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Conditions of Internationalisation of Foreign Service Enterprises in the Polish Market

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The characteristic feature of the contemporary economic reality is growing internationalisation of enterprises. This applies to all sectors, including the service sector. Of key importance in the process of internationalisation of service enterprises are the motives impelling businesses to undertake expansion to foreign markets, as well as the factors (criteria) serving the evaluation and comparison of the target markets. The aim of the article is to analyse the determinants affecting the propensity of foreign service entities to undertake expansion into the Polish market and the strategies undertaken in this field, as well as to identify the key sources of competitive advantage taking place at the enterprises in question. The grounds for deliberations in the article are findings of the research carried out in 2017, among managers of 153 foreign service enterprises operating in the Polish market, of different sizes and scopes of activity. In this article, the author focused on two issues: evaluation of the factors describing the Polish market from the point of view of their impact on the propensity to run their activities therein, as well as identification of the sources of competitive edge used by foreign service entities. The findings of the conducted research show a positive perception by foreign service enterprises of a prevailing majority of the factors characterising the Polish market. And there are no significant differences between the appraisals made by individual categories of enterprises. In this research, the author identified fourteen sources of competitive edge of foreign service enterprises in Poland. The key one is professionalism in customer service. An important role is also played by brand and accompanying reputation , as well as promptness of customer service and efficacy of marketing measures, mainly promotional ones.

Key words: *Services, Service enterprise, Internationalisation, Internationalisation conditions, Competitive advantage.*

Introduction

When discussing the problems of internationalisation of service enterprises and the factors determining it, one should pay attention to the growth in the share of services in international turnover (Grönroos, 1999). Their growing role in international transactions is connected with the civilisational development and globalisation, including the following (Nowacki, 2018; Wojtczuk-Turek, 2017: Pluta-Olearnik, 2013; Kłosiński, 2011):

- the growing wealth of societies whose consequence are changes of the patterns of service behaviours related to ongoing servicisation of consumption as well as the accompanying growth of expectations as regards the quality of services provision;
- modernisation of the service sector in result of implementation of new technologies, including ICT, what is particularly apparent in new and modern services whose consequence is faster internationalisation of production and services provision;
- innovation in processes of service provision, including the development of e-services and the services based on digital technology;
- the growing specialisation of services and the emergence of specialised enterprises rendering services in extensive trans-border markets;
- the development of systems products in services;
- the development of the demand for expert knowledge in many areas of activity.

In view of the growing importance of the service sector in the economy and the dynamic changes taking place in its internal structure, the Polish market for services is an interesting research area. According to Eurostat (Eurostat, 2017), in 2016, the share of the service sector in creation of gross value in the European Union reached 73.7% and the share of employees amounted to 73.9%. The indicators of Poland's economy are clearly lower – 63.6% and 58.5%, respectively (GUS 2017, pp. 407-408). These disparities show the existence of a potential developmental gap of the service sector, which may be exploited by foreign service entities entering the Polish market.

The aim of the article is to analyse the determinants affecting the propensity of foreign service entities to undertake expansion into the Polish market and the strategies undertaken in this area as well, so as to identify the key sources of competitive edge occurring at the enterprises in question.

Literature Review

The development of contemporary economies is inextricably connected with the processes of internationalisation. Internationalisation is a complex notion, defined in many planes (Barłożewski, 2017; Witek-Hajduk, 2010). It is generally understood as internationalisation of an enterprise connected with each type of economic activity undertaken abroad, irrespective of the degree (scope) of foreign deployment of resources (Jarosiński, 2013; Cavusgil, Knight, Riesenberger, 2012; Fonfara, 2009; Gorynia, 2007; Rymarczyk, 2004; Keegan, 1999; Piercy, 1985). Hill (2013) and Yip (2004), also emphasise the necessity to choose a definite strategy or differentiation thereof. Andersen (1997), Duliniec (2009), as well as Ruzzier, Hisrich and Antoncic (2006), bind the process of internationalisation with absorption of resources, whereas Calof and Beamish (1995), pay attention to the necessity to take into account the determinants of the international environment as the determinants of the scale of engagement. Internationalisation is usually considered in the context of the process approach (Melin, 1992; Welch, Luostarinen, 1988), albeit more and more frequently the concept of the network approach is taken into account (Johansson,Vahlne, 1990).

There are many concepts classifying the determinants of internationalisation. Rymarczyk (2004) and Duliniec (2009) refer to the four categories thereof: market-, cost-, supply-related, and political. In turn, Wiktor, Oczkowska and Żbikowska (2008), as well as Drabik and Limański (2010), pay attention to the three groups: economic, market (marketing), and political (legal). Also three categories (market, economic, and strategical) are distinguished by Shenkar and Luo (2004).

Globalisation processes are an important motivating factor for internationalisation. They play an increasingly important role in shaping markets, especially in highly developed countries (Nowacki, 2007).

In the context of service enterprises, it is worthwhile to refer to the concept of Hollensen (2004), who specifies the four groups of factors: information and communication technologies, cultural, location of service activity as well as service standardisation and individualisation, and also the extended classification taking into account the economic, market, demographic, sociocultural, political, legal and administrative, technological, and natural factors (Pluta-Olearnik, 2013).

In the case of service enterprises, there are indicated several causative factors of internationalisation (Lenartowicz-Łysik, 2002). They include: stagnation of the parent market and/or growth of the foreign market, threat to the position in the parent market, internationalisation of activities of competitors and/or customers, building or strengthening of competitive edge, ambitions of the management, cultural similarity of the parent and target countries, size of the company and opportunities for its growth (Li and Guisinger, 1992), policy and regulations of the target country as well as characteristics of the service product (Dunning, 1989), especially in the context of interactions between the service provider and the customer in the process of provision, and the share of tangible assets in this process (Vandermerwe and Chadwick, 1989).

The mentioned motives of internationalisation become the starting point to evaluate the attractiveness of potential markets for expansion. The present and future sizes of the foreign market, the structure of competition, and the marketing infrastructure are the paramount parameters of the market of the host country (Oczkowska, 2005). Berndt, Altobelli and Sander (1997) divide the determinants concerning the foreign market into general (economic, political and legal, cultural, geographical, and technical) as well as the competitive in terms of branch (the branch's structure, competitors, suppliers, final customers, trade). Their positive evaluation affects optimisation of the choice of the target market, thus implying the opportunity for reaching competitive advantage in that market.

The notion of competitive edge is the key one from the view point of functioning of enterprises in competitive markets (Porter, 1985; Stankiewicz, 2005). Besides, they are characterised by the size and diversification of approaches to defining. Aaker (1989), defines competitive edge as something, owing to which the enterprise obtains better results than its competitors. A similar current in their views is displayed by Stoner (1982), Rue and Holland (1986), Barney (1991), as well as Hunt and Morgan (1995). Fahey (1989), describes competitive advantage as everything which positively distinguishes the enterprise's products or the very enterprise amongst competitors in eyes of customers or final users. The determinants of competitive edge are: [1] its type issuing from the sources such as costs (Porter 1999), resources and skills (Day and Wensley, 1988), creation of new solutions (Drucker, 1992), compression of the time of offer production and delivery (Stalk, 1988), [2] the size expressed by the disparity vis-à-vis competitors, and [3] permanence connected with the ability to maintain it over time. These determinants occur in every market, including also in the service sector. An organisational design of an enterprise can also be an important factor influencing the building of competitive advantage (Hernaus, Aleksic and Klindzic, 2013). In the case of services, the area of management with human resources is of particular importance. In the era of the knowledge-based economy, its importance becomes strategic as the effectiveness of activity within this scope largely determines the achievement of the company's competitive advantage (Staniewski, 2011). Creation of competitive edge thus boils down to the use of a number of various factors whose importance depends both on the market situation and the features characterising the enterprises making use of it (Nowacki 2012; Nowacki 2015).

Research method

Internationalisation of service enterprises in the Polish market was the subject of empirical research implemented within the framework of the project "Expansion of Foreign Service Enterprises onto the Polish Market. The Theoretical and Empirical Approach" in mid-2017. The research was carried out by the method of interviews with managers of 153 service entities with foreign capital, sampled in the random quota manner. The basic stratification criterion was the enterprise's size measured by the number of employees. The structure of the enterprises surveyed from the point of view of the features taken into account in the article is presented by Table 1.

Table 1: Characteristics of the Surveyed Population of Enterprises

Specification	N	%
Share of foreign capital (SFC)		
Up to 50%	72	47.1
51-99%	36	23.5
100%	45	29.4
Enterprise size (ES)		
Up to 9 employees	10	6.5
10 - 49 employees	39	25.5
50 - 249 employees	37	24.2
250 and more employees	67	43.8
Number of domestic markets serviced (NDMS)		
Up to 3	28	18.3
From 3 to 10	44	28.8
From 11 to 30	35	22.9
31 and more	46	30.1
Presence in the market in Poland (PMP)		
Till 1992	31	20.3
1993-1997	29	19.0
1998-2000	29	19.0
2001-2008	38	24.8
2009 and further	26	17.0

Source: Author's own investigation.

The research touched the issues of expansion of foreign service entities in the territory of Poland, with a particular consideration given to its motives, determinants, strategies, and building competitive advantage. The article presents the results referring to the appraisal of the factors characterising the Polish market important for the undertaken expansion and the identification of the sources of competitive edge. There are two hypotheses:

H_1: There is not any statistically significant relationship between the features of operation in Poland foreign service enterprises and the perception by them of the factors affecting foreign expansion;
H_2: There is not any statistically significant relationship between the features of operation in Poland foreign service enterprises and their sources of competitive edge.

We used in the article the structure indices presenting distributions of findings for the entire population of enterprises surveyed as well as non-parametric tests, the Kruskal-Wallis test and the Pearson's chi-squared test, for identification of relationships between the variables in order to verify the hypotheses put forward, and the Cramer's V coefficient, for determination of its strength. In the analyses, there are taken into consideration the four independent variables: the share of foreign capital (SHC), enterprise size (ES), number of domestic markets serviced (NDMS), and presence in the market in Poland (MP).

Results

First, we evaluated the factors affecting the propensity to internationalise, considering them in the context of the Polish market as positive, average or negative (Table 2). Among the factors affecting the choice of the strategy of internationalisation, the respondents in Poland most positively evaluated the following (more than 50% of indications): developmental perspectives, accessibility of mass media/communication channels, possibility to transfer or make use of experience from other markets, Poland's membership in the EU, accessibility of cheaper and better (more effective) production factors, market's attractiveness measured with demand volume, norms and standards of service provision, and sales/distribution channels. As negative (unfavourable) factors, the following were mainly considered (more than 13% of indications): legal conditions related to running activities in the Polish market and their stability, risk of running activities in Poland, the level of technological development, and cultural distance between the Polish and parent markets.

The analysis of relationships between the evaluation of the conditions affecting expansion into the Polish market and the features characterising the service enterprises in question confirmed the hypothesis H_1 of the absence of a statistically significant relationship between the variables. Out of seventy-two possibilities (eighteen factors times four descriptive variables), only in five cases asymptotic significance did not exceed the adopted critical value p=0.05, which means that there are no grounds for rejection of the zero hypothesis of the existence of relationships between variables. Four times – in case of the following factors: sales/distribution channels, possibility to make use of experience from other markets, the level of technological development, and the membership in the EU – such situations took place in case of the number of domestic markets being serviced. Each time, the greater was the range of enterprises (they serviced more domestic markets), the better was the evaluation of the Polish market. In case of the last relationship, there was observed the growth of positive scores assigned to the Polish market in terms of customers' purchasing power, together with the length of the period of the enterprise's operating in the Polish market. In all the identified cases of relationships, their strength was modest – the Cramer's V coefficient reached the value not exceeding 0.210.

Table 2: The Factors Affecting the Propensity to Undertake Expansion into the Polish Market and the Features of the Enterprises in Question – Structure and Analysis of Relationships

Factors	Total rating (in %)			Relationship between the score and enterprise's features							
	A	B	C	SFC		ES		NDMS		MP	
				χ^2	p	χ^2	p	χ^2	p	χ^2	p
Accessibility of mass media/communication channels	8.5	34.0	57.5	0.453	.797	0.965	.810	4.643	.200	3.915	.418
Market's developmental perspectives	6.5	35.9	57.5	2.755	.252	1.657	.647	3.404	.333	1.568	.814
Possibility to make use of experience from other markets	5.2	37.9	56.9	0.077	.681	2.482	.476	10.264	.016	5.278	.260
Membership in the EU	8.5	35.9	55.6	4.346	.144	5.126	.163	7.860	.049	3.969	.410
Market attractiveness measured with demand volume	5.9	41.8	52.3	3.581	.167	5.214	.157	0.943	.815	2.991	.559
Sales/distribution channels	6.5	41.8	51.6	1.282	.527	4.386	.223	9.564	.023	3.216	.522
Norms and standards of service provision	5.9	42.5	51.6	0.095	.953	5.638	.131	5.917	.116	3.856	.426
Economies of scale related to expansion	7.2	43.8	49.0	2.800	.247	6.606	.086	0.913	.822	4.570	.334
Geographical proximity of the parent market	9.2	47.7	43.1	3.591	.166	2.421	.490	4.652	.199	2.246	.691
Accessibility of cheaper and better production factors	12.4	45.1	42.5	1.185	.553	1.030	.794	0.627	.890	6.262	.180
Favourable competitive terms	9.2	49.0	41.8	2.302	.316	2.108	.550	0.709	.871	0.917	.922
Customers' purchasing power	10.5	49.0	40.5	2.147	.342	7.698	.053	3.445	.328	9.486	.050
Cultural proximity of the parent market	13.1	49.7	37.3	0.243	.886	5.266	.153	4.236	.237	0.229	.994
Position of the market	5.9	57.5	36.6	2.821	.244	11.329	.100	5.388	.145	7.172	.127
Similarity of customers to the parent market	10.5	53.6	35.9	0.784	.676	2.034	.565	2.275	.517	4.095	.393
Level of technological development	13.1	51.6	35.3	0.069	.966	0.212	.976	9.773	.021	8.138	.081

Legal conditions related to running activities	15.7	56.2	28.1	2.009	.366	1.238	.744	3.016	.389	2.182	.702
Risk of running activities	14.4	63.4	22.2	1.643	.440	3.016	.389	3.982	.263	2.688	.611

Keys: A – negative evaluation, B – average evaluation, C – positive evaluation
χ^2 - Value of the Kruskal-Wallis test, p – asymptotic significance
Source: Author's own investigation.

Later on, fourteen sources of competitive edge of foreign service enterprises were identified (Table 3). The results showed dominance of the measures related to professional customer service. The significance of this factor was marked by two-thirds of the respondents and its key importance is evidenced by its advantage over the second best attribute – strong brand distinguishing the service company vis-à-vis its environment (47.7% of indications). Customer service was also pointed in the context of process duration – importance of its promptness was declared by 37.9% of respondents. In case of other factors, differences in indications were modest.

Table 3: Sources of Competitive Edge of Foreign Service Enterprises in Poland and Features of the Enterprises Surveyed – Structure and Analysis of Relationships

Sources of competitive edge	Total (%)	Relationship between the pointed sources and enterprise's features							
		SFC		ES		NDMS		MP	
		χ^2	p	χ^2	P	χ^2	p	χ^2	p
Professional customer service	66.7	0.587	.745	1.793	.616	7.184	.066	8.339	.080
Strong brand distinguishing the company vis-à-vis its environment	47.7	1.594	.451	11.238	.011	7.827	.050	7.295	.121
Promptness of customer service	37.9	1.330	.514	8.382	.039	4.626	.201	0.120	.998
Effective marketing, including promotion	32.0	0.926	.629	1.772	.621	0.592	.892	16.476	.002
Management proficiency and managers' competence	30.7	0.579	.749	0.694	.875	6.729	.081	8.245	.083
Innovations in the service offer or in the manner of provision thereof	29.4	0.365	.833	3.512	.319	0.751	.861	1.486	.829
Low costs of service provision	27.5	2.684	.261	1.464	.691	9.131	.028	10.762	.029
Innovative services compared to competitors	26.1	5.068	.079	2.139	.544	1.487	.685	2.122	.713
Wide accessibility of service establishments	22.9	0.546	.761	6.821	.078	0.367	.947	7.279	.122
Distinguishing the service offer vis-à-vis competitors	20.3	3.023	.221	0.583	.900	3.010	.390	6.456	.168
Care of the material setting of the services provided	19.6	0.271	.873	3.126	.373	5.335	.149	10.580	.032
Offering favourable financial terms of the use of services	13.1	1.365	.505	3.323	.344	2.458	.483	2.878	.578
Ability to react faster to changes in the environment than competitors	11.8	1.141	.565	8.722	.033	2.190	.534	1.082	.897
Efficient system of information about suppliers, competitors and customers	10.5	0.820	.664	8.535	.036	4.368	.224	10.283	.036

Keys: χ^2 - Value of the Pearson's chi-squared test, p – asymptotic significance
Source: Author's own investigation.

The analysis of relationships between the pointed sources of competitive edge and the enterprises' features indicated the existence of relationships in ten cases: four times it concerned relationships between the sources and the enterprise size and its presence in the market in Poland, whereas twice – relationships with the number of markets serviced. In these cases, asymptotic significance did not exceed the critical level of significance p=0.05. The strength of the identified relationships was modest and medium – the Cramer's V coefficient oscillated from 0.226 to 0.328 (in case of relationships between the enterprise's market presence and the indicated efficacy of marketing and promotion). Such a level of the identified relationships indicates that we may merely speak of a partial confirmation of the hypothesis H_2.

Discussions and Conclusions

The research concerning the functioning of foreign service entities in the presented approach has not so far been undertaken, thus there is no benchmark for the obtained results. The conducted research usually concerns other aspects of functioning of service enterprises, it also mainly relates to Polish entities (Nowacki 2017). Hence, the presented research concept has features of an innovative one.

Analysing the presented research findings, one may draw several conclusions. First, the Polish market is an interesting market for foreign service enterprises, with good developmental perspectives and inducements to invest. The determinants for expansion into the Polish market are perceived positively by most managers of foreign service enterprises. The most critically evaluated are the legal terms and a relatively high level of market risk connected, *inter alia*, with strong competition.

A response to the perceived risk is to undertake competitive activity whose key tool is professional and prompt customer service. Of great importance is also the brand reputation. This determines the directions of improvement of the competitive potential: care of personnel competency and improvement of customer relations.

The research in question was characterised by a relatively limited scale. It also did not take into consideration a full representation in terms of the profile of service activities. Having this in mind, we may suggest carrying out the research comprising a bigger and more diversified population of service companies, as well as a comprehensive evaluation of the problems identified in this research, *inter alia*, determination of the map of perception between the importance (weight) of particular sources of competitive edge and the scale of their occurrence in every company.

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