

SELECTED ASPECTS OF EXHIBITORS' MARKETING ON THE EXAMPLE OF BIOEXPO WARSAW

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Purpose: The main purpose of the survey was to provide assessment of selected marketing instruments used by exhibitors during a chosen trade event

Design/methodology/approach: The survey was conducted during a trade event by the observation method and interviews with suppliers in the years 2021-2023. Secondary data was obtained from reports and domestic and foreign publications, among others, those registered in the Web of Science and Scopus Base.

Findings: Promotions were found to be the weakest marketing instrument, whereas physical evidence was found to be the best prepared.

Research limitations/implications: Relatively few scientific papers in the field of trade events were identified.

Practical implications: The results can be used by producers as an indication for optimization of marketing activities. In the overall assessment promotion had the worst score as compared to other marketing instruments. The above result was largely affected by the score of supplemental promotion activities. It seems that at the relatively new market, ecological products especially: samples, tasting, or demonstrations are very important as they allow to get familiar with the products and break the barrier of distrust.

Social implications: Effective marketing activity of exhibitors contributes to the promotion and increase of social awareness in relation to organic food. On average, more than 3000 visitors educated themselves in this area during each day of the fair.

Originality/value: Lack of studies on trade events in reference to bio industry.

Keywords: Organic food, trade event, exhibitors, marketing, marketing-mix.

Category of the paper: Research paper.

1. Introduction

Poland is currently the largest trade market in Central and Eastern Europe. It occupies the 11-th position among European countries and 18-th position in the world (according to the criterion of exhibition area) (World Map of Exhibition..., 2022).

In Poland, trade events have a very long history. One of the first events of this type which started the era of modern trade events in our country was the Agricultural-Industrial Exhibition in Warsaw which was held in 1821, in the Kingdom of Poland. Trade Fairs for certified ecological products have a shorter, thirty year long, history.

Although there are Polish (Gębarowski, 2010, 2018, 2019; Szromnik, 2012; Bazarnik, Mańczak, 2014; Knurek, 2023) and foreign publications that address the subject of fairs and exhibitors (Blytke, 2010; Miceulic, Paunovic, Prebezac, 2012; Torun, Çelik, Bobat, 2012; Santos, da Silva, 2013; Kaladsky, Gress, 2014; Szekely et al., 2018; De la Calleja, Mora, Zamitiz, 2020; Gaudamuz-Villalobos, Valerio, 2020; Quemini, 2020; Sproule, 2020; Lazzaro, Moureau, 2021; Ibbara et al., 2021; Li, Chen, 2022; Park, Lee, Kim, Rojik et al., 2022; Zhou, Zhao, 2023), studies on assessment of bio industry trade events can hardly be found. This article fills the gap in this area. In addition, most of the above publications are devoted to research on the importance of trade fairs for exhibitors, visitors, regions, countries or technical innovations in the arrangement of exhibition stands. A few are related to marketing evaluation.

The study goal is to provide assessment of selected marketing instruments used by exhibitors during Bioexpo Fair. The following research hypothesis was adopted in the research: the marketing instruments used by the majority of the evaluated exhibitors are at least at a good level.

2. Materials and methods

The research consisted of several steps. The first step involved defining the concept of fair, its genesis and function (including marketing functions). Next, the position of Poland as a trade center was determined in comparison with other European countries. In the next stage bioexpo fair was presented as compared to domestic and foreign events. The basic statistic parameters, i.e. the number of exhibitors and visitors, the size of exhibition area were used. In this step reports and publications from domestic and foreign databases were analyzed including Web of Science and Scopus.

The successive step involved choosing a trade event to be used for the study. The selection criteria included a location, the fair profile and the number of editions. BioExpo Fair was used in the research. This research is a continuation of earlier studies performed for BioFach fair in Nuremberg and Natura in Łódź (Koreleska, 2014, 2016). The research was conducted in 2021-23, on a sample of 106 manufacturers (having a stand at BioExpo Warsaw), by the method of observation with the use of an observation sheet as a measuring instrument, and non-standardized interviews. The assessment included selected marketing instruments, i.e. physical evidence, promotion, people and innovations. These instruments can be found in different modern marketing concepts, i.e. RAPP, 7P, 5P. The choice of the above-mentioned

tools was made taking into account factors such as the duration of the trade fair event and their importance for establishing new business relationships.

3. Notion of Fair and its Marketing Importance

The concept of fair has several definitions. Until the 90s of the previous century, definitions had been focused on its trading function. A fair was defined as 'a place of regular trade meetings' organized always in the same place, in fixed time intervals and with limited duration time. Its task was to provide the participants with the opportunity to present their offers in order to conclude trade transactions (Encyclopedia of Management) or organize 'a domestic or foreign exhibition enabling a review of exhibits from different production fields making it possible to enter into trade transaction' (Dictionary of Polish Language, 1983).

No sooner than in the last decade of XX century, attention was focused on the informative-promotion function of trade fairs which found reflection in newer definitions of this concept. In such an approach, a fair is referred to as 'specific form of promotion and specific form of personal sale supported by all best things of the company promotion mix' (Drab, 1995) or 'a fair is an organized form of presentation of product designs by different economic subjects to trigger trade activities'. They are organized in a precisely defined period and a place where visiting persons are subject to (customers and visitors) by a wide range of marketing communication tools" (Gębarowski, 2010).

4. Characteristics of BioExpo Fair in Comparison with Other Trade Events

The analyses indicate that for the last 10 years the worst year for the exhibition industry was 2021 (tab. 1). According to the report of the Polish Trade Industry Chamber, the number of trade events, exhibitors, visitors and the overall exhibition area was the lowest in that year (Kozyra, 2023).

However, it needs to be noted that as early as from 2017, the number of exhibitors had been systematically decreasing. The fall of the number of exhibitors can be explained by too high participation costs, e.g. psychological aging of some trade events (Szromnik, 2012; Bazarnik, Mańczak, 2014) as well as Pandemic Covid-19 and fast development of modern remote technologies enabling more and more easy contact of exhibitors with customers.

Current prognoses are optimistic for the branch, and indicate that the Polish trading industry is predicted to come to the level of 2019 until 2024, and some events even until 2023.

Table 1.
Trade events in Poland in 2012-2022

Specification	Years									
	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2021	2022
Number of fairs	221	216	214	200	211	193	201	189	73	123
Exhibition area (in thousands km)	742	682	818	765	838	785	871	761	396	540
Number of exhibitors	27810	27828	28392	28896	26381	26645	27381	25598	6786	13973
Number of international exhibitors	4461	4380	4790	4674	4753	5853	6240	5339	1508	2750
Number of visitors (in thousands))	1162	1249	1378	1436	1539	1503	1621	1581	436	894

Source: Kozyra, 2023.

International Fair of Food and Organic Products – BioExpo Warsaw organized in Nadrzyń (the facility with the largest exhibition area in Poland and Central and Eastern Europe) belong to the most important trade events of organic products (Ptak Warsaw Expo..., 2020). It is a new initiative, and the first edition took place 5 years ago. Despite the problems caused, among others, by the pandemic, it survived that difficult time.

Its scale, however, is much smaller as compared to the International Fair of Production, Processing and Distribution of Ecological Products Biofach in Nuremberg. According to data from 2023, it hosted 12 times fewer exhibitors, and 3.7 times fewer visitors. There were 20 times fewer foreign visitors.

The number of visitors was, however, quite impressive. Most of them came from the following ten countries: Italy, Austria, Holland, Spain, France, Poland, Switzerland, Czech, Great Britain and Turkey. The visitors were mainly citizens of the European Union countries UE (64%) and European from outside the EU (16%), Asia, Australia, Oceania (9%), the USA (8%) and Africa (3%).

It should be noted that organizers of the eco-fairs sought to provide the participants with a platform for exchange of additional information. For this purpose, e.g. scientific congress was organized where as many as 120 lectures were given for 8487 listeners. As part of BioExpo Fair there was a congress of organic products with lectures given by experts, discussion panels, workshops and presentation of the sector related companies. In total, 19 trade events were planned.

Table 2.
Characteristics of Bioexpo and Biofach Fairs

Specification	Name of fair	
	Bioexpo	Biofach
Number of exhibitors	206	2574
Number of foreign countries	7	137
Number of visitors	9724	35991
Number of foreign visitors	7%	47%
Number of editions	5	34
Duration time (days)	3	4

Source: Veranstaltungsanalyse, 2023.

The survey research which was conducted with exhibitors during the Biofach Fair confirmed that the great majority of the respondents had a possibility to meet with the target group. 90% of exhibitors declared having made new business contacts and 80% hoped to turn them into a long term cooperation.

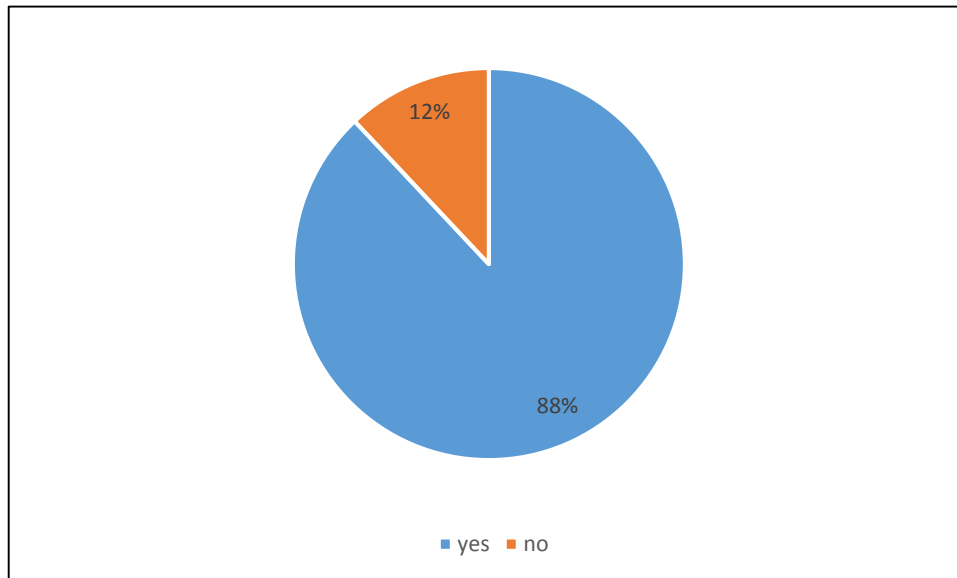


Figure 1. Assessment of the opportunity of contact with the target group during the Biofach Fair in the opinion of the exhibitors.

Source: Veranstaltungsanalyse, 2023.

The survey results show that in comparison with the visitors the exhibitors are more skeptical about further development of eco-industry. Similar voices appeared at the BIOEXPO Warsaw fair. Such an approach may be caused by the following factors: inflation, global trade disruptions due to political factors, or general economic slowdown likely to turn into a recession (Piątek, 2023).

Table 3.

Assessment of eco industry economic situation in the opinion of exhibitors and visitors

Specification	Name of Fair	
	Exhibitors	Visitors
Rapid increase	9	15
Slight increase	27	36
No change	25	27
Slight decrease	23	17
Rapid decrease	6	5
No answer	10	-

Source: Veranstaltungsanalyse, 2023.

5. Results

The first marketing instrument to be studied were people understood as workers in 7P model. ‘People employed in a company are often said to be the most important marketing instrument as they remain in direct contact with the customers (...) and create the company image (positive or negative)’ (Lexicon of Marketing, 1998).

In relation to people representing organizations and enterprises at the Bioexpo fair, a special focus was put on the method and quickness of sharing information about the company and the assortment offer, staff competences, responsiveness, politeness toward customers, atmosphere at the fair stand etc.

The survey shows that the great majority of respondents received a very good score. Every tenth exhibitor had a good score. This results indicate good preparation of the staff members, the level of their knowledge and good competences. Moreover, the exhibitors were kind, smiling and cultured. There was a good atmosphere at the fair stands. The only thing that was found to be a little disturbing was absence of the personnel of some stands. This is a situation that must be avoided. Chart 2 demonstrates a detailed assessment of this marketing tool.

It should be noted that similar results were obtained in the study of previous exhibitors at the BioFach trade fair in Germany. Although the competence of the staff and the interaction between the staff and the visitors were at the highest level, the number of staff was assessed slightly worse (Koreleska, 2014).

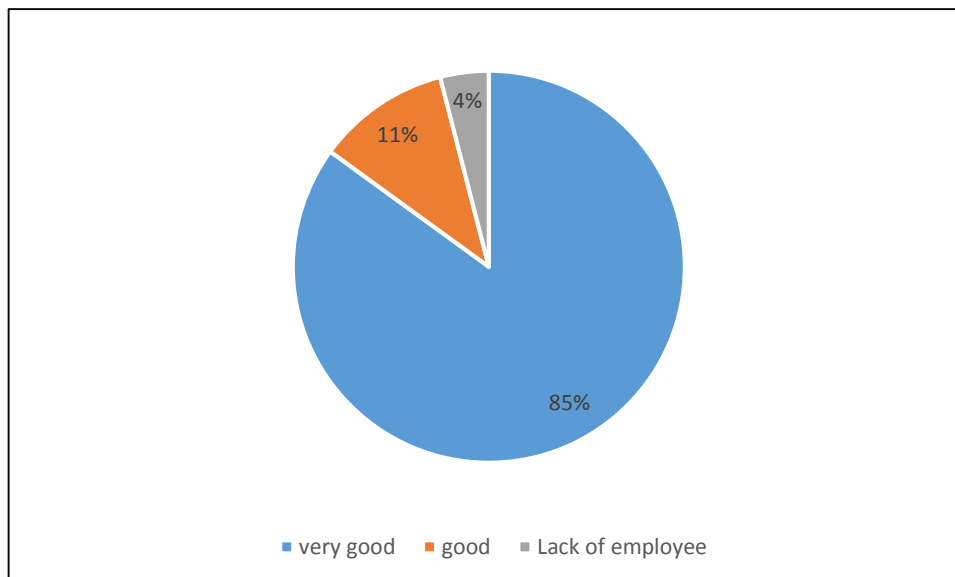


Figure 2. Assessment of marketing instrument referred to as ‘people’ used by exhibitors on a 5-point scale, where 5 – very good, 4 – good, 3 – average, 2 – bad, 1 – very bad.

Source: own research.

Another marketing tool that was subject to assessment was physical evidence. This component of the marketing mixture covers all the physical elements which are seen by customers while visiting a fair stand. This is a particularly important marketing instrument to be used during a trade event as it consciously or sometimes subconsciously affects customers by focusing their attention to the exhibitors and their offers. The survey research was supposed to evaluate attractiveness of the stand arrangement (display and equipment), outfits of the stand attendants, logo, etc. According to an analysis of the results the exhibitors were very well prepared in this field (figure 3). The arrangement of the stand received a similarly high rating in previous studies (Koreleska, 2014).

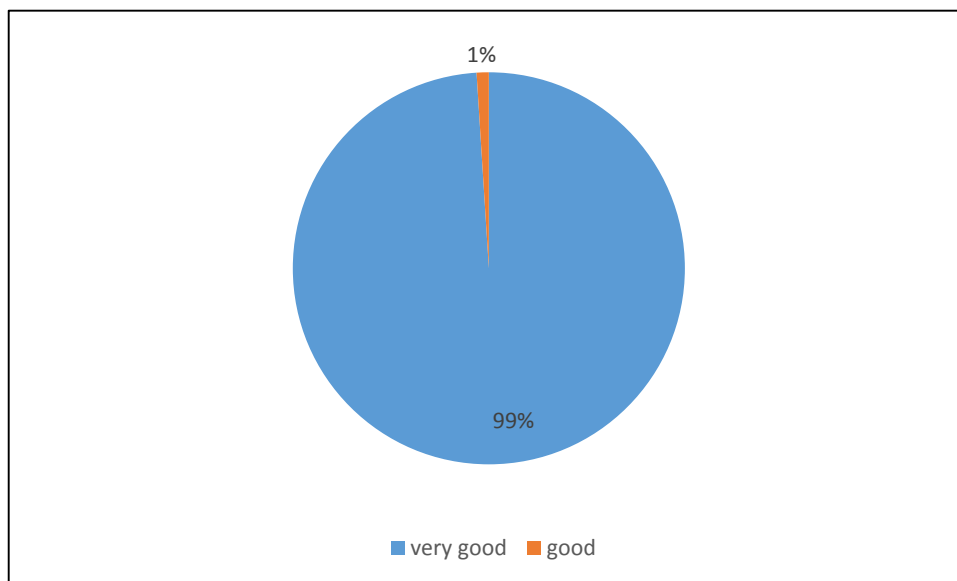


Figure 3. Assessment of marketing instrument referred to as 'physical evidence' used by exhibitors on a 5-point scale, where 5 – very good, 4 – good, 3 – average, 2 – bad, 1 – very bad.

Source: Own research.

The next marketing instrument to be assessed was promotion including: advertisement, supplemental promotion and personal sales. In the overall assessment promotion had the worst score as compared to other marketing instruments. The above result was largely affected by the score of supplemental promotion activities. It seems that at the relatively new market, ecological products especially: samples, tasting, or demonstrations are very important as they allow to get familiar with the products and break the barrier of distrust.

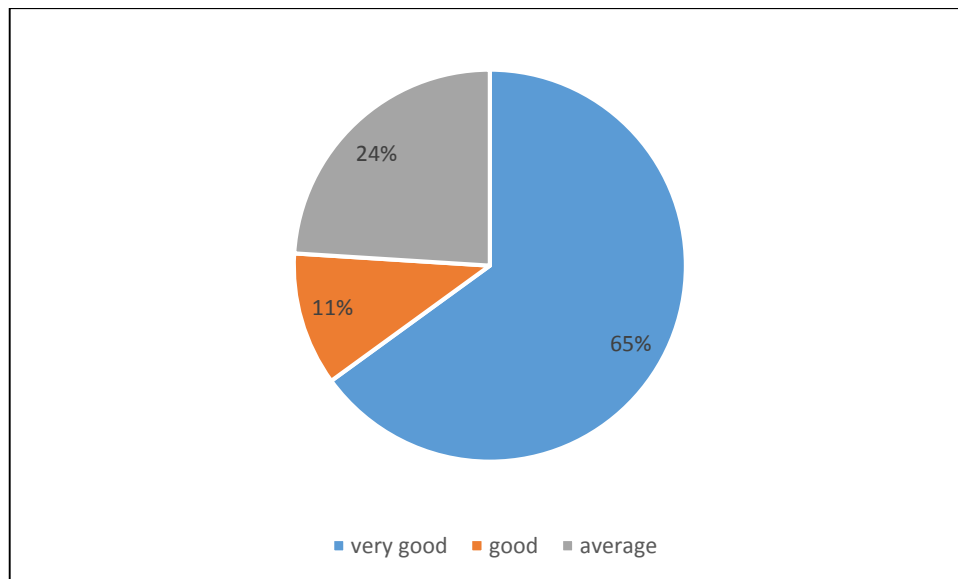


Figure 4. Assessment of marketing instrument referred to as ‘promotion’ used by exhibitors on a 5-point scale, where 5 – very good, 4 – good, 3 – average, 2 – bad, 1 – very bad.

Source: Own research.

To sum up, it should be noted that all marketing instruments used by the majority of the evaluated exhibitors were implemented at least at a good level, which confirms the adopted research hypothesis.

6. Summary

The research results show that the level of exhibitors’ preparation for the trade events was very high, which confirms the adopted research hypothesis. Physical evidence was found to be best marketing instrument, whereas the weakest one was promotion which should be improved. The above result was largely affected by the score of supplemental promotion activities. It seems that at the relatively new market, ecological products especially: samples, tasting, or demonstrations are very important as they allow to get familiar with the products and break the barrier of distrust.

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