

MYSTERY VISITOR AS A RESEARCH METHOD OF TRADE SHOW PERFORMANCE



received: 23 April 2015
accepted: 30 September 2015

MARCIN GĘBAROWSKI, DARIUSZ SIEMIENIAKO

ABSTRACT

The goal of this paper is to present a research method used during trade shows, which is commonly named as a mystery visitor, and in particular to identify its unique characteristics and the conditions under which correct results may be achieved. The authors used to one of the variants of participant observation, which is mystery visitor, as a research method. This method was used during the MAPIC – the world's largest retail real estate business trade show. Mystery visitor method can be used to examine in detail various phenomena existing in exhibitors' activities and to assess a general level of customer service during a particular trade show. The observation based on the mystery visitor method, carried out during trade shows, which is properly conducted can provide numerous benefits for both exhibitors and exhibition event organisers. The mystery visitor research method has not been presented in the marketing literature yet. This paper fill in the existing gap, in particular, by indicating characteristics of that method. The paper points out how to effectively use the mystery visitor method in practice in order to assess trade show performance.

KEY WORDS

trade shows, trade show performance, participant observation, mystery visitor, retail real estate business

DOI: 10.12846/J.EM.2015.03.02

Corresponding authors:

Marcin Gębarowski

Rzeszow University of Technology,
Faculty of Management,
Department of Marketing

e-mail:
marcing@prz.edu.pl

Dariusz Siemieniako

Bialystok University of Technology,
Faculty of Management,
Department of Marketing
and Entrepreneurship

e-mail:
d.siemieniako@pb.edu.pl

INTRODUCTION

Contemporary enterprises have a wide spectrum of instruments at their disposal necessary for influencing the market. Electronic forms of communication, based on the Internet and mobile telephony, are becoming more and more significant. Those methods make it possible to reach consumers and deliver information about products to them in a quick and easy manner, however, using only two senses (sight and hearing). In the context of the fast development of new media, the future of trade shows – which have been a traditional information exchange platform, used for many decades – will be dependent on the exhibitors' ability to communicate with visitors effectively. Maintaining an important role of exhibition events among the marketing communication instruments (especially on the business-to-business market) is conditional on whether the contact during trade shows is made appropriately, and if it produces desired results for both exhibitors and people who visit booths. In order to identify the level of that

contact, the mystery visitor method, which was rarely applied by exhibitors and trade show organisers, can be used. The method was applied occasionally also by researchers who carried out research during exhibition events.

The mystery visitor research method has not yet been presented in the literature on the subject. The paper aims at filling in the existing gap by indicating characteristics of that method, in particular, by comparing it with a similar, far more frequently used participant observation method, that is mystery shopping. The characteristics of mystery visitor method have been presented basing on the analysis of the literature on the subject and on the basis of empirical research which used that method. The characteristics have been also demonstrated as a result of a comparative analysis made in connection with other research methods applied by the authors of the paper to the research which concerned exhibitors. The research based on the mystery visitor method was conducted during the MAPIC trade

show – the world's largest retail real estate business exhibition event, which is held every year in Cannes, France. Observation questionnaire was the instrument used in the research.

1. THE ESSENCE AND APPLICATION OF TWO METHODS: MYSTERY SHOPPING AND MYSTERY VISITOR

The mystery shopping method should be considered the prototype of mystery visitor. Both methods are the forms of participant observation whose main principle is that a person who carries out research becomes directly involved as a participant in peoples' daily lives (also including professional life). Through participation, the researcher is able to observe and experience the meanings and interactions of people from the role of an insider (Jorgensen, 1989, p. 21).

The main goal of using the mystery shopping method is an appraisal of the level of customer service, which is done by the people who take the role of „ordinary” purchasers of products. Such people do not reveal the fact that they conduct research during the interaction with a seller, and the appraisal is made, first of all, in order to verify if customer service standards are met and what a point of sale or place where service is rendered looks like. In typical mystery shopping-based research a trained researcher visits a selected place (chosen randomly) of sale (a place of rendering services or an eating place) and observes everything he or she is able to see and hear from the point of view of a customer. Observations are made in a deliberate, planned and systematic manner. The researcher usually seeks an answer to a research problem that had been defined before. Data is gathered mainly by the use of senses, especially sight, and a registration process is made by entering the data into sheets (observation registers, called audit questionnaires), which had been earlier prepared specifically for that purpose. The observation may concern people, their behaviour, and objects (Wódkowski, 2003, p. 47).

When one refers to the genesis of mystery shopping, it should be noticed that the method derives from the techniques used by private detectives, whose aim was to detect theft or prevent it. The main focus was put on the theft committed by the employees of banks and shops. The term „mystery shopping” was introduced in 1940 by a research company WilMark and from that time on, the method has been put into practice. Nowadays, the mystery shopping-

related industry is estimated to be over \$1.5 billion annually (Zikmund et al., 2009, p. 238).

The literature on the subject pays a lot of attention to the mystery shopping analysing its diversified aspects. Based on the literature review, it must be admitted that the most of publications refer to the practical dimension of using mystery shopping, and in particular, they contain instructions on how to conduct research properly (for example PamInCa, 2009; Mooradian, 2011). There are also papers in which central focus is placed on the usefulness of that method when one attempts to identify the level of service quality (Dawes, Sharp, 2000; Schmidt, 2007; Varma, 2008). However, some of the authors concentrate on using mystery shopping to check the quality of services rendered by entities representing selected areas of business activities, for example: banks (Roberts, Campbell, 2007; Prymon-Ryś, 2011), restaurants (Rood, Dziadkowiec, 2010; Lai, Chang, 2013), hotels and travel agencies (Atef, 2012; Minghetti, Celotto, 2014), medical facilities (Moriarty et al., 2003; Baum, Henkel, 2010, pp. 19-23). In the literature, there appears a trend connected with using the method under analysis to study the satisfaction and loyalty of customers (Van der Wiele et al., 2005) as well as to create business relationship (Mattsson, 2012). An ethical dimension of mystery shopping is also indicated (Shing, Spence, 2002; Wódkowski, 2007, p. 237; Rzemieniak, Tokarz, 2011, pp. 48-51). The method is also considered to be the support for selling products in connection with the activity perceived as field marketing (Gębarowski, 2007, p. 137). Furthermore, some of the authors believe that the observation based on the 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 (Latham et al., 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 show participants (Kaniewska-Sęba et al., 2006, p. 98). However, they do not refer to detailed matters related to any measurements performed among exhibitors. Similarly, trade show publications do not describe mystery visitor 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 the participation in trade shows is able to verify, whether the standards of dealing with guests who visit the booth, which had been established before, are reached or not” (Mruk, Kuca, 2006, p. 129). With reference to the mystery visitor method, the observation can concern both the personnel behaviour (including many detailed aspects such as the way of presenting showpieces, an attitude towards a customer, familiarity with the presented offer) as well as the appearance of the booth and the programme of a trade show 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.

The review of scientific literature on trade shows demonstrates that mystery visitor has been very occasionally used in scientific researches. Herbst et al. (2007) introduced an innovative way of measuring interaction quality – the concept of mystery shopping – to industrial markets. The above-mentioned authors organised a famous international trade show of the packaging industry in Germany; and Polish researchers – Pilarczyk and Kwiatek (2010) – used the mystery visitor method to collect data from exhibitors who participated in one of the furniture business trade shows, organised by Poznań International Fair. Their research was focused on dyadic buyer-seller professional communication on business markets.

In addition to the above, it must be pointed out that the method has been put into practice by providing trade show organisers with results that can be useful for the management of trade show preparation and performance. The application of this method helped some entities that organise trade shows 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)*, *Nowy DOM Nowe MIESZKANIE (Warsaw)*.

2. COMPARISON OF MYSTERY VISITOR WITH OTHER RESEARCH METHODS

2.1. MYSTERY VISITOR VS. MYSTERY SHOPPING

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 at points of sale or places where customer service is provided, and the other involves observation made at booths. It can be assumed, however, that specific work conditions during trade shows determine, to a large extent, the dissimilarity of the mystery visitor method. That dissimilarity with regard to the way of behaviour displayed during trade shows entails predominantly working for many hours in haste, noise and confusion resulting from the fact that exhibitors enter into discussions with several customers at the same time (Gębarowski, 2013, pp. 132-133). The comparison of mystery shopping to mystery visitor lets identify the differences and similarities between the two methods.

Above all, mystery shopping is classified as belonging the group of quantitative marketing research, in which the researcher’s purpose is often to obtain the results that can be subject to statistical analysis. In the case of mystery shopping, the selection of a sample is rather not indicated, as the measurement is almost always made at all points of sale (Wódkowski, 2007, p. 233). The mystery visitor technique, 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 the customer service standards, established for a particular entity (for example chain store). Contrary to the above method, in the 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 the 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. For 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 show performances for which specific phenomena can be observed.

With regard to mystery shopping and mystery visitor – which are the forms of participant observation, ethical doubts may be raised. They result

from the fact that the person whose behaviour is under evaluation is not aware of being observed. However, both at points of sale (customer service points) and during trade shows, 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 research does not violate ethical norms that are applicable in everyday life circumstances (see Wilson, 1998, p. 149). On the other hand, there are more considerable doubts regarding the situation when the result obtained by the mystery shopping or mystery visitor method is linked with a specific person employed by an organisation (then, the final appraisal of such person may have an impact on his or her salary or may even result in dismissal of an employee who fails to perform well), and an 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 the infringement of law. The literature on the subject puts forward a view which implies that using the mystery shopping-based research for disciplinary purposes is negatively interpreted by the observed and creates a barrier to the development of that method (Wódkowski, 2007, p. 223). The same problem may occur in connection with mystery visitor.

2.2. MYSTERY VISITOR AND OTHER RESEARCH METHODS ADOPTED DURING TRADE SHOWS

When one analyses the mystery visitor method other possible marketing research methods which may be implemented during trade shows must also be mentioned. Optional methods which facilitate gathering empirical material from exhibitors are: auditorium questionnaire – which represents quantitative research methods, and personal interview – classified under qualitative research methods. Those methods also have their own unique characteristics but they have been quite extensively described in the literature on marketing research.

The auditorium questionnaire is a form of measurement suitable for application during such events as conferences, symposia, lectures, trade shows. 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 enables to achieve a huge percentage of answers and to preserve anonymity at the same time (Kaczmarczyk, 2011, p. 262). Moreover, one person is able to conduct the research

by providing all exhibitors with the questionnaires during the first day of trade shows, and finally, collect them on the last day. This method is often exposed to the following limitations – first, the personnel which 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 a trade show, a researcher should visit the booths and remind about the questionnaires that he or she has handed out.

It is also possible to carry out the research using a personal interview method. However, there are certain conditions for carrying out the interview during trade shows: a limited number of questions addressed to the representatives of exhibitors and the time of the research – when there are fewer visitors at booths (usually, the lowest attendance is observed straight after the beginning of a trade show day or at its end, 2-3 hours before the closing of trade show halls). The fact that a researcher is present when conducting the personal interview makes it less plausible that a respondent misunderstands a question or chooses an answer contained in the questionnaire incorrectly. There is, however, a risk of obtaining erroneous results because the respondent's answers can be influenced by the researcher's behaviour (Kaniewska-Sęba et al., 2006, p. 113). People who collect the data during a face-to-face discussion can be supported by computer terminals, and then research based on Computer-Assisted Personal Interviews (CAPI) is involved. There are several user-friendly electronic packages that design relatively simple questions for the respondent to understand. CAPI can be used to collect data at test facilities from street interviews, conferences as well as trade shows (Malhotra, Birks, 2007, p. 271).

In the case of both the auditorium questionnaire and personal interview, a researcher reveals that he or she carries out research. It is thus impossible to conduct a disguised and uninterrupted observation of the personnel which run trade show booths. Only the mystery visitor method allows for such possibility. Furthermore, this type of research differs from conventional survey research in that it aims to collect facts rather than perceptions (Malhotra, Birks, 2007, p. 284).

3. EMPIRICAL RESULTS – AN EXAMPLE OF USING MYSTERY VISITOR

Mystery visitor-based research was carried out by one of the authors of this paper in November 2013

during the MAPIC trade show which is organised in Cannes once a year. The method was applied to study 34 exhibitors. The sample size was determined by the number of discussions (in respect of relations existing on B2B market) to be held by one person throughout the duration of the trade show, that is within three days.

The process of preparing and carrying out the research consisted of several stages, which can be presented as follows:

- developing a research concept – formulating a research problem, defining the scope: objective, subjective, spatial, temporal;
- selecting a trade show for the research – it was decided to choose the MAPIC event, as its subject matter was concurrent with the many years' interest (both scientific and professional) of one of the authors; moreover, it is the biggest retail real estate business exhibition event all around the world, which guarantees a high attendance of exhibitors and great diversity of trade show performances;
- constructing a scenario of behaviour for a person conducting the research – it was specified how a researcher must behave and what to ask about; the same scenario was implemented at every booth;
- preparing a measurement instrument – an observation questionnaire was used, which contained nineteen questions – mostly open-ended and closed-ended (both dichotomous and multi-chotomous); the application of such questions enabled to significantly shorten the time needed to fill in the measurement instrument, and what is more, it ensured greater comparability of the results obtained at various booths; diversified aspects of the appraisal of trade show performances were considered in the questionnaire – and they were, among other things, the appearance of booths, the way of having discussions, the scope of applied forms of promotion;
- gathering empirical material – participating in the trade show for three days and carrying out the research that involved: selecting the booths to be observed, holding discussions (15 to 30 minutes long), recording obtained results;
- aggregating and elaborating on the collected empirical material – the answers given to the questions contained in the questionnaire and additional researcher's remarks were gathered and analysed (in the case of quantitative questions, a spreadsheet was used); consequently, the results were obtained, which were a qualitative description of the phenomena explored by the researchers.

The aim of the research conducted using the mystery visitor method was to explore trade show performances made by selected exhibitors who participated in a retail real estate business trade show. One of the phenomena interesting to the authors concerned the study of the scope of using the experiential marketing forms by exhibitors representing that business. The first criterion that was taken into account in this context during the observation of the booths was the attractiveness of exhibitions. Above all, the appearance of the booths was considered – their influence on the visitors' sight. After the end of the visits, the researcher's opinions were recorded in the observation questionnaire – each booth under evaluation was awarded one of the following marks: very attractive, attractive, average, unattractive. The highest marks were given to the booths: which were original; whose offer was presented with the use of diversified and unique means; which were functionally correct; and which displayed a sense of cohesion regarding the overall concept of the booth. Apart from the above assumptions, the appraisal of the booth attractiveness was determined, to a large extent, by the researcher's subjectivity. It resulted from the qualitative nature of the research.

The person who visited the booths focused also on whether an exhibitor used any marketing-related event during his or her participation in the trade show – the observation results were recorded in the questionnaire in the form of dichotomous question (with the possible answers: „yes” and „no”). With regard to the entities which included marketing-related events in their trade show programme, the researcher specified what type of events they were: contests, lotteries, quizzes, special exhibitions of products, presentations with the participation of famous people or some other forms of events – the questionnaire contained a semi-open question (a cafeteria question) that corresponded to that issue.

The also researcher attempted to observe carefully what methods were applied at the booths in order to overcome the intangible nature of the presented services. Among the possibilities that manifested that activity, the following items in the questionnaire were specified: the use of diversified visual materials, special personnel clothing, aromamarketing, tastings, the application of sounds, symbolic things (gadgets), the presentation of an exhibitor's logo. The observation concerned selected booths and its aim was to understand the reasons why the exhibitors used a particular means of influence on the visitors' senses. For example, one of the booths under observation, where more sophisticated experiential marketing activities were conducted, was run by Places Brussels,

a developer, and presented a new shopping centre. The trade show performance programme established by that exhibitor included, among other things, such elements as: a cocktail party called „happy hour“; house music played live by a DJ; Belgian sweets tasting. The presentations were accompanied by female models wearing eye-catching clothes. Outside the trade show hall, the models moderated over various events, for example taking photographs of them together with the people disguised as fairy tale characters.

Many important remarks referring to the use of experiential marketing by the exhibitors were included in the observation questionnaire in the form of open-ended and semi-open questions. Those remarks constituted a loose description of the observed phenomena and they were analysed in the next step. As an example of such opinions the following statements made by the researcher can be quoted: „the decoration of the booth made reference to the Arab culture (the personnel dressed in Arab-style clothes, Arab sweets, ethnic music)“, „the booth was plastered with pictures and visualisations of the exhibitor’s offer – playgrounds for children“, there was a presentation of large urban space (it was an artificial island in Qatar to be developed in the existing buildings by retailers)“, „the exhibitor used a slogan retailtainment presenting

everything about entertainment“.

After the end of the MAPIC trade show, the data gathered in all observation questionnaires was analysed. This served as the basis for compiling tables related to the issues which were the focus of the researchers’ attention. It must be mentioned, however, that the results have been analysed in consideration of the parameters contained in demographics questions of the questionnaire – there were, among others, three exhibitor subgroups distinguished according to the exhibitors’ business profiles: developers (12 exhibitors), tenants (7), service providers (15).

The obtained quantitative data made it possible to carry out a more in-depth qualitative analysis of the selected phenomena. Part of the results referring to experiential marketing achieved through the mystery visitor-based research is presented in Tab. 1.

In the light of the presented description of the mystery visitor method, one can notice that the research conducted during the MAPIC trade show had to take into account considerably individualised appearances of the booths, which means that there was no standardisation and different conditions under which the observation took place occurred. The researcher concentrated on certain detailed elements of the trade show performances and

Tab. 1. An example of the results obtained through the research carried out using the mystery visitor method

QUESTION IN THE OBSERVATION QUESTIONNAIRE	OBTAINED RESULTS				
		Service providers	Developers	Tenants	Total
Attractiveness of a booth in comparison to the others:	very attractive	6	4	1	11
	Attractive	3	5	1	9
	Average	4	3	5	12
	Unattractive	2	0	0	2
	Sum total	15	12	7	34
What methods have been used by an exhibitor in order to overcome the intangible nature of the offered services?		Service providers	Developers	Tenants	Total
	visual materials: paper materials	14	12	6	32
	the presentation of a logo	13	11	7	31
	visual materials: multimedia presentations	10	11	1	22
	groceries	7	11	4	22
	symbolic things, gadgets	6	8	4	18
	sound	2	3	0	5
	visual materials: mock-ups	1	6	0	7
	aromamarketing	1	1	1	3
	special personnel clothing	0	2	1	3
	other methods	7	5	1	13
	no methods have been used	1	0	0	1

perceived the booths as the area for creating experiences. The empirical material that was collected has enabled to identify quantitative research results, yet they constitute merely a complementary element to the overall research. The results gained through the research cannot, therefore, be generalised owing to the lack of statistical analysis. Nevertheless, it must be highlighted that the essence of the research was a qualitative identification of the characteristic phenomena that occurred during trade shows.

4. UNIQUE CHARACTERISTICS OF MYSTERY VISITOR

As it has been already mentioned, the mystery visitor-based research is carried out under specific trade show conditions which could be noticed during the research done at the MAPIC. Taking into consideration the results of the observation as well as the qualities typical of mystery shopping (that is a method implemented in a similar manner), one can identify the features that give the mystery visitor-based research a distinct character. The Tab. 2 shows these features.

As it has been already noticed, the observation using the mystery visitor method is carried out similarly to the mystery shopping-based research. Therefore, apart from the differences, it is also possible to indicate similarities between the two methods. The authors of the paper have recognised the following main characteristics which the two techniques have in common:

- a confidential nature of research, which makes the researchers take any measures necessary to avoid being exposed;
- the necessity to specify main assumptions for research – the scope, time and context of observation;
- the use of standardised observation questionnaires, which are filled in in secret after the visit at a point under appraisal (a shop, a booth);
- for a proper execution of the research it is required to select auditors who have desired qualities (which include, among others, a good memory, perceptiveness) and skills (for example acting skills) as well as to train them later on with regard to the observation assumptions.

In addition to the similarities, it must be mentioned that – adopting the typologies of 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 refer also to the following types of observation: disguised (people under research are not aware of being observed), controlled (people under research are influenced by auditors), standardised (an observer knows under which conditions he or she must conduct research and how and where he or she must record the results), (Kaczmarczyk, 2011, pp. 333-336). What is more, the essence of the two methods is in line with the triangulation trend of research methods, that is „the use of multiple research methods across multiple time periods” (Woodside, Wilson, 2003, p. 498). Triangulation effect on those researches enables to minimise the disadvantages of traditional quantitative and qualitative methods of customer satisfaction recognition (see Kaczmarek et al., 2013, p. 154). Researcher’s familiarity with the characteristics distinguishing mystery visitor is a condition which determines the 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 show halls.

CONCLUSIONS

The paper focuses, first of all, on identifying specific characteristics of the mystery visitor method by juxtaposing it with the similar research method – mystery shopping. The research process considering the observation of trade show performances has been described. Moreover, the examples of the results obtained after visiting the exhibitors’ booths during a large international trade show have been presented. As a consequence, such a detailed description of mystery visitor has enabled to fill the gap existing in the literature on the subject.

Considering the comparison between the two methods – mystery shopping and mystery visitor – one can draw a conclusion that the observation based on the mystery visitor method, carried out during trade shows can be used to examine in detail various phenomena existing in exhibitors’ activities and to assess a general level of customer service during a particular trade show (this method involves an assessment which concerns activities taken by many exhibitors). The mystery visitor research, on the other hand, is not suitable for examining single exhibitors. However, it could be applied to evaluate the activity of a single enterprise, if it exhibits its offer throughout several trade shows per year or in a longer time perspective.

It must be also noticed that a complete appraisal of the same exhibitor’s performances during several consecutive trade shows could be problematic – a particular entity can use a different booth for

Tab. 2. The characteristics of the mystery visitor method (in comparison to mystery shopping)

A 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 (for example chain store, 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 shows – yet 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 show 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 rather do not enforce standards of trade show 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 lets control the research to a large extent	An auditor must be flexible since it is difficult to follow only one pattern because each exhibitor presents a distinct offer
The conditions under which observation is conducted	Every observation is carried out under comparable conditions – at 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 show is common for exhibitors under research (sometimes the subject matter is significantly narrowed down) – entities which participate in trade shows use various booths and can offer products which differ completely from each other
Duration of research	The duration of the research is unlimited, which enables to carry out observation for a large research sample (several hundred, even up to one thousand points)	The duration the research is determined by the duration of a trade show (often 2-3 days), which is the reason why in this time period only a limited number of observations can be done (the sample size is restricted also 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 the facility which is being evaluated (he or she is the one who decides on for how long the observation should be carried out)	Usually, a short time available for the contact with a customer, which results from the nature of many trade show discussions held in accordance with a „touch & go“ approach
Control of sales personnel work	The research enables to check 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 show conditions (when the area around is crowded, when they have to perform many activities simultaneously, and when they are under stress)
The 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 the 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 show performance, which cannot be easily standardised
Costs of research	High costs of a single research study (which is, among others, 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 show
Necessity for personal contact	There are forms of research, which are not performed personally (via phone or email)	The research always requires a visit at trade shows 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	It is easier to take pictures of a booth and personnel working at it, because trade show visitors very often photograph exhibition elements

exposition every time (with a different area, layout, arrangement). Moreover, the number of team members designated to serve visitors at a booth as well as the division of duties may also differ during every consecutive trade show. However, taking into consideration these differences, the mystery visitor-based research may be conducted due to its qualitative nature.

The mystery shopping-based research is a long-term project which involves cyclical observations at many points owned by a particular business entity. In the case of mystery visitor, it is difficult to talk about a long-term nature of activity, because – as it results from the analysis of the literature on the subject – nobody has ever before carried out this research undertaking in the long-term perspective.

The selection of auditors, who would be able to conduct research during certain trade shows organised for the participants of the B2B market, can create a difficulty in carrying out the mystery visitor-based observation. B2B market-related trade shows are the events in which many experts take part, and because they operate in this business on a daily basis, they know it very well. Therefore, people who carry out observation – in order to avoid being unmasked and to do research incognito – should be very well prepared not only in terms of conducting research, but also with regard to factual knowledge (they should be familiar with the business related with the trade show). This is a mandatory condition if one has to enter into business-related discussions with booth personnel and to properly assess their behaviour.

In the context of the defined characteristics of a mystery visitor, it can be stated that research which is properly conducted can provide numerous benefits for both exhibitors and exhibition event organisers. Direct observation of the way in which booths are run, and consequently, sharing the conclusions drawn therefrom with personnel representing exhibitors, leads to the increase of trade show performance level, and in particular – visitor service. This results in improving the perception of a trade show as an effective instrument applied to accomplish marketing objectives and is the reason for using it more frequently instead of other means of communication.

LITERATURE

- Atef T.M. (2012), The mystery demystified: a mystery shopper's experience with hotel services and products, *TOURISMOS: An International Multidisciplinary Journal of Tourism* 7 (1), pp. 289-308
- Baum N., Henkel G. (2010), *Marketing Your Clinical Practice: Ethically, Effectively, Economically*, Jones & Bartlett Publishers, Sudbury
- Dawes J., Sharp B. (2000), The Reliability and Validity of Objective Measures of Customer Service: „Mystery Shopping”, *Australian Journal of Market Research* 8, pp. 29-46
- Gębarowski M. (2007), *Nowoczesne formy promocji*, Oficyna Wydawnicza Politechniki Rzeszowskiej, Rzeszów
- Gębarowski M. (2010), *Współczesne targi. Skuteczne narzędzie komunikacji marketingowej*, Regan Press, Gdańsk
- Herbst U., Barisch S., Voeth M. (2007), *Mystery Shopping as a Tool for Advanced Interaction Quality in Business Relationships – an Exploratory Study*, Proceedings of the 23rd IMP-conference, Manchester, <http://www.impgroup.org/uploads/papers/5874.pdf> [14.09.2015]
- Jorgensen D.L. (1989), *Participant Observation: A Methodology for Human Studies*, SAGE Publications, Thousand Oaks
- Kaczmarczyk S. (2011), *Badania marketingowe. Podstawy metodyczne*, Polskie Wydawnictwo Ekonomiczne, Warszawa
- Kaczmarek M., Olejnik I., Springer A. (2013), *Badania jakościowe – metody i zastosowania*, CeDeWu, Warszawa
- Kaniewska-Sęba A., Leszczyński G., Pilarczyk B. (2006), *Badania marketingowe na rynku business-to-business*, Oficyna Ekonomiczna, Kraków
- Lai Y.L., Chang S.Ch. (2013), How Improving the Customer Experience Quality and Business Performance? A Case Study by Mystery Shopper Practices, *International Journal of Marketing Studies* 5 (6), pp. 52-61
- Latham G.P., Ford R.C., Tzabbar D. (2012), Enhancing employee and organizational performance through coaching based on mystery shopper feedback: A quasi-experimental study, *Human Resource Management* 51 (2), pp. 213-229
- Malhotra N.K., Birks D.F. (2007), *Marketing Research: An Applied Approach*, Pearson Education Limited, Harlow
- Mattsson J. (2012), Strategic insights from mystery shopping in B2B relationships, *Journal of Strategic Marketing* 20 (4), pp. 313-322
- Minghetti V., Celotto E. (2014), Measuring Quality of Information Services: Combining Mystery Shopping and Customer Satisfaction Research to Assess the Performance of Tourist Offices, *Journal of Travel Research* 53 (5), pp. 565-580
- Mooradian B. (2011), *The Mystery Shopper Training Program Book: All You Ever Wanted to Know About the Best Part-Time Job*, CreateSpace Independent Publishing Platform, United States of America
- Moriarty H., McLeod D., Dowell A. (2003), Mystery shopping in health service evaluation, *British Journal of General Practice* 53 (497), pp. 942-946
- Mruk H., Kuca A. (2006), *Marketing targowy. Vademecum wystawcy*, Polska Korporacja Targowa, Poznań

- PamInCa (2009), *The Essential Guide to Mystery Shopping: Make Money, Shop, Have Fun, Get an Insider's Guide to Success*, Happy About, Cupertino
- Pilarczyk B., Kwiatek P. (2010), Professional communication: does meeting preferences constitute effectiveness, in: Conchon F. (ed.), *Proceedings of the 9th International Conference Marketing Trends*, Marketing Trends Association, Paris-Venise, pp. 1-10, http://www.marketing-trends-congress.com/sites/default/files/papers/2010/2010_fr_Pilarczyk_Kwiatek.pdf [14.09.2015]
- Prymn-Ryś E. (2011), Wykorzystanie metody mystery shopping w badaniu jakości usług finansowych, *Prace Naukowe Akademii im. Jana Długosza w Częstochowie V*, pp. 147-158
- Roberts B., Campbell R.C. (2007), Being new-customer friendly: determinants of service perceptions in retail banking, *International Journal of Bank Marketing* 25 (1), pp. 56-67
- Rood A.S., Dziadkowiec J. (2010), Why Use Importance Performance Analysis in Mystery Shopping? A USA-Poland Comparative Answer, *Journal of Quality Assurance in Hospitality & Tourism* 11(1), pp. 1-16
- Rzemieniak M., Tokarz E. (2011), Mystery shopping w budowaniu tożsamości organizacyjnej, *Politechnika Lubelska*, Lublin
- Schmidt K. (2007), *Mystery Shopping. Leistungsfähigkeit eines Instruments zur Messung der Dienstleistungsqualität*, Deutscher Universitäts-Verlag, Wiesbaden
- Shing M.N.K., Spence L.J. (2002), Investigating the limits of competitive intelligence gathering: is mystery shopping ethical?, *Business Ethics: A European Review* 11 (4), pp. 343-353
- Van der Wiele T., Hesselink M., Van Iwaarden J. (2005), Mystery Shopping: A Tool to Develop Insight into Customer Service Provision, *Total Quality Management & Business Excellence* 16 (4), pp. 529-541
- Varma A. (2008), *Mystery Shopping – An Introduction*, Icfai University Press, Hyderabad
- Wilson A.M. (1998), The Use of Mystery Shopping in the Measurement of Service Delivery, *The Service Industries Journal* 18 (4), pp. 148-163
- Woodside A.G., Wilson E.J. (2003), Case study research methods for theory building, *Journal of Business and Industrial Marketing* 18 (6/7), pp. 493-508
- Wódkowski A. (2003), Tajemniczy klient wkracza do badań, *Marketing w Praktyce* 1, pp. 47-50
- Wódkowski A. (2007), Mystery Shopping – badanie jakości usług, in: Maison D., Noga-Bogomilska A. (eds.), *Badania marketingowe. Od teorii do praktyki*, Gdańskie Wydawnictwo Psychologiczne, Gdańsk, pp. 221-239
- Zikmund W.G.J., Babin B.J., Carr J.C., Griffin M. (2009), *Business Research Methods*, Cengage Learning, Mason