

Perception of social companies at customers' side in Czech business environment

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Abstract

The mission of the social business is to create jobs for poorly unemployed people or to significantly care for nature. They are doing so more and more. Their activities bring potential and development for the whole of society. On the other hand, they have to face not only problems like current SMEs but also others that are specific to the area of social firms. In Czech Republic there are often launched companies as a kind of response to difficult life situations of founders or their neighbourhood. These companies are in a highly competitive environment where one of the main goals of maximizing profits. The main objective of the paper is identify relationship between knowledge of social companies and chosen demographic parameters in Czech Republic. There were returned questionnaires from 371 respondents (return rate is 36.77%). Own research survey has been realised during spring of 2019.

Keywords: social business, perception of customers, gender, education, level, Czech Republic.

Introduction

Social entrepreneurship differs from classical business, in particular through its social dimension and mission. The concepts of social business and social enterprise are currently on the rise, and this leads to the question of what entities under these terms can be ranked. For the first time, these concepts appeared in the 1990's in Western Europe and the USA (Defourny, Nyssens, 2010). The understanding of these concepts is very different across the world, which has contributed to the different political and historical development of individual countries that adopt the social business to their cultural roots and conditions. In Western Europe, the perception of the social business is closely intertwined with European democratic values.

Definition of a social enterprise is ambiguous as there are various opinions what social business is and isn't. Choi and Majumdar (2014) claim that social entrepreneurship is an essentially contested concept (based on the original work of Gallie (1956), essentially contested concepts inevitably involve endless disputes about their proper uses on the part of their users.), and for that reason reaching one universal definition that would be accepted by everyone is hardly possible. Additional different concepts of social enterprises have developed in US and Europe. We were focus on Europe concept, where EMES European Research Network conducted the major research work in social enterprises in 1990s. Especially countries that were part of the European Union before 2004. One could view social enterprises as organisations with an explicit aim to benefit the community, initiated by a group of citizens and in which the material interest of capital investors is subject to limits (Defourny, Nyssens, 2006; Yunus, Moingeon, Lehmann-Ortega, 2010; Škarabelová, 2005; Evers, Laville, 2004).

Some authors don't class charities and charitable funds as the potential social businesses in their work (Hunčová, 2005). On the other hand Dohnalová (2011) believes that if charities and charitable funds have some supplementary economic activities then they belong to the social economy (Defourny, 2009). There are also different views on religious institutions that are not generally regarded as social businesses. However, according to Hunčová (2004) some of religious institutions, charities and sheltered workshops could be viewed as social businesses. A social business addresses a social issue while being financially sustainable (Yunus, Moingeon, Lehmann-Ortega, 2010). Social enterprises that complement the job offer for socially disadvantaged people in society are looking for answers to the question of how to engage new customers and keep them up.

Taking into account the EMES International Research Network definition, a social enterprise has these 4 characteristics (Defourny, Nyssens, 2006):

- a continuous activity, selling goods or/and services, it is not a non-profit organization;
- a high degree of autonomy, they may depend on public subsidies but are not managed by public authorities or other organizations;
- a significant level of economic risk;
- a minimum amount of paid work.

The social dimension of a social Enterprise is given by these 4 criteria:

- an explicit aim to benefit the community;
- an initiative launched by a group of citizens;
- decision-making power not based on capital ownership;
- a participatory nature, which involves the various parties affected by the activity.

All of these attributes point the social companies as a very effective solution for social cohesion and sustainable growth. The main goal of these enterprises is to benefit society.

In Czech context are often established as a response to difficult life situations in which family members, friends, and acquaintances were found. These companies are in a highly

competitive environment where one of the main goals of maximizing profits. Their non-social competitors have other competitive tools to reach their customers. These "weapons" are backed up by a sufficient amount of money. The financial situation is one of the main situations that make the operation of social enterprises more difficult. However, there are approaches and methods that can be used to reach customers in case of low financial budgets. The Social Business Initiative (SBI) launched in 2011 is a plan to support the development of social enterprises and has the intention of making easier for the social companies to obtain funding, increase their visibility and making the legal environment friendlier for them.

Social Business is a comprehensive set of activities that are referred to as entrepreneurial activity and is based on three pillars - economic, environmental and social (Francová, Bednářiková, 2011), and on democratic principles and fundamental decisions are discussed with all shareholders. An important aspect distinguishing these businesses from classical is the emphasis on the balance between social and economic values, e.g. profit (Dohnalová, Průša, 2011).

Social enterprises are often set up as small, medium firms or large non-profit groups and are designed to ameliorate a difficult situation threatening certain people, the environment, or sometimes a combination of these parameters (Durieux, Stebbins, 2010). Some of these entrepreneurs are altruists (Durieux, Stebbins, 2010) what is one reason for their non-successes. Failures of non-profit organizations could be originated from similar problems as are in social companies (Gordon, 2015):

- Philanthropic inadequacy — it is described as lack of sources, which are required to full-function of social companies and their absence strike at the existence of that kind of companies;
- Philanthropic particularism — it is focused on preferences specific social problems in large amount instead others, which rise the situation, where some problems are not solved and are ignored;
- Philanthropic paternalism — it represents an effect of a dependence of social companies and financial help from external sources;
- Philanthropic amateurism — is related to employing non-qualified staff in social companies. These companies usually cannot employ qualified and educated staff because of their financial requirements. Therefore, they are reliant on the help of volunteers with no or low level of useful knowledge.

Social business in the Czech Republic

In the last few years, there has been a development of social business in the Czech Republic, but the conditions for it are not ideal. Social entrepreneurship has almost no support in the Czech legislation (Dohnalová, Průša, 2011; Frič, Šilhánová, 2001), there is as yet no generally accepted definition. In addition, these enterprises face general mistrust in this type of business activity (Dohnalová et al., 2009).

In 2017, however, the subject-matter of the Social Business Act was adopted, which respond to the need to create a unified legal environment for social business. The purpose of this law is to establish the conditions for granting the status of a social enterprise.

Several years ago were launched 10 indicators for social businesses in the Czech Republic. These indicators are based on five principles: public benefit, social benefit, economic benefit, local benefits, and environmental benefits. Social business must fulfil all of the mentioned principles. In the Czech Republic, there are currently 238 social enterprises registered with an organization called 3P. Their register, which is also known as the Ministry of Regional Government, is a unique source of information about social businesses in the Czech Republic. Disabled people, long-term unemployed people, youngsters in a difficult life situation or ethnic minorities are often employed in social businesses. Homeless people, ex-prisoners or drug-addict people are less likely to be employed by these types of firms (P3, 2015).

Based on 3P's annual register the majority of social businesses operate in agriculture services, education services, cleaning services, including property maintenance, hospitality and accommodation, ironing, and manufacturing of decorative products. We could have also seen a boost in transport, tourism, digitalization/copyright and manufacturing of metal products in 2015 and 2016. The highest concentration of social businesses is in Prague (more than 50 companies) and only lowest concentration is in Karlovy Vary region (Malá, 2017).

Social enterprises faced often problems they are related to limited human and financial resources, with 62% of social entrepreneurs, 48% marketing, 74% lacking time, and entrepreneurs often see the problem of insufficient volume the number of orders is 54%, which is related to the previous three points, and 39% of the employees represent a considerable percentage of the problems, which is obvious because these companies employ workers who are otherwise unemployed on the labour market (P3, 2015).

There is no mention in literature, what lead customers to make purchase product from social beneficial company and specification of his/her purchase decision-making process. In general, customer represents a key element for each company, on which must be targeted all business and marketing activities. The main condition for effective targeting is knowledge of customers' requirements, connected to individual person (Who), purchasing amount (How much), a way of purchasing (How) and purchasing motives (Why). The most difficult is a specification of customers' motives. Basic differentiation of all customers' motives is considered in accepting or rejecting an offer. Both cases need to answer relevant reasons for possible improvements and next developing the offer.

Adequate understanding of human reactions on individual products

The basic premise for adequate marketing decisions is required a correct understanding of human reactions on individual products, prices, and kind of communication. Therefore, it is necessary to monitor the relationship between mall marketing suggestions and

consumers' reactions (Tomek, Vávrová, 2011; Mulačová, Mulač et al., 2013; Bellini, Cardinali, Grandi, 2017; Sharma, Sivakumaran, Marshall, 2010).

The behaviour of customers in the consumer market is strongly influenced by various factors. The significant role in decision-making process makes actual impulse, which moved-out rational reasons and gives priority to purchasing-point (Betancourt, Gautschi, 1992). All impulsive buys are closely connected with emotional activities and cognitive learning, what lead to influencing behaviour and positive decision for purchase. If this decision is linked to needs satisfying, customers get correct experience and move them to other potential customers with positive purchase references (Puccinelli et al., 2009).

The most considerable model for analysing customers' reaction is "black-box model". This model helps to show problems in customers' behaviour prediction. There is put under research buying customers' behaviour in chain stimulus/suggestion – black box – reaction. The black box represents the interaction of consumer to causing factors in the decision-making process. All factors, which influencing customers and its mind, are based on three groups. The first group consists such kinds of stimulus, preparing from tools' combination in a marketing mix. These stimuli are connected together and impact customer in a complex way. The second group includes effects, which are employed in a marketing environment. Last third group includes internal factors such reaction of customers on previous groups (Mulačová, Mulač et al., 2013; Vysekalová et al., 2011; Muruganatham, Bhakat, 2013).

According to model black box, Kotler and Keller (2006) defined basic factors, developed from a specific environment, where purchasing consumer is located. These factors consist individual items of culture, social environment, personal and psychological. All of these factors must be comprehended to cause on customers' black boxes in an effective way.

Social enterprises usually provide services in own workplace (Koudelková, 2014). For this kind of businesses, there is the typical fact that customers are caused by factors like atmospherics, crowding perception and visitor satisfaction (based on tourism theory).

Atmospherics-according to marketing point-of-view, people are influenced by some environmental factors called as atmospherics such as colours, sounds, other people, forms of exhibition, in the process of purchasing decisions. Those factors influence people's purchasing and decision-making behaviour either positively or negatively. A study by Baker (1986) was a starting point for determining the factors that form atmospherics, e.g. layout, colours, complexity, employees, lighting, voices, smells. Bitner (1992) suggested that atmospherics can be measured by the evaluation of environmental conditions such as spatial order and functionality. To these factors proposed Bitner (1992), Evan and Berman (1995) the inclusion of external environment of a place, e.g. entrance, windows exterior architecture, etc. These theories are based on in-store communication (Jesenský, 2013).

Crowding Perception – the crowding concept is mainly examined theoretically in the context of environmental and behavioural psychology (Neuts, Nijkamp, 2012) and exist two basic theories. The first one suggests that an individual's crowding perception is a

kind of behavioural restraint and stimulus load (Kaya, Weber, 2003) which is an inappropriate social communication. According to the second perspective, crowding is perceived when other people intervene and individuals experience (Stokols, 1972).

Visitor satisfaction – is important e.g. in restaurant or cafeterias. Some researchers have suggested that satisfaction means the meeting of needs, while others have argued that it is a process influenced by psychological conditions (Tian-Cole, Crompton, 2003).

Gender differences are received as kind of social signals on base of comprehension of content. Effects of gender have been ignored. Nowadays, there are approaches to observe perception in social and mental fields to find out possible impacts on communication (Barkley, Gabriel, 2007; Pavlova, 2009). Many researchers (Costa, Terracciano, McCrae, 2001; Rahmani, Lavasani, 2012, He, Wong, 2011) consider, that there could be differences between perception of marketing campaigns from point of view men and women. At same time, they point out necessity adequate knowledge about target market. Perception of the company or product is based on the knowledge or experience with these elements at side of customers and consumers.

Methods and Data

The purpose of the research as base for this paper is to find out differences between perception of final customers and companies, labelled as social ones. The main objective of the paper is identify relationship between knowledge of social companies and chosen demographics (region, gender, education) in Czech Republic. Main hypothesis is that there are dependence in between the perception of social companies in connection with these demographics.

To specify connection between perception and social business label questionnaire survey was realised. Sample population was created by 1009 consumers that were chosen in random way. There were returned questionnaires from 371 respondents (return rate is 36.77%). Own research survey has been realised during spring of 2019.

Gained data were processed by IBM SPSS Statistics 25. Then, there was employed calculation of dependency between two variables by means of contingency tables and Pearson's chi-squared test. Pearson's chi-square test for independence of variables provides a basic view on the relationship between variables and help to show intensity of the dependency.

Results

Results of the questionnaire survey showed, that 74.7% of all respondents or don't want to visit or don't know, if they visit any company with social parameters. Just 25.3 % of all respondents visit social companies with direct plan. From visiting companies, the most visited kind of social company is café or restaurants. The highest concentration of visited cafés and restaurants is in Prague region and as second region is South Moravia (Table 1).

Tab. 1: Knowledge of visits social businesses according to their industry

	No visits	Café and restaurants	Production industry	Services	Total
Central bohemia region	37	7	1	3	48
South Bohemia region	10	0	2	1	13
Liberec region	6	2	0	0	8
Hradec Králové region	14	3	0	1	18
South Moravia region	67	8	9	10	94
Pardubice region	5	0	0	0	5
Prague region	57	18	3	2	80
Plzeň region	4	2	0	1	7
Karlovy Vary region	7	0	0	0	7
Ústí nad Labem region	11	5	0	0	16
Vysočina region	15	0	0	2	17
Olomouc region	10	2	0	2	14
Zlín region	6	2	2	2	12
Moravia-Silesia region	9	1	0	0	10
Slovakia and others	18	0	0	0	18

Source: own work of authors.

For evaluation of defined hypothesis there were chosen other variables except region of the respondents. Frequencies of the chosen variables are included in Table 2. Concept of social businesses know 45.73% of respondents (in connection to education level, the knowledge is mainly for undergraduates). In case of knowledge of any foundations, at least one foundation know 83.02% of all respondents.

Tab. 2: Frequencies of individual variables

		Absolute	Percentage
Gender	Woman	250	67.75
	Man	119	32.25
Education	high school - with graduation	117	31.54
	high school - with no graduation	1	0.27
	undergraduate / graduate	253	68.19
Knowledge of social business	Yes	166	45.73
	No	197	54.27
Foundation knowledge	No knowledge	63	16.98
	One foundation	74	19.95
	Two foundation	67	18.06
	Three foundation	167	45.01
Social business visits	Yes	94	25.34
	No	273	73.58
	Don't know	4	1.08

Source: own work of authors

The results of the dependency test are provided in Table 3 which examines the dependency between gender, region, education and knowing foundation, visiting social business. The results of the dependency examination in individual variable categories are depicted in the following results of Pearson's chi-square test.

Maintaining the % reliability of the test, there was compared the established value with 0.05 which represents a 5% reliability level. The value 0.050 of Pearson chi-square test is smaller than 0.05, which represents 5% error of bad decisions (95% confidence level). Therefore, it could be assumed that there is dependence between individual variables, i.e. education and knowing foundation (sig.=0.014), education and visiting social business (sig.=0.002), and region and knowing foundation (sig.=0.001). From point of view of the region and visiting social business, there is significance value of Pearson chi-square test at 0.062 which means that there could be potential dependence in the future (Table 3).

Tab. 3: Specifies of observed dependencies between individual variables

		Value	Significance
Gender vs knowing foundation	Pearson chi-square	2.384	0.497
	Contingency coefficient	0.080	
Gender vs visiting social business	Pearson chi-square	1.226	0.542
	Contingency coefficient	0.058	
Education vs knowing foundation	Pearson chi-square	15.885	0.014
	Contingency coefficient	0.203	
Education vs visiting social business	Pearson chi-square	17.253	0.002
	Contingency coefficient	0.211	
Region vs knowing foundation	Pearson chi-square	78.473	0.001
	Contingency coefficient	0.420	
Region vs visiting social business	Pearson chi-square	42.740	0.062
	Contingency coefficient	0.323	

Source: own work of authors.

Conclusion

Social companies offer employment for disadvantaged citizens, what leads to develop present society on the way of getting new customers and keep actual customers. Main purpose to establish social company is difficult life situation of founders. Such kind of companies enter to high competitive business environment, where main business aim is to reach maximal profit and choose different business models.

Several years ago were launched 10 indicators for social businesses in the Czech Republic. These indicators are based on five principles: public benefit, social benefit, economic benefit, local benefits, and environmental benefits. Social business must fulfil all of mentioned principles. In the Czech Republic there are currently 216 social businesses registered with an organisation called 3P. Their register, which is also known at the Ministry of Regional Government, is a unique source of information about social businesses in the Czech Republic. Disabled people, long-term unemployed people, youngsters in a difficult life situation or ethnic minorities are often employed in social businesses. Homeless people, ex-prisoners or drug-addict people are less likely to be employed by these types of firms.

The main objective of the paper is identify relationship between knowledge of social companies and chosen demographics (region, gender, education) in Czech Republic.

According to observed relationships of individual variables, there were defined three connections with defined statistical dependence:

- Education and knowing foundation (signif. = 0.014; conting. coef. = 0.203);
- Education and visiting social business (signif. = 0.002; conting. coef. = 0.211);
- Region and knowing foundation (signif. = 0.001; conting. coef. = 0.420).

From these dependencies, relationship between Region and knowing foundation reaches the highest intensity value in comparison to the rest. This intensity is 0.420, what could be considered as rather high value.

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