

E-shops and customer feedback: experience by Czech B2C customers

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Abstract

This paper deals with customer feedback given to e-shops by Czech B2C customers. There are three aims: (1) to find out whether respondents have already given their feedback to an e-shop, (2) to investigate the nature of given feedback (with emphasis on possible gender difference: men vs women), and (3) to ascertain the nature of a reply to customer feedback. In order to get relevant data, a quantitative approach was used and data were collected by means of questionnaires. Findings show more than one half of customer has given feedback to an e-shop. Their feedback can be described as rather positive, dealing with bought products and also with speed of delivery, trying to help to the e-shop and also to other customers. As for reply to customer feedback, it seems that the character of the obtained reply could influence the level of customer satisfaction. Some recommendations for e-shops (e.g. managerial implications) were derived: to really send a reply (for a customer it is probably an indicator that feedback is taken seriously) and to formulate a reply more personally (to avoid general phrases).

Keywords: e-shops, Czech B2C customers, customer feedback, reply to customer feedback

Introduction

This paper is organized as follows: firstly, there is literature background focusing on key theoretical concepts for purposes of the subsequently presented research. Then material and used methods are described, incl. aims of this paper. The next section contains results which are discussed and enriched with comments in a subsequent section. This paper ends with usual necessities such as conclusion and list of references. It indicates discussion about feedback belongs to crucial topics when considering the level of business performance.

Feedback in general

There is a considerable amount of literature that recognizes the important role of feedback from many aspects. Benefits of creating feedback-friendly culture in organizations from a psychological point of view are emphasized by Baker et al. (2013).

Feedback is described as a great source of information (Dai 2016); it can be considered as a gift because it shows opportunities for growing (Cohn 2016) and how to better competitiveness (Usugami 2013), by finding out weaknesses (Moules 2012) which should be eliminated. It can be said well formulated feedback is able to cause performance improvements and so positively affects individual's learning (Mulder and Ellinger 2013). As a result, customer feedback also contributes to organisational learning (Caemmerer and Wilson 2010).

Customer feedback

Customer feedback is a marketing term (Beard 2014). Customer feedback can have a form of suggestions for product/service improvements, but it can be also complaints (Celuch, Robinson and Walsh 2015) which indicate a certain level of customer dissatisfaction (Ola 2016 or Cobb Walgren 2016 who deals with a somewhat special case: with complaining children in the role of customers). Besides suggestions and complaints, Pawar et al. (2015) state the third category of customer feedback can be called "appreciations". In this sense, Kipfelsberger, Herhausen and Bruch (2016) distinguish between positive and negative customer feedback – it can be deduced that complaints are negative feedback, appreciations are positive and suggestions can be considered rather neutral.

Kotler and Keller (2012, p. 141) point out listening to customers "is only part of the story". It means it is necessary to process obtained customer feedback – to utilize it.

There is no doubt customer feedback can help companies to identify their strengths and weaknesses (Solarová and Švec 2016). Therefore, companies seek for solutions which facilitate the process of collecting and further processing customer feedback. This is possible thanks to advances in information and communication technologies. For instance, Goncalves et al. (2011) claim using internet for obtaining customer feedback is cost effective – and it is obvious this is possible thanks to advances in communication technologies. Ordenes et al. (2014) or Büschken and Allenby (2016) deal with using information and communication technologies for purposes of processing customer feedback from a theoretical point of view, whereas some companies have already offered software tools for use in business practice (e.g. Staffino, s. r. o. 2017). Such software tools can be incorporated into a CRM system (mentioned by Assimakopoulos et al. 2015).

The need to have a particular system for processing and analysing customer feedback is apparent, especially because customers expect a reply to their feedback – this is very urgent in the case of negative customer feedback (i.e. complaints). According to Osarenkhoe (2016), service-minded and competent staff should be able to deal quickly with customer complaints. In other words, it is crucial to apply customer-oriented approach.

Customers can have various motives for giving feedback; their willingness should be also encouraged (Brownlee 2014) – Furgison (2015) states incentives are the easiest stimuli (e.g. it can have a form of a coupon). If their feedback leads to improvements, their willingness to give feedback can be interpreted as an effort to co-create value. Hence, customers can be considered as partial employees (Chiu, Kwag and Bae 2015). Customers belong to stakeholders of enterprises (Slabá, 2016) so it is obvious they will influence enterprises' actions.

Customer feedback is studied in many different industries – for example, Dinnen and Hassanien (2014) or Dah and Dumenya (2016) deal with feedback in hospitality industry whereas Celuch, Robinson and Walsh (2015) focus on customer feedback in retail etc. It indicates customer feedback is an important and actual topic.

E-shops

Thanks to advances in information and communication technologies, the way of shopping has changed (Saprikis 2015) not only in the Czech Republic, but all over the world (Pílik 2012). E-shops belong to everyday lives of many today's customers. According to Apek.cz (2017), 49% of Czech customers bought something online in the year 2016. When shopping online, men tend to spend more money than women. Czech people aged between 25 and 34 are the biggest shoppers whereas people at the age of 65+ are their opposite: they do not buy so often. (Čuchna 2016)

In the Czech Republic, there are more than 36 thousand e-shops. Czech customers spent in e-shops approximately 98 billion CZK in the year 2016 and they bought electronics at most (sales of electronics created 51% of total sales in e-shops). The share of e-commerce in total retail sales increased to 9.5 percent. (Byznys.ihned.cz 2017).

Materials and Methods

This paper presents a part of the conducted research focused on feedback which Czech customers give to e-shops. The aims of this paper are summarized in Table 1.

Tab. 1: Aims of this paper

Aim 1 => to find out whether respondents have already given their feedback to an e-shop	Aim 2 => to investigate the nature of given feedback (with emphasis on possible gender difference: men vs women), specifically: • <i>reasons for giving customer feedback</i> • <i>activity vs. passivity when giving customer feedback</i> • <i>subject of given customer feedback</i> • <i>character of given customer feedback</i>	Aim 3 => to ascertain the nature of a reply to customer feedback, namely: • <i>character of the obtained reply</i> • <i>speed of getting a reply</i> • <i>satisfaction with the received reply</i>
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Source: Authors

The purpose of the aims specified in Table 1 is to point out the experience (behaviour) of Czech customers when giving their feedback. Understanding specific reasons for giving customer feedback, knowledge whether customers are rather passive or active when giving their feedback, subject and character of their feedback are crucial for enterprises preparing tools in order to obtain customer feedback. On the other hand, it seems to be helpful for enterprises to know how the reply to customer feedback is perceived; then it is possible to adapt present customer feedback internal policy rules. It means the findings have the potential to be inspiration for enterprises.

In order to get relevant data, a quantitative approach was used and data were collected by means of questionnaires (methodologically described e.g. by Bryman and Bell 2015). Totally 322 completed questionnaires were obtained (144 of them were completed by men and 178 were completed by women). Questionnaires were distributed to individuals (e.g. B2C customers) from 19 years old (because there was an assumption they have certain experience with shopping and they are also able to formulate their feedback), with different level of education. Totally 420 questionnaires were obtained; however, only 322 of them were complete.

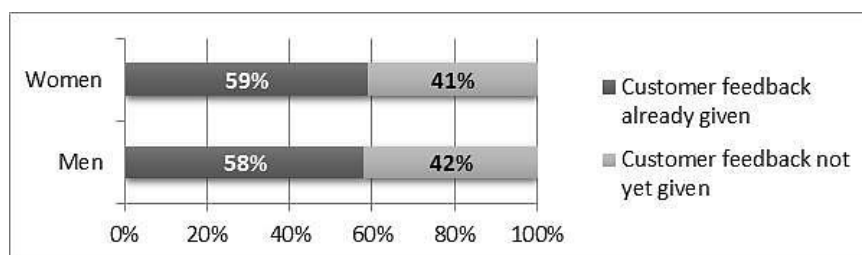
Chi-square goodness of fit test has shown this sample can be considered as balanced with regard to the above stated number of men and women (chi-square = 1.8; p-value = .18). All of the respondents were aged between 20 and 64. Data collection was conducted from November to December 2016.

Results

Graph 1 shows results relating to the question whether respondents have already given their feedback to an e-shop. At the beginning of the questionnaire, there was information that customer feedback may take the form of a variety of comments, suggestions but it can also be a complaint (= this was an explanation for respondents to be able to understand correctly the questions in the questionnaire).

It is obvious the majority of respondents has already given feedback (men: 58%, women: 59%). As for this case, results presented in Graph 1 indicate there is no statistical difference between men and women – this was confirmed also through Chi-square test of independence (chi-square = 0.0597; p-value = .81).

Graph 1: Giving customer feedback to e-shops

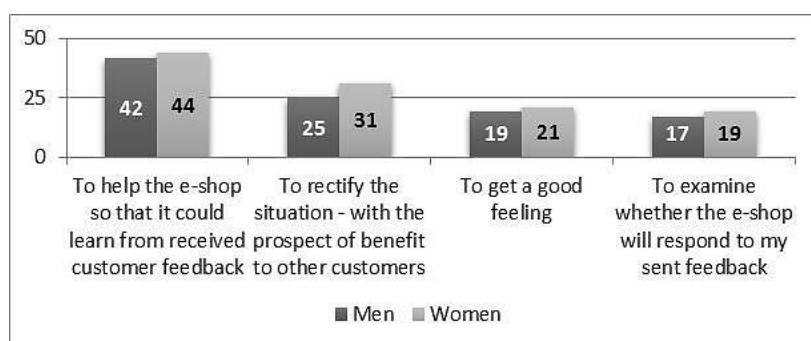


Source: Authors

Following questions were answered only by those respondents who have already given feedback to an e-shop. It means, data from 188 respondents (83 men and 105 women) were further processed. This subsample is again balanced with regard to the number of men and women (Chi-square goodness of fit test was used; chi-square = 1.29; p-value = .26). Respondents in this subsample were also aged between 20 and 64.

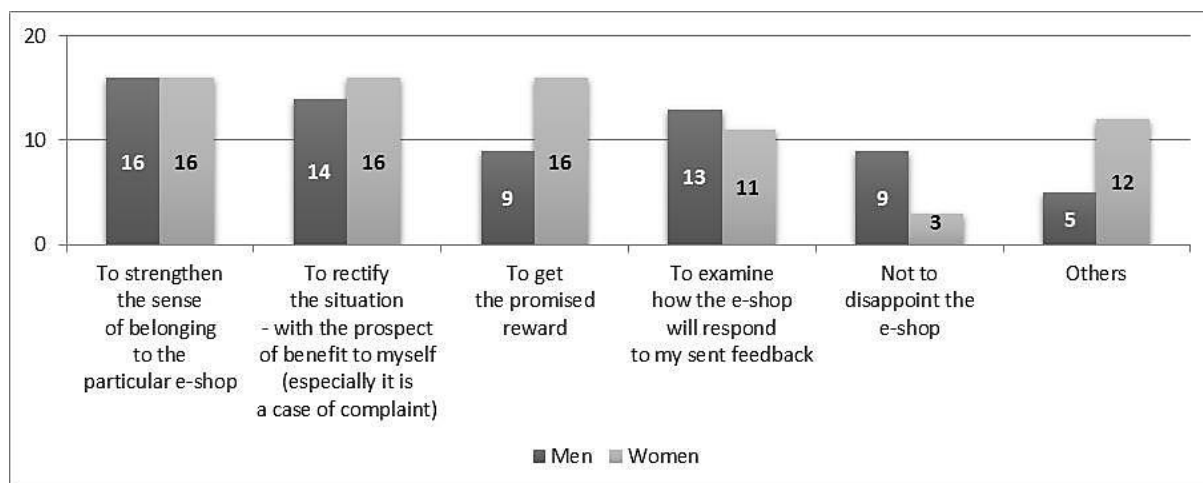
Graph 2 presents respondents' reasons for giving customer feedback to e-shops. Since respondents could mark more options, results are presented in the form of the bar chart.

Graph 2: The most frequent reasons for giving customer feedback to e-shops



Source: Authors

Graph 3: Further reasons for giving customer feedback to e-shops



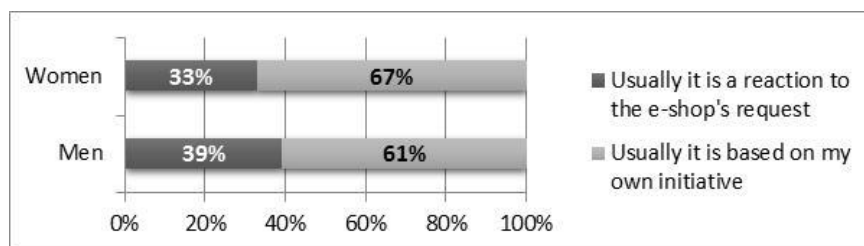
Source: Authors

It is apparent from Graph 2 that “to help the e-shop so that it could learn from received customer feedback” and “to rectify the situation – with the prospect of benefit to other customers” were the most frequent reasons for giving customer feedback. Further frequent reasons were “to get a good feeling” and “to examine whether the e-shop will respond to my sent feedback”. On the other hand, the less frequent reason is “not to disappoint the e-shop” – see Graph 3. As for the category “others”, respondents formulated answers in their own words very vaguely.

In order to find out whether there is a difference between reasons stated by men and women, Chi-square test of independence was used. The results of this test indicate there is no difference (chi-square = 5.45; p-value = .79).

The following Graph 4 shows how active or passive are respondents when giving customer feedback to e-shops. It is quite surprising that respondents give their feedback on their own initiative (men: 61%, women: 67%). Based on Graph 4 it is quite clear there is no statistical difference between man and women – this assumption was subsequently confirmed by means of Chi-square test of independence (chi-square = 0.55; p-value = .48).

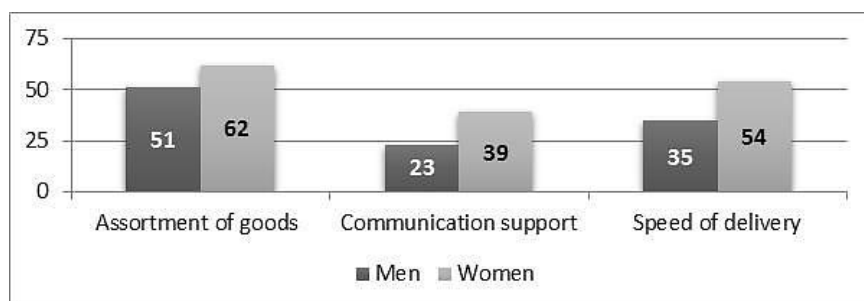
Graph 4: Initiative when giving customer feedback to e-shops



Source: Authors

Graph 5 presents **subject of given customer feedback**. Since respondents could mark more options, results are presented in the form of the bar chart.

Graph 5: Subject of given customer feedback



Source: Authors

It is obvious from Graph 5 that “assortment of goods” was the most frequent subject of given customer feedback. “Speed of delivery” was the second and “communication support” was the third. As for the category “others”, respondents stated their feedback concerned warranty claim, quality of purchased product, orientation on e-shop’s websites and accompanying services.

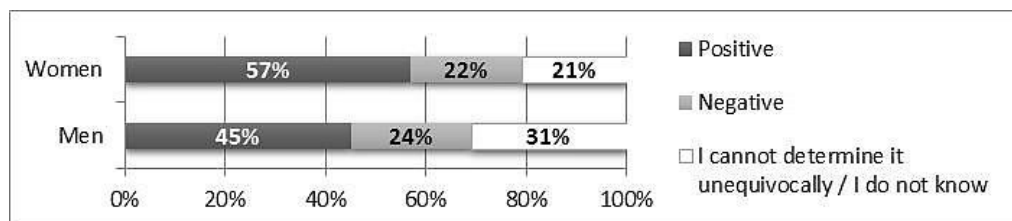
In order to find out whether there is a difference between subjects of feedback given by men and women, Chi-square of independence test was used. The results of this test indicate there is no difference (chi-square = 5.625; p-value = .13).

The following Graph 6 shows character of given customer feedback. Respondents evaluated whether their feedback was positive, negative or they are not able to determine

it retrospectively. The results indicate customer feedback was rather positive (men: 45%, women: 57%). Approximately one quarter of men and women stated their feedback was rather negative. The rest was not able to determine or did not know.

In order to find out whether there is really a difference between the character of given customer feedback expressed by men and women, Chi-square test of independence was used. The results of this test show there is no difference (chi-square = 3.469; p-value = .18).

Graph 6: Character of given customer feedback

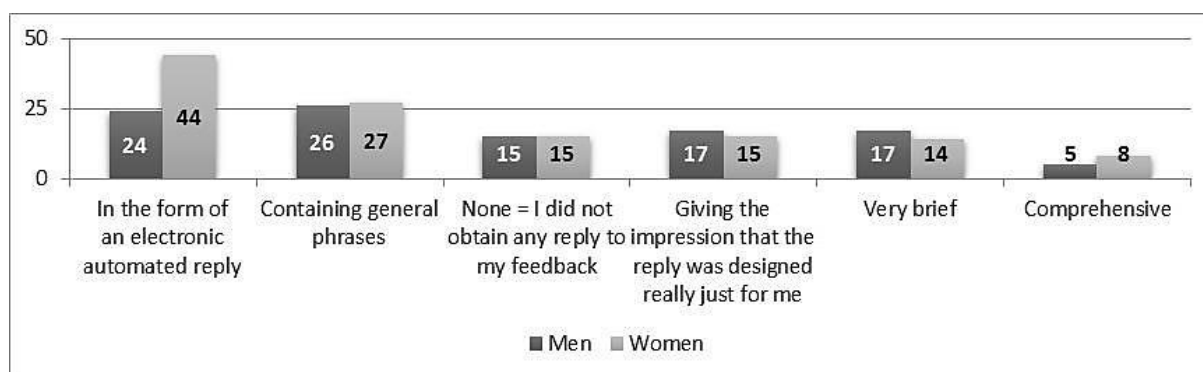


Source: Authors

The following Graph 7 presents character of the obtained reply to customer feedback. Since respondents could mark more options in order to describe the character of the obtained reply, results are presented in the form of the bar chart.

It is apparent from Graph 7 that obtained replies from e-shops were often “in the form of an electronic automated reply” and often they contained general phrases. Only in a few cases replies could be described as “comprehensive”. It is necessary to emphasize also the fact some respondents did not receive any reply.

Graph 7: Character of the obtained reply to customer feedback



Source: Authors

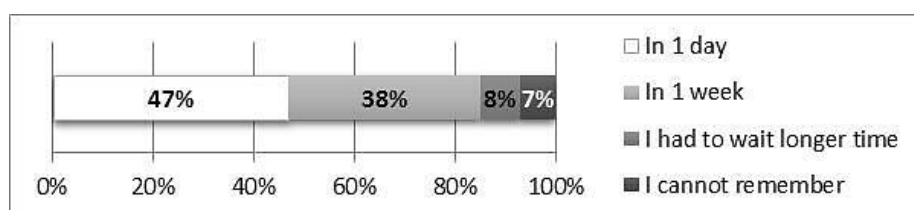
It is necessary to highlight respondents' evaluation of the obtained reply from e-shop is dependent on their subjective impression, i.e. it is a matter of their subjectivity (that was also the reason why respondents' answers were evaluated separately for men and women because there is an assumption that men could evaluate the obtained reply in a different way in comparison with women). In order to find out whether there is a difference, Chi-

square test of independence. The results of this test indicate there is no statistical difference (chi-square = 5.457; p-value = .36).

The following Graph 8 shows speed of getting a reply to customer feedback. This question was answered only by those respondents who received a reply to their sent customer feedback. It means, data concerning 158 respondents were analysed for purposes of Graph 8.

The majority of respondents (47%) stated they received a reply in one day and 38% of respondents got a reply in one week. The rest of respondents had to wait longer time or they cannot remember.

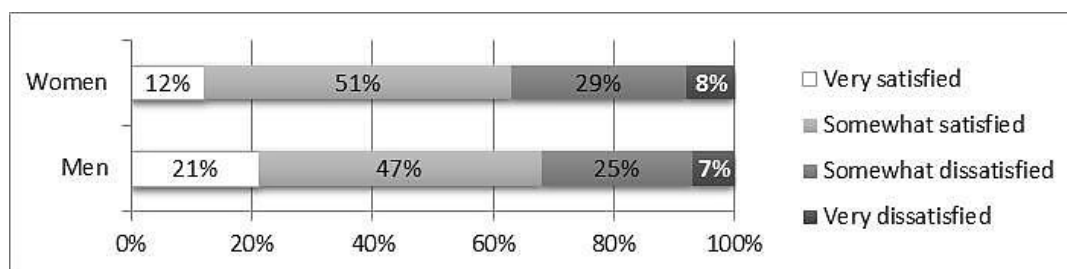
Graph 8: Speed of getting a reply to customer feedback



Source: Authors

The last Graph 9 presents respondents' satisfaction with the received reply to customer feedback. This question was also answered only by those respondents who received a reply to their sent customer feedback. It means, data concerning 158 respondents (68 men and 90 women) were analysed for purposes of Graph 9. This subsample can be considered as balanced with regard to the number of men and women (Chi-square goodness of fit test was used; chi-square = 1.5391; p-value = .21). Respondents in this subsample were aged again between 20 and 64.

Graph 9: Satisfaction with the received reply to customer feedback



Source: Authors

It is crucial to emphasize respondents' satisfaction with received reply is dependent on their subjective impression, i.e. it is a matter of their subjectivity (that was also the reason why respondents' answers were evaluated separately for men and women because there is an assumption that men could evaluate their level of satisfaction in a different way in comparison with women). In order to find out whether there is really a difference, Chi-

square test of independence was used. The results of this test indicate there is no statistical difference (chi-square = 2.0667; p-value = .56).

However, it is useful to have a closer look at results in Graph 9: the results show respondents were mostly "somewhat satisfied" (men: 47%, women: 51%). It is worth noting men seem to be more satisfied than women (21% of men were very satisfied whereas only 12% of women were very satisfied). 25% of men and 29% of women expressed a certain level of dissatisfaction (i.e. they were "somewhat dissatisfied").

Discussion

About 60% of customers give their feedback to an e-shop where these customers have made a purchase. Results show giving feedback does not depend on customer's gender – in this sense, it cannot be expected women will give much feedback than men. It means e-shops which focus on a segment of women cannot expect much or less feedback in comparison with e-shops which focus on a segment consisting of men. However, Mikhaylov and Mikhaylova (2015) state in their research study that customers' gender, (and also age and income level) predetermines whether the customer will or will not to give his/her feedback, especially to make a complaint.

As for reasons for giving customer feedback, the main motives seem to be quite altruistic since customers expressed their willingness to help the e-shops in order to improve e-shops' performance and also customers want to ensure better services for other customers (these motives are common for both men and women). This can sound quite surprisingly because from a psychological point of view it is generally assumed that first of all people act in order to better their own position or situation (e.g. Joshua 2011). The third frequent motive was connected with a prospect for customers themselves because they stated they want to get a good feeling through giving customer feedback.

Results indicate customers are rather active when giving their feedback (regardless of customer's gender) – this is quite surprising. There are many pieces of advice in the literature and also on the internet how to increase the amount of customer feedback (e.g. Celuch, Robinson and Walsh 2015; Toman 2015; Lake 2016; Cinanni 2016 or Hykel 2016). If customers were so active, and if they gave feedback purely on their own initiative, then it would not be necessary to deal with the question how to stimulate customers in order to get much feedback. Therefore, the above presented result seems to be slightly inconsistent.

Customer feedback mostly deals with assortment of goods or products which were purchased by customers (regardless of customer's gender). This is quite logical because the bought product is usually something tangible and visible – hence, it is expected customer feedback will be related to it. Besides this, speed of delivery is also an often stated subject of given customer feedback. When buying on the internet, speed of delivery belongs to crucial aspects (Čuchna 2016 or Bobalca 2015), so there is no wonder customer feedback contains also the issue of speed of delivery.

The majority of customers state their feedback was rather positive (irrespective of customer's gender). It is necessary to take into account a certain level of subjectivity when customers try to determine the character of their feedback. In the literature, researchers claim that customers usually give either very positive or very negative feedback (negative feedback has a form of a complaint – Osarenkhoe and Komunda 2013). Neutral feedback is not so common – customers do not tend to give feedback when they are not extremely satisfied or dissatisfied.

If customers obtained a reply to their feedback they often perceive it is a general reply which is probably sent to everyone. On the other hand, some replies gave the impression they were prepared just for the individual customer. It is also worth noting that some customers did not get any reply – and because they remembered it, it indicates they were waiting for a reply, but the e-shop has sent nothing. It is clear these results are affected by the memory of customers and also by subjective perception. However, some recommendations for e-shops can be derived: to really send a reply (for a customer it is probably an indicator that feedback is taken seriously) and to formulate a reply more personally (to avoid general phrases).

Speed of getting a reply to customer feedback could be related to the character of this reply. In order to test this assumption, additional Table 2 summarizes key variables.

Tab. 2: Speed of getting a reply vs character of the obtained reply to customer feedback

Speed of getting a reply	Character of the obtained reply	
	containing general phrases	giving the impression the reply was designed just for the individual customer
"In one day"	25	18
"In one week" or "I had to wait longer time"	21	12

Source: Authors

The tested assumption (which can be marked as working hypothesis 1) is that the longer time customers had to wait, the more personal the reply was. To find it out, Chi-square test of independence test was used: the results indicate there is no statistical difference (chi-square = 0.2361; p-value = .63). It means longer waiting did not cause more personalised reply.

Further, satisfaction with the received reply could have a relation to the character of this reply. Therefore, additional Table 3 was created to test this assumption (working hypothesis 2).

Tab. 3: Satisfaction with the received reply vs character of the obtained reply to customer feedback

Level of satisfaction	Character of the obtained reply	
	containing general phrases	giving the impression the reply was designed just for the individual customer
"Very satisfied" and "Somewhat satisfied"	26	27
"Very dissatisfied" and "Somewhat dissatisfied"	26	5

Source: Authors

The tested assumption is whether level of satisfaction is influenced by character of the obtained reply. Chi-square test of independence was used again: the results show there is statistical difference (chi-square = 10.0526; p-value = .002). It means the character of the obtained reply influences the level of customer satisfaction.

Similarly, satisfaction with the received reply could be related to the speed of getting this reply. In order to test this assumption (working hypothesis 3), the following Table 4 was created.

Tab. 4: Satisfaction with the received reply vs speed of getting a reply

Level of satisfaction	Speed of getting a reply	
	in 1 day	in 1 week or longer
"Very satisfied" and "Somewhat satisfied"	44	54
"Very dissatisfied" and "Somewhat dissatisfied"	19	28

Source: Own processing.

The tested assumption is whether level of satisfaction is influenced by speed of getting a reply. Chi-square test of independence was used: the results indicate there is not statistical difference (chi-square = 0.2586; p-value = .61). It means the speed of getting a reply does not influence the level of customer satisfaction.

It is obvious that testing working hypothesis 1 – 3 is only additional action for purposes of this discussion. In order to get more relevant results, a more comprehensive analysis is needed. Therefore, it can be an idea for future research.

Since better customer service can be considered as a marketing weapon (Majerčák, Weissová and Moravčíková 2014), any improvements that bring more value for customers are welcomed. The obtained customer feedback is a source of valuable inspiration which improvements are really required by customers. And in the upshot, meeting customer needs and wants is a basic principle of marketing (Gubíniová 2012).

Future research in this area could be focused on special groups of respondents, e.g. young men, housewives as special kinds of B2C customers. It means the same questions which are presented above could be used and then findings could be compared, including formulation of managerial implication.

Conclusion

More than one half of customers has given feedback to an e-shop. Customers are rather active when giving their feedback. As for reasons for giving customer feedback, the main motives seem to be quite altruistic since customers expressed their willingness to help the e-shops in order to improve e shops' performance and also customers want to ensure better services for other customers. Customer feedback mostly deals with products which were purchased by customers and also speed of delivery is an often stated subject of given customer feedback.

The majority of customers state their feedback was rather positive. However, it is necessary to take into account a certain level of subjectivity when customers try to determine the character of their feedback.

Additional assumptions emerged in the discussion that can be considered as ideas for future research, especially that the character of the obtained reply could influence the level of customer satisfaction.

Finally, some recommendations for e-shops can be derived: to really send a reply (for a customer it is probably an indicator that feedback is taken seriously) and to formulate a reply more personally (to avoid general phrases).

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