 1992). Regarding the dominant function of trade fairs, a transaction dimension was indicated, and their capability to generate sales was highlighted (Kijewski, Yoon, and Young 1993; O’Hara, Palumbo, and Herbig 1993; Tanner, and Chonko, 1995). Over time, another view appeared, and it was observed that exhibition events could also fulfil non-selling functions (Bonoma 1983; Sharland, and Balogh 1996). Some authors maintained that non-selling activities were considered by some exhibitors to be more important than selling activities (Kerin, and Cron 1987; Blythe 2000). As for the main non-selling objectives, two activities are worth mentioning – informing about exhibitors’ offers, and enhancing their image and the image of their products. Some researchers who dealt with trade fairs paid a lot of attention to the significance of their promotional function (Browning, and Adams 1988; Blythe 1999; Palumbo, and Herbig 2002), as well as to their role in obtaining information (Ponzurick 1996; Bettis-Outland, Johnston, and Wilson 2012; Solberg Søylen 2013). Also, emphasis was placed upon the relational dimension of trade fairs (Blythe 2002; Ling-yee 2006; Farhangmehr, Sarmiento, and Simões 2010) and their importance in the process of knowledge sharing (Reychav 2009; Bathelt, Golfetto, and Rinallo 2014; Gębarowski, and Wiażewicz 2014).

The present state of knowledge about trade fairs makes it possible to articulate a comprehensive view on the functions which contemporary trade fairs perform with regard to economies, and in respect of marketing activities conducted by individual enterprises. In the light of such a view, Kirchgeorg (2005) approached exhibition events in a broad sense, taking into account four different perspectives, and thus attaching many functions to trade fairs. Considering the supra-economic/social perspective, he discerned an innovation function, a public relations function, an information (education) function, and a political function. Whereas, with respect to the macroeconomic perspective, he pointed out a market building function, a market development function, a transparency function, and an economic development function. An exhibitors'/visitors' perspective allowed the author to refer to an information function (market research goals), an influence function, a sales function, and a motivation function. The last view related to a trade fair company's perspective, which implied a service providing function, an earnings function, and a profile development function.

It can be thus assumed that retail real estate trade fairs, as specialist exhibition events, serve many functions for exhibitors, including, predominantly, an important information function, as well as being an essential instrument for building relationships. However, that assumption needs to be empirically verified, which has been undertaken by the authors of this book.

1.3. Exhibition events devoted to the retail real estate industry as B2B trade fairs

The subject of MAPIC and SCF is very narrow, and participants of such trade fairs are almost always specialists who know the retail real estate industry very well. This is the reason why both events must be perceived as business-to-business trade fairs. It is commonly accepted that this type of trade fair encompasses the trade fairs which are attended mostly by experts working in highly specialised (narrow) fields. A different group of events is represented by B2C trade fairs (business-to-customer) – whose subject is broader and whose nature is more common (as a rule, such events gather a much larger attendance), and which serve to exhibit consumer goods.

Events organised for the B2B and B2C markets are different from each other in terms of many aspects, which strongly determines the marketing activity of exhibitors. This dissimilar nature of exhibition undertakings should be reflected in the literature on the subject. However,

analysing trade fair-related publications, it can be observed that only very few authors have turned their attention to the distinctive features of B2B trade fairs. For example, Kästner, Springer and Kirchgeorg (2011) referred to the dissimilarity between B2B and B2C trade fair participants in respect to their goals. Gębarowski (2013), on the other hand, demonstrated distinctive characteristics of the exhibition activity of entities operating in the *business-to-business* sector. Compared to events staged for the B2C market, the following unique features of B2B trade fairs must be mentioned: stretching the process of organising a trade fair performance over a long period of time due to the fact that additional aspects must be considered (e.g. technical solutions must be presented precisely, trade fair personnel must be trained for establishing relationships); holding longer conversations with guests at a booth (meetings are often arranged before, and are of a confidential nature); raising detailed issues connected with a displayed offer during conversations (this is the reason why only people with extensive knowledge about the offer and the industry can be sent to serve trade fair guests); the dissimilar nature of promotional materials (advertising accessories and short printed materials are of lesser importance, and packages that include information and advertising materials are more often given to guests); when giving a presentation, greater emphasis is placed on factual aspects than on entertainment elements (exhibitors more seldom use means of expression which can be considered to be remarkable marketing events).

The above-mentioned characteristics stem mainly from the profile of B2B trade fair participants. Usually, they are people, either professionals or hobbyists, who are deeply involved in the subject of an event, and are well prepared to hold conversations based on facts and to evaluate a presented offer, as well as being aware of the goals of visiting booths. Moreover, B2B trade fair participants give less attention to how original a trade fair performance is (regarding visualisations and events included in a booth scenario), attaching greater significance to matters which are based on facts. Another feature of B2B trade fairs is also an increased opportunity for multiple contact with a single person who visits a booth – which is possible during subsequent meetings of the same trade fair or events organised in other places, where experts from this particular industry gather (this results from the fact that representatives of companies more frequently attend industry-related trade fairs than individual customers). Trade fair meetings thus become the “climax” to the processes of relationship development and promise management – which is because while carrying on cyclical discussions at booths, promises made during previous meetings are verified.

Owing to the features demonstrated above, B2B trade fairs create a favourable environment for developing relationships between exhibitors and visitors (Sarmiento, Simões, and Farhangmehr 2015), particularly through trade fair conversations and experiential marketing. However, the peculiarity of the industry, that is, to be precise, mainly different configurations of market power, requires conducting researches – concerning the extent to which methods and techniques of relationship marketing are employed, as well as relating to the management of the process of building relationships – in the context of individual markets. Such a special context for researches is created by the retail real estate industry, where relationships among developers, tenants and service providers are fostered. Furthermore, the industry in question offers services with intense contact and project logic in the management of enterprises.

Trade fairs are perceived as one of the most important marketing instruments in the B2B sector. This statement is confirmed by results obtained from representative surveys, which have been cyclically conducted for more than ten years for AUMA (*Ausstellungs- und Messeausschuss der Deutschen Wirtschaft*), and which encompass a sample of 500 companies exhibiting at B2B fairs (Chapter 4.3 presents the results of that research). The industry of real estate with modern retail space, which is analysed in this book, is a B2B market. Therefore, also in this industry, trade fairs play an important role, which has been revealed by the results of the research conducted during the MAPIC and the SCF events. The following chapters of this book demonstrate the aforementioned results.

1.4. Mystery visitor and other research methods adopted during trade fairs

The mystery visitor research method as a type of participant observation adopted during trade fair activities

In the literature on the subject, contemporary trade fairs are referred to as “a marketing research laboratory” (Solberg Søylen 2013). Such a belief stems from the fact that during exhibition events it is possible to conduct research among exhibitors and visitors using several methods of collecting data, such as a mystery visitor, an auditorium questionnaire, or a personal interview. Those methods allow for collecting data related to many research areas, including those which refer to relationship marketing management in the B2B market. Both the mystery visitor (which is a form

of participant observation) and the personal interview are classified under qualitative research methods. The auditorium questionnaire, on the other hand, represents quantitative research methods.

It is characteristic of trade fairs that people who participate therein can meet “face to face”, which allows for the indirect observation of exhibitors’ and visitors’ behaviour. Therefore, during exhibition events, it is possible to carry out marketing research using participant observation. That method is perceived as ethnographic research. Ethnography is the study of social interactions, behaviour and perceptions that occur within groups, teams, organisations and communities (Reeves, Kuper, and Hodges 2008).

In participant observation the main principle is that the person who carries out the research becomes directly involved as a participant in peoples’ daily lives (including professional life). Through the participation the researcher is able to observe and experience the meanings and interactions of people as an insider (Jorgensen 1989). This method connects the researcher to the most basic of human experiences, discovering through immersion and participation the how and why of human behaviour in a particular context (Guest, Namey, and Mitchell 2012). The participant observation process requires the researcher to become involved as a participant in a social setting and to make descriptive observations of him/herself, of others, and of the setting (Mackellar 2013). Every social situation can be identified by three primary elements: place, actors, and activities. While conducting the participant observation the researcher locates himself or herself in some place; he or she watches actors of one sort or another, and becomes involved with them; he or she observes and participates in activities (Spradley 1980). In the case of trade fairs, the place is an exhibition venue, the role of actors is assumed by exhibitors and visitors, and activities encompass everything which occurs at booths and during events that accompany the trade fairs (e.g. during conferences and banquets).

Participant observation represents a qualitative research method and is appropriate for use in a trade fair environment. This method offers an unobtrusive way to collect data, and to record and analyse important activities in the context of event environments, where the use of surveys can interrupt the flow of the event experience for consumers, or be precluded by the staging and operation of the event (Mackellar 2013). However, the conditions for using participant observation during trade fairs may be difficult owing to the limited time in which it is possible to research one trade fair booth (usually, a single conversation does not last longer than 15 minutes). Furthermore, a researcher who visits an

exposition booth frequently conducts research in great confusion and haste, which results from the fact that personnel hold conversations with other customers. Due to an amount of time that is needed to carry out research at one booth, and owing to the short duration of trade fairs (maximum 3-4 days), the researcher is able to conduct a limited number of visits. Moreover, it must be highlighted that carrying out research during trade fairs is influenced by multiple additional stimuli (disrupting factors), which exert an effect on both the researcher and the person under research.

It can be assumed that mystery visitor research is a variant of participant observation. The mystery visitor research method refers to mystery shopping research, which is a popular method of observing the behaviour of sales personnel. The main goal of using mystery shopping research is an appraisal of the level of customer service, which is done by people who take the role of “ordinary” purchasers of products. People who conduct mystery visitor research do not reveal during an interaction with a shop assistant that they are making observations. A trained researcher visits selected places where services are rendered, or eating places, and while pretending to be a customer pays attention to everything that he or she sees and hears. Usually, the observation is orientated towards finding an answer to a research problem formulated before, thus the mystery visitor behaves in a planned way. Everything which happens during the research is remembered, and as soon as the observation has finished findings are recorded in standardised forms (observation registers, called audit questionnaires). After leaving the place where the research was carried out, the forms are filled in. The observation may be recorded by means of a hidden video camera or a tape recorder.

The literature on the subject pays a lot of attention to mystery shopping, analysing its diversified aspects. Based on a literature review, it must be admitted that most of the publications refer to the practical dimension of using mystery shopping, and in particular they contain instructions on how to conduct research properly (e.g. PamInCa 2009; Smith 2010; Mooradian 2011; Moran 2014). There are also books and articles in which the central focus is placed on the usefulness of this method when one attempts to identify a level of service quality (Dawes, and Sharp 2000; Schmidt 2007; Varma 2008; Douglas 2015). However, some authors concentrate on using mystery shopping to check the quality of services rendered by entities representing selected areas of business or public activities, for example banks (Roberts, and Campbell, 2007; Pinar, Eser, and Strasser 2009; Sossong 2010), restaurants (Rood, and Dziadkowiec, 2010; Lai, and Chang 2013, Liu et al. 2014), hotels and travel agencies (Atef 2012; Minghetti, and Celotto 2014; Huang, Liu, and

Hsu 2014), libraries (Calvert 2005; Kocevar-Weidinger et al. 2010; De Diago 2013), or medical facilities (Hartley 1995; Moriarty, McLeod, and Dowell 2003; Baum, and Henkel 2010). The literature presents a trend connected with using the method under analysis to study the satisfaction and loyalty of customers (Van der Wiele, Hesselink, and Iwaarden 2005), as well as to create a business relationship (Mattsson 2012). The ethical dimension of mystery shopping is also indicated (Ng Kwet Shing, and Spence 2002). Furthermore, some authors believe that observation based on mystery shopping may be useful not only to accomplish marketing objectives, but also to manage human resources – in the process of controlling the work of sales personnel and coaching (Erstad 1998; Brender-Ilan, and Shultz 2005; Latham, Ford, and Tzabbar 2012).

So far, there have not been any in-depth scientific publications devoted to the mystery visitor method. Books on marketing research very seldom mention the possibility of using this method to study the behaviour of trade fair participants (Kaniewska-Sęba, Leszczyński, and Pilarczyk 2006). However, they do not refer to detailed matters related to any measurements performed among exhibitors. Similarly, trade fair publications do not describe the mystery visitor method in detail. One of the very few scientific papers concerning the issue under question indicates that a person who carries out such research “approaches a booth, pretending to be a potential customer, and after the visit, he or she gives an account of the manner in which the service was provided. On the basis of that practice, a person responsible for the organisation of participation in trade fairs is able to verify, whether the standards of dealing with guests who visit the booth, which had been established before, have been reached or not” (Mruk, and Kuca 2006). With reference to the mystery visitor method, the observation can concern both personnel behaviour (including many detailed aspects, among other things the way of presenting the show pieces, the attitude towards the customer, familiarity with the presented offer), as well as the appearance of the booth and the programme of the trade fair performance (carrying out marketing actions contained in its scenario). After the end of a discussion with exhibitors, observation results are recorded in questionnaires containing open-ended, closed-ended and semi-closed questions, which enable the standardisation of questions and comparability of results after their aggregation and analysis.

A review of the scientific literature on trade fairs demonstrates that the mystery visitor method has been very occasionally used in scientific researches. Herbst, Barisch, and Voeth (2007) introduced an innovative way of measuring interaction quality – a concept of mystery shopping – in industrial markets. The above-mentioned authors conducted research

during a famous international trade fair for the packaging industry, organised in Germany; and Polish researchers – Pilarczyk and Kwiatek (2010) – used the mystery visitor method in order to collect data from exhibitors who participated in one of the furniture business trade fairs, organised by the Poznan International Fair. Their research was focused on dyadic buyer-seller professional communication in business markets.

In addition to the above, it must be pointed out that the method was put into practice by providing the trade fair organisers with results that could be useful for the management of trade fair preparation and performance. The application of this method helped some entities that organise trade fairs check the level of service provided to people who visited booths. To provide examples of such actions one can refer to the following events, during which the mystery visitor method was used: International Confex (London), ED Expo (Dallas), ISTE (Philadelphia), Nowy DOM Nowe MIESZKANIE (Warsaw).

Mystery shopping and mystery visitor are very similar to each other with regard to the way in which they are employed – the only difference is that one of the methods entails carrying out observation in points of sale or places where customer service is provided, whereas the other involves making observation at booths. It can be assumed, however, that specific work conditions during trade fairs determine, to a large extent, the dissimilarity of the mystery visitor method. That dissimilarity with regard to the way of behaviour displayed during trade fairs predominantly entails working in haste, noise and confusion for many hours, which results from the fact that exhibitors enter into discussions with several customers at the same time. Comparing mystery shopping to mystery visitor makes it possible to identify the differences and similarities between the two methods.

Above all, the mystery shopping method is classified under a group of quantitative marketing research in which a researcher's purpose is often to obtain results that can be subject to statistical analysis. The mystery visitor method, on the other hand, must be considered to be a manifestation of qualitative research, in which the primary objective is to explore the phenomena which seem interesting for a researcher.

For the mystery shopping method it is crucial to find out to what extent sales personnel abide by customer service standards established for a particular entity (e.g. a chain store). Contrary to the above method, in mystery visitor-based research observation is made while visiting selected booths of various entities representing diversified businesses. Hence, the standardisation of research and the comparability of obtained results are far less important than in the case of mystery shopping.

In the context of standardisation one must also mention the fact that when using the mystery shopping method it is essential to compare the evaluated points of sale or customer service points. That is why rankings for individual chains are frequently prepared: banks, restaurants, petrol stations, etc. For the mystery visitor, on the other hand, it is relevant to grasp certain phenomena. It can be thus assumed that in the case of that method the quantity of booths under research is not as important as researching selected trade fair performances for which specific phenomena can be observed.

With regard to mystery shopping and mystery visitor, which are forms of participant observation, ethical doubts can be raised. They result from the fact that a person whose behaviour is under evaluation is not aware of being observed. However, both in points of sale (customer service points) and during trade fairs, the observation takes place in public places and can be made by representatives of almost the entire society. Consequently, it can be assumed that such researches do not violate ethical norms that are applicable in normal everyday life circumstances (see Wilson 1998, 149). On the other hand, there are more considerable doubts regarding a situation when a result obtained by the mystery shopping or the mystery visitor method is linked with a specific person employed by an organisation (then, the final appraisal of such a person may have an impact on his or her salary, or may even result in the dismissal of an employee who failed to perform well), and the observation process is recorded with a recorder or a camera without his or her permission. In that case, the issue in question must be considered not only in terms of ethical aspects, but also in relation to infringement of the law.

As has already been mentioned, mystery visitor-based research is carried out under specific trade fair conditions. Taking into consideration conclusions related to using the mystery visitor method during research conducted among exhibitors at a retail real estate trade fair (a detailed description of research methods is presented in further sections of Chapter 2), as well as the qualities typical of mystery shopping, one can identify the features that give mystery visitor-based research a distinct character. The below table shows these features.

Table 1.1. The characteristics of the mystery visitor method (in comparison to mystery shopping)

Characteristic	Mystery shopping-based research	Mystery visitor-based research
Place and subject of research	The research refers to many places belonging to one organisation, where contact with customers occurs (e.g. a chain store, a mobile telecommunications network)	The research often considers single performances of many exhibitors during one exhibition event (it is possible that the research focuses on the performances made by one attendee at many subsequent trade fairs, although the duration of such research would have to be several years)
Aim of research	Frequently, the aim of the research – apart from the assessment of the present-day level of customer service – is to set optimum standards of service for a single entity	The aim of the research is, first of all, to study the nature of trade fair performances (including the specification of the level of customer service) in very general terms – with reference to all exhibitors, and not only to one entity
Standardisation	The research refers to the (codified) standards applicable in a particular organisation, which facilitates the interpretation of results	Exhibitors do not enforce standards of trade fair visitor service which are appropriate for them and which oblige booth personnel to comply with general guidelines for holding discussions properly (this hinders the interpretation of results)
Auditor's competence	An auditor acts within the framework of “story life”, which makes it possible to compare the results of many observations and allows control of the research to a large extent	An auditor must be flexible, since it is difficult to follow only one pattern, since each exhibitor presents a distinct offer
Conditions under which observation is conducted	Observation is always carried out under comparable conditions – in similarly arranged points which offer the same products (for one research project)	There are diversified conditions under which observation is done – even though the subject matter of a trade fair is common for the exhibitors under research (sometimes the subject matter is significantly narrowed down) – entities who participate in trade fairs use various booths and can offer products which differ completely from each other
Duration of research	The duration of the research is unlimited, which makes it possible	The duration of the research is determined by the duration of a

	to carry out observation for a large research sample (several hundred, even up to one thousand points)	trade fair (it is often 2-3 days), which is the reason why in this time period only a limited number of observation attempts can be made (the sample size is also restricted by the number of exhibiting entities)
Duration of contact with customers	Usually, there is no time pressure resulting from the fact that an auditor is present at a facility which is being evaluated (he or she is the one who decides on how long the observation should be carried out)	Usually, a short time available for contact with a customer, which results from the nature of many trade fair discussions held in accordance with the “touch & go” approach
Control of sales personnel work	The research enables the checking of the work of salespeople (including the functioning of a team) during the time in which they are performing their daily (routine) duties	The research makes it possible to check how every single salesperson and the entire team running a booth work under specific trade fair conditions (when the area around is crowded, when they have to perform many activities simultaneously, and when they are under stress)
Nature and object of appraisal	The appraisal has a quantitative dimension and is often carried out in the context of clearly defined customer service standards, which must be met by employees of all points of sale (service points)	The appraisal is of a qualitative nature and is conducted in connection with personnel behaviour during a trade fair performance, which cannot be easily standardised
Costs of research	High costs of a single research study (which is, among other things, due to the fact that it is necessary to arrive at every point of sale which has been chosen for the appraisal)	Lower costs of observation, which is due to the fact that several hundred exhibitors are concentrated in one place during a trade fair
Necessity for personal contact	There are forms of research which are not performed personally (via phone or email)	The research always requires a visit to trade fairs and personal contact between an auditor and exhibitors
Documentation of research	Documenting the observation in the form of photographs creates serious difficulties for an auditor, as he or she has to take the pictures without being seen by the observed people	It is easier to take pictures of a booth and personnel working at it, because trade fair visitors very often photograph exhibition elements

Source: Gębarowski, and Siemięniak 2015b.

As has already been noted, the observation using the mystery visitor method is carried out similarly to mystery shopping-based research. Therefore, apart from the differences, it is also possible to indicate the

similarities between the two methods. The authors of the book have recognised the following main characteristics which the two techniques have in common (Gębarowski, and Siemieniako 2015b):

- the confidential nature of research, which makes researchers take any measures necessary to avoid being unmasked;
- necessity to specify main assumptions for research – the scope, time and context of observation;
- the use of standardised observation questionnaires, which are filled out in secret after a visit to a point under appraisal (a shop, a booth, etc.);
- necessity to select auditors who have desired qualities (which include, among other things, a good memory, perceptiveness) and skills (e.g. acting skills), as well as to train them later on with regard to observation assumptions in order to make sure that research is carried out properly.

In addition to the similarities, it must be mentioned that – adopting the typologies of the observation method presented in the literature on the subject – both mystery shopping and mystery visitor represent, above all, participant observation (a researcher becomes a participant of an observed society). Furthermore, both methods also refer to the following types of observation: hidden (a subject is unaware that observation is taking place), standardised (an auditor knows under which conditions he/she must conduct research and how and where he or she must record results), structured (an observer sets up in advance categories of behaviour in terms of which he/she wishes to analyse a problem, and keeps in mind a time limit within which he/she has to make observation) (Lal Das 2008; Zikmund et al. 2010). What is more, the essence of the two methods is in line with a triangulation trend of research methods. Triangulation – or, more specifically, triangulation methods, in the context of methods alone – refers to the use of more than one method while studying the same research question in order to “examine the same dimension of a research problem” (Jick 1979; Hesse-Biber 2010).

The researcher’s familiarity with the characteristics distinguishing the mystery visitor is a condition which determines proper use of this method in practice. And that is because it is impossible to transfer the commonly used mystery shopping method directly to trade fair circumstances.

Auditorium questionnaire and personal interview research methods adopted during trade fair activities

During trade fairs, an auditorium questionnaire, which is a quantitative research method, can be used as a method of carrying out marketing researches. This is a form of measurement suitable for application during such events as conferences, symposia, lectures and trade fairs. The research involves distributing questionnaires to its participants, and after answering the questions an interviewer collects the completed questionnaires. The possibility of measurement control is an advantage of the auditorium questionnaire, which allows for achieving a huge percentage of answers and preserving anonymity at the same time (Kaczmarczyk 2011). Moreover, one person is able to conduct the research by providing all exhibitors with the questionnaires during the first day of a trade fair, and finally, to collect them on the last day. This method is often exposed to the following limitations – first, personnel who run a booth do not have time to answer questions contained in the questionnaire, and second, due to many other duties, exhibitors tend to forget about filling them in. Therefore, during every single day of the trade fair the researcher should visit the booths and remind the personnel about the questionnaires that he or she has handed out.

While preparing a survey form for the auditorium questionnaire, it must be remembered that research will be conducted in difficult trade fair conditions (in great confusion), and the research participants will be under considerable time pressure – exhibitors' representatives will have to perform many activities simultaneously, which involve running the booth, and filling in the form, and visitors, on the other hand, will be in haste in order to see the expositions presented at the booths. Therefore, structured questions should be mainly used, and the number of pages of the survey form should be limited to a maximum of 4 (in the case of exhibitors) and 2 (in the case of visitors). Moreover, it is recommended that while preparing cafeteria questions, lengthy responses should be avoided.

During trade fairs it is also possible to carry out research using the personal interview method. When using that method a researcher approaches trade fair participants (exhibitors' representatives or visitors) and asks them to give answers to questions that seem the most interesting for him or her. While having the conversation, he or she records the answers in an interviewer questionnaire. The personal interviews may be of a quantitative nature – in the case of structured interviews (the researcher reads out questions contained in a standardised questionnaire) or of a qualitative nature – when holding unstructured interviews (a loose discussion with a respondent takes place, without a formal questionnaire).