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Article

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Journal for East European Management Studies

Provided in Cooperation with:

Rainer Hampp Verlag

Suggested Citation: Skinner, Heather; Kubacki, Krzysztof; Parfitt, Scott; Moss, Gloria (2008) : Polish nightclubs and bars: Management insights into what customers really want, Journal for East European Management Studies, ISSN 0949-6181, Rainer Hampp Verlag, Mering, Vol. 13, Iss. 2, pp. 154-169

This Version is available at:

<https://hdl.handle.net/10419/84110>

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Polish nightclubs and bars: Management insights into what customers really want*

*Heather Skinner, Krzysztof Kubacki, Scott Parfitt, Gloria Moss***

This research aims to analyse the needs of nightclub and bar customers from emerging and developing Polish market by examining customer preferences towards the servicescape and service offerings provided by such venues. Purposive sampling was used to establish two focus groups within the industry's main target market age group. This data was then subjected to a frequency analysis in SPSS in order to identify those elements that were most preferred by the majority of respondents in Poland. Our findings point to the significant preferences of Polish club-goers, indicating importance of various elements of the servicescape (e.g. gender of clientele, security, seating, location of dance floor and service offering) in influencing customer decisions to enter a venue.

Diese Studie zielt daraufhin ab, den Bedarf der Kunden von Nightclub und Bars in dem aufstrebenden und sich entwickelnden polnischen Markt anhand der Kundenpräferenzen in Bezug auf Dienstleistungen zu analysieren. Zweckmäßige Stichproben wurden verwendet, um zwei Zielgruppen innerhalb der Hauptalterszielgruppe der Branche zu etablieren. Die Daten wurden dann einer Häufigkeitsanalyse in SPSS unterworfen, um jene Elemente zu identifizieren, die von der Mehrheit der Befragten in Polen am stärksten bevorzugt wurden. Unsere Ergebnisse deuten auf signifikante Vorlieben der polnischen Clubbesucher hin, wobei die Wichtigkeit von verschiedenen Elementen der Dienstleistungen bei der Entscheidungsfindung der Kunden aufgezeigt wird.

Key words: Servicescape, Nightclubs, bars, Customer attitudes, students

* Manuscript received: 22.04.08, accepted: 05.05.08 (0 revision)

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Background

The overwhelming majority of the research into late-night economy has so far been concentrated on the British pub industry. Although there are other studies into the issues under investigation in this paper, these are both “limited and scattered” (Heide/Gronhaug 2006:271). Previous authors have explored elements such as the structural changes within that industry (Knowles/Egan 2002; Knowles/Howley 2000; Pratten/Scofield 2002; Pratten 2003a; Pratten/Scofield 2003), smoking policies (Lambert 2006; Mykletun/Furunes 2005; Pratten 2003b), general issues relating to the servicescape (Heide/Gronhaug 2006; Jones et al. 2003; Clarke et al. 1998), general pub management (Pratten/Lovatt 2003), efforts to promote responsible drinking (Pratten 2007a), the policing of anti-social behaviour (Jones et al. 2003; Barclay/Thayer 2000) and the implications of shifting demographics on the pub atmosphere preferred by men and women (Schmidt/Sapsford 1995a; Schmidt/Sapsford 1995b). The link between atmosphere and service quality in hospitality settings has long been recognised, but due to the limited research in this area, Heide and Gronhaug (2006:284) assert that “there is need for researchers to seize the moment and further explore the role of atmosphere in hospitality settings”.

This paper therefore addressed this gap in the research. As there is little in the extant literature on management issues relating to the late night economy in Poland, we draw parallels from the well-researched British hospitality industry in order to analyse the needs of nightclubs and bars customers in Poland which can provide insights for managers of such venues to improve their service offerings in an increasingly competitive market.

The late-night economy

Although Schmidt and Sapsford (1995a) described the late-night economy as “a valid area for social research”, the lack of official statistics and published research shows that in Poland it is still not recognised as an important part of the whole economy. Since early 90’s nightclubs, growing numbers of pubs and bars have been opening in the centres of all major cities which have become very popular venues for young people. Nevertheless, the safety of nightclubs and bars in Poland has been frequently questioned, with a survey published in 2003 by Pentor indicating that 77.1% of respondents did not feel safe in nightclubs and bars.

According to OBOP’s research (2000), the main customers of nightclubs, pubs and bars in Poland are young people, mostly in their 20s, more often males than females, in a good financial situation. Unfortunately, winning loyalty with this age group is not easy. On the one hand they are spoilt for choice in the town centre (Mintel 2004). On the other, they have a tendency to be “hedonistic” and “live for today” (*ibid.*), leading to the urge to “find new places as soon as current

places became popular” and “consciously moving on searching for something new” (Nancarrow et al. 2002). Aiming at this target group, many such venues now strive to be the “cool” or “in” place to be, and in which to be seen yet “cool” is hard to maintain, as customers tend to feel the “urge to find new places as soon as current places became popular” with customers “consciously moving on searching for something new” (ibid.). Given this, to aspire to maintain a steady clientele on the basis of continual innovation can be problematic and other means of competing are necessary. The range of marketing strategies available has been the subject of much research.

The servicescape

Leisure services offer an intangible experience, with even well-branded multiple clubs and bars unable to fully counteract the inseparability of production and consumption of the service by offering a totally uniform experience across all their venues. It is therefore not surprising that due to competition for market share, capacity and demand are often managed by way of price promotions on either drinks or on entry (e.g. targeting students with lower prices on midweek nights).

While competing on price brings with it a range of disadvantages, there are a range of advantages to non-price mechanisms of attracting clients. According to Beatty and Kahle (1988), “frequent patrons who are highly involved and identified with the organization may perceive little need for price discounts”. The service marketing literature bears this out in highlighting the advantages of competing on non-core service elements which, in the case of pubs, would imply competing on elements other than alcohol and dancing. The literature also describes the specific advantages of competing on the range and quality of supplementary services provided (Lovelock et al. 1999).

However, the introduction of total or partial bans on smoking in public places complicates the issue somewhat. In countries where customer have the choice of entering a smoking or non-smoking venue, “customers who do not like the air policy a space-owner has selected will patronize the space only if they are being otherwise compensated by some positive attribute of the space at issue — say, cheap drinks or a particularly attractive clientele” (Lambert 2006:35). “Smoking bans in public places are quickly becoming part of a global trend, which implies that this variable has shifted from controllable to restricted” (Heide/Gronhaug 2006:281). In particular relation to the pub and club trade, while “such bans generally produce health benefits for guests and staff, and are likely to create costs savings due to less damage on materials and furniture from smoke and cigarette burns” they are also resisted by the hospitality industry, particularly that in the profit-seeking public sector where imposed restrictions on smoking can be seen to affect freedom of choice for consumers and the owners’ profitability (Lambert 2006). Moreover, “smoke bans can create new problems

in the form of odors from perspiration, poor hygiene and perfumes, which were previously masked by strong cigarette smoke” (Heide/Gronhaug 2006:281) which, in some countries, has also been found to lead to increased cleaning costs by smokers using snuff as a means to ingest nicotine rather than cigarettes (Mykletun/Furunes 2005).

Other issues that are attracting the attention of regulators and legislators relate to binge drinking, defined as “the rapid consumption of large quantities of alcohol, especially by young people” (Pratten 2007a:62). “The tobacco and alcoholic drinks industries are associated with highly visible social issues” (Bramner/Pavelin 2004: 88), often leading to calls for managers of such industries to introduce socially responsible policies either as “the result of a genuine desire to prevent crime, or driven by a fear of government action and a public backlash if they failed to so do” (Pratten 2007a:68).

In addition to highlighting the importance of the core service offering, the service marketing literature recognises the effects that front and backstage personnel (Pratten 2004), along with other customers, can have on customers’ experiences (Langeard et al. 1981), and the effect of the wider servicescape within which the service is offered (Bitner 1992). This comprises the elements of ambient conditions, spatial layout, functionality, signs, symbols and artefacts. The literature distinguishes between elements in the environment that would lead to attraction, linking these to the firm’s exterior, and elements, usually in the interior space, that lead to staying on the premises (Bitner 2001). Visual cues and preferences are often grouped under the heading of ‘store atmospherics’ a field driven by the notion that the physical form of a product is an important element (Bloch 1995), that it creates certain effects in buyers (Kotler 1973) and that elements perceived as pleasurable are preferred (Yahomoto/Lambert 1994). It is also informed by the belief that objects that are preferred are used more often than those not perceived as pleasurable (Jordan 1994) and that this leads to enhanced purchasing (Donovan et al. 1982; Groppe 1993).

The servicescape becomes particularly critical with the offering of intangible services to first-time customers who tend to “rely on the tangibles associated with the service as clues or indicators of the level of quality that is available, thus reducing the feeling of buying an unknown quantity” (Knowles/Howley 2000). Extrinsic cues can serve as a form of non-verbal communication, imparting meaning through “object language” (Ruesch/Weldon 1956) and acting as cues from which quality can be inferred (Zeithaml 1988; Iacobucci/Ostrom 1993).

One aspect of the servicescape that can create an image and critically influence behaviours is the physical environment. Emotional and cognitive reactions to the environment may be transferred to people and/or objects within the environment (Obermiller/Bitner 1984) so that products viewed in an environment deemed to be pleasing are evaluated more positively than products viewed in an unpleasing

environment. In this way, perception of the servicescape appears to influence unrelated feelings about the products and service. This influence is thought to play a key role in service businesses such as hotels, restaurants and retail stores (Bitner 2001).

Although over time nightclubs and bars customers in Poland have become more demanding and the quality of products and services have significantly increased, Iwona (2003) argues that nightclubs are still mostly based on owners' improvisation and belief that "the spiral of fortune moves itself", which leads to many mistakes and bankruptcies. That faith and lack of any research into that industry in Poland lead to urgent need of better understanding of the forces driving that industry – customers. This is therefore where the focus of our research lies, in the town and city centre mainstream nightclubs and bars frequented mainly by young people, many of whom are students. It will aim to give a wider understanding of what these target customers in Poland really want from visits to late-night venues by examining customer attitudes to various aspects of the servicescape and service offerings provided by such venues.

Methodology

Our methodology supports the further call by Heide and Gronhaig (2006:283) for future research where "all three types of drivers (ambient, social and design factors) are included and their effects measured both individually and combined." This research considers the full range of atmospheric factors also combined with other issues of service quality, and was conducted in two phases.

Phase 1:

Purposive sampling was used to establish two focus groups of young people, who are deemed to be the key target market for this industry. One group comprised 5 males (all students aged between 21 and 22) and the other group comprised 5 females (all students aged between 21 and 25).

One of the researchers is a native Pole, and so was able to run the focus groups in-country in the Polish language. The recorded material was then transcribed and translated into English. Discussions within these groups therefore explored the in-depth views of high street nightclub and bar-goers within the industry's main target market age group.

The qualitative data gathered from the focus groups was analysed from a grounded theory approach (Glaser/Strauss 1977) in order to identify the emerging themes and determinant attributes that were then tested by quantitative data gathered by means of a questionnaire in Phase 2 of the research.

Phase 2:

In order to increase the reliability and validity of the data, the themes arising from the literature and focus groups were further investigated by means of a survey. 60 structured questionnaires were administered to students on a university campus in one of the biggest Polish cities. Only respondents who classified themselves as Polish were included in the study. In the sample 48.3% of respondents (n = 29) were male and 51.7% (n = 31) were female; all respondents were aged between 19 and 25.

Respondents were pre-qualified by asking if they had visited a mainstream city centre club or bar within the previous 12 months. The detailed statistics of the frequencies of visits are indicated in Table 1.

Table 1. Frequency of visits

	4-7 times per week	2-3 times per week	Once per week	Once or twice a month	Less frequently	Total
Frequency	1	6	26	22	5	60
Percent	1.7	10	43.3	36.7	8.3	100

Survey questions centred on relevant aspects of the servicescape and service offering, with many elements highlighted by pictorial representations in order to minimise the risk of misinterpretation. Where pictorial representation was used, the order of each pictorial representation was randomly picked in order to lower the risk of list bias.

It is recommended practice to use ordinal or ranking scales (these do not use interval values but order items on an underlying continuum) when equal interval scales cannot be used. This type of ranking is used to rank elements in order of prestige (Oppenheim 1992). Adopting this principle, respondents were required to rate a range of six different offerings in order of preference (with 1 being the respondent's strongest preference and 6 the lowest preference).

This data was subjected to a frequency analysis in SPSS in order to identify those elements that were most preferred by the majority of respondents.

Findings

Type of clientele preferred

Respondents were asked to rank, in order of preference, venues with predominantly male clientele, venues with predominantly female clientele, and those venues showing pictures of predominantly mixed clientele. A mix of male and female clientele was indicated as most preferred by 80% of respondents. The detailed preferences are indicated in Table 2.

Table 2. Type of clientele preferred

	Most preferred	Least preferred
Largely female clientele	16.7%	13%
Largely male clientele	3.3%	83%
Mixed clientele	80%	3.3%

Focus groups offered further insight into the reasons why these particular preferences hold. Male respondent pointed out that: *'really, other people are the most important'*. This found confirmation from a female respondent opinion, who when asked what most contributed to atmosphere replied: *'people, only people'*. Male respondents were further very precise in defining the *'right people'* in the venue, all agreed with one respondent who stated: *'we always go clubs where other students go, so even if they are drunk they always have fun...'*

In the focus groups, men identified the opposite sex as the critical factor in the decision to select a bar. A male respondent confessed: *'we rather prefer clubs where are more girls than boys'*. The importance of female customers led one male respondent to admit that: *'I have a girl-friend here, but I think that like most guys I hardly ever go out to a club with my girl-friend. We have more fun; we are not on a tight lead'*. Nevertheless, for female respondents equal gender distribution in a club was more important: *'I would rather prefer mixed clientele'*.

Exterior: security

As the level of security inside a venue tends to be inferred by customers from the level of security outside of a venue, respondents were also asked in the pictorial survey whether they believed formally or informally dressed door staff emitted a greater image of security. Respondents showed slight preference towards formally dressed doorstaff, with 58.3% believing that more formal attire offered greater image of security.

Security was an issue raised by both focus groups. In the male focus group the issue of security, which was described as *'very important'*, provoked longer discussion when a respondent mention the following story:

'I was punched once... bouncer hit me! Two guys were fighting, I wanted to separate them, and door staff thought I was involved in it and they caught me, took outside the club and punched me in my stomach so I couldn't catch a breath for half an hour!'

Another respondent then added that:

'A friend of mine works as a doorman; he says he is extra paid when there is any brawl! Because he is risking his health... so they often start it!'

The importance of security and the right staff shows story told by other respondent:

‘In my home town, there is a club where door staff is well-known, locally, for being dangerous and aggressive. No one starts a brawl in this club, but we rather avoid that venue’

For female respondents visual aspect of security plays a significant role:

‘There is a stereotype that bouncer should be huge, strong, with skin head, and never smile! But they should be friendlier, trustworthy; you want to know that if you are in danger’

‘Sometimes you can see a bouncer that is big, but behaves like a human being. You can even talk to him!’

Interior: seating

Survey respondents were also asked about the type of seating arrangements on which they would prefer to locate themselves once inside a venue. Sofas were the most preferred by 65% of respondents. Seating on bar stools was also offered as an option, but 43.3% of respondents rated this as their least preferred seating choice.

Table 3. Type of seating preferred

	Most preferred	Second preferred	Least preferred
Bar stools	15%	40%	43.3%
Chairs	20%	38.3%	41.7%
Sofas	65%	20%	13.3%

In the focus groups, views were expressed on preferred seating arrangements. Focus group respondents were mostly concern about the comfort of seating:

‘You can sit comfortable, relax, and lean against backrest’

‘And chairs should not be wooden as they usually are, I can’t sit on them comfortable’

Interior: location of dance floor

While inside the venue, second important element attracting customers’ attention is dance floor. Survey respondents were therefore asked about the preferred location of the dance floor. “Surrounded on all sides by people” was the most preferred option (38.3%). Further preferences are listed in Table 4.

The location of the dance floor within the venue prompted a range of comments. Female respondents argued:

'It must be away from bar, someone may spill something on you'

However, exactly opposite preferences were expressed by male focus group respondents:

'I would prefer the stage to be somewhere in the middle, with people and bar around. You can see then what is going on the stage'

'If you are sitting around the stage you can get on the stage quicker when you see a nice girl. You don't have to worry about your stuff because you can keep your eye on it'

Table 4. Preferred location of dance floor

	Most preferred	Second preferred	Least preferred
Surrounded on two sides by people	26.7%	58.3%	5%
Near the bar	11.7%	11.7%	41.7%
Away from the bar	23.3%	8.3%	33.3%
Surrounded on all sides by people	38.3%	21.7%	20%

Service offering

In the next part of survey respondents were asked to rank in order those service offerings that would most attract them to a venue. The options offered were ranging from music (live bands, DJs and karaoke), quiz and everyday low alcohol prices to promotions like "happy hours" or "buy-1-get-1-free".

Table 5. Preferred service offering

	Most preferred	Second preferred	Least preferred
Music	55%	10%	6.7%
Quiz	3.3%	5%	40.0%
Happy hours	1.7%	17%	16.7%
Buy-1-get-1-free	5%	26.7%	8.3%
Everyday low alcohol prices	35%	26.7%	3.3%
Coupons	0%	15%	25%

Music

The most popular service offering was music, with 55% of respondents rating it their most preferred service offering.

This was in agreement with both the male and female focus group results. A member of the female focus group made the following comment: *'I go where they play the music that I prefer, usually with friends... oh, and where live music is, we can have more fun then'*. However, one male focus group respondent argued that *'when people are ok even music is not so important'*.

Everyday low alcohol prices

“*Everyday low alcohol prices*” was the second popular element of service offering and was rated as the most preferred by 35% of all respondent, which may be unsurprising given the limited student budget and such consumers’ price sensitivity. Male focus group respondents summarised: *‘usually everyone looks for cheaper alcohol. But alcohol is cheap in obscure places, so we usually chose something in the middle’*.

However, some male respondents, despite declaring at the beginning that *‘prices are... important’*, expressed later in the interview somewhat contradictory opinions:

‘I think that everyone has sometimes a bad day and does not care then about prices; I do not care then where and how much. I have only one life and just spend whatever I have in my wallet!’

Female focus group respondents were more concerned about prices:

‘... it must be a place where I can have fun, but it’s not too expensive’

‘We go to clubs where we don’t have to pay too much’

Others

Although “quiz”, “happy hours” and “buy-1-get-1-free” were attractive for very small groups of customers, 26.7% of survey respondents rated “buy-1-get-1-free” promotion as their second preference.

Price sensitivity to drinks costs was therefore an important issue for all respondents. They provoked a lively discussion among members of focus groups, with some respondents indicating that they would rather stay in the venue that has got promotions: *‘in [named City Centre venue] beer used to be cheaper on Thursday with student card, so all the student were going there’*.

A male respondent summarised his and his colleagues’ attitude saying:

‘If someone is short of money we buy him a drink. If we all don’t have money we just don’t go anywhere. If the club is really expensive we just don’t go there at all. Even we have lots of money, we don’t go there because it’s a waste of money. It doesn’t make any sense’

Surprisingly, no one ranked coupons as their preferred choice. A female respondent explained that:

‘Once we went to [named City Centre venue] only because we met a girl who gave us leaflets and told that everyone could have a free drink there, just like that. So we went there, had a free drink, but because we didn’t like the atmosphere we moved to another club’

Finally, respondents were asked to indicate the importance of service with a smile. It cannot be a surprise that overwhelming majority of students (95%)

ranked this element as “very important” or “somewhat important”. Only one respondent rated this element as not at all important.

Discussion

Much of the research that has been undertaken concerns the UK late night economy, and based upon comparisons of our findings concerning Polish customers and those in the UK, it appears that parallels can be drawn in many instances that can lead to insights being gained from the UK industry that can aid managers of venues in Poland offer their customers a better service.

The city centre late-night economy is a competitive market. The venues in Poland vie for market share amongst young people aged mainly 18-25. A large proportion of this target market consists of students and the respondents used in the study reported here mirrored this target population in terms of age and occupation. In our sample, the overwhelming majority of respondents visit high street clubs and bars at least once or twice a month. Focusing on these demographics, our research therefore sought to establish what factors motivated Polish customers to visit these venues. However, effective management of the pub or club’s ‘servicescape’ can affect not only a pub or club customer’s perceptions about the place, but can also affect their behaviour once in it. Therefore, managers should consider what improvements can be made to the following three key atmospheric components:

Atmospheric factors

Music was the key attractor to nightclubs and bars for our respondents, of whom over half ranked it as the most important service offering. The type of music played at a venue can therefore be managed to offer customers cues about whether they are likely to be either targeted or excluded by a particular venue (Heide 2006).

Additionally, lighting can offer cues and manage behaviour, with, for example, brighter lighting being used in places emphasising sociability, and dimmer in places that want to engender a more intimate or romantic atmosphere (Heide/Gronhaug 2006).

Scent and air quality are also factors that are seen to contribute to atmosphere, and which can be relatively easily managed (Heide/Gronhaug 2006). Currently, smoking in public places is not regulated in Poland as it is in the UK and many other parts of Europe. It would therefore appear prudent from a business and management perspective, if and when the introduction of such legislation is considered in Poland, for Polish pub managers to consider lobbying for legislation similar to parts of Europe where a venue can choose whether or not to allow smoking, or be allowed to set apart a separate area for smokers, rather

than follow the UK which has introduced a total ban on smoking in all public places, and which can have a negative effect on trade (Lambert 2006).

Social factors

Social interaction between consumers is also seen to affect a customer's service experience. Langeard et al. (1981) found that the service experience of one customer is affected by other customers in a service environment. In agreement with him were respondents in Poland indicating '*the right people*' as the most important factor influencing their decision to visit a venue. Where gender of clientele is concerned, the industry research in the UK (Mintel 2002) shows that one factor motivating men's visit to pubs is the opportunity of encountering women. The comments in the male focus group support this finding. The literature also suggests that women place a premium on female-friendly environments (Jones et al. 2003) that are not male-dominated (Schmidt/Sapsford 1995a). Both these findings were tested through the pictorial survey. The results show agreement with the literature insofar as only 3.3% of sample expresses a preference for a largely male clientele. A large proportion of respondents prefer a mixed clientele. However, unlike the mostly polarised answers to preferences for mixed environment, or lack of preference to a predominantly male environment, responses for preferences towards a predominantly female environment were clustered around the mid point.

Given that safety and security are perceived as important, especially amongst females (Schmidt/Sapsford 1995a; Jones et. al. 2003), such easily managed tangibles can include the attire of doorstaff. Furthermore, as Polish customers do not feel safe in nightclubs and bars (Pentor 2003), doorstaff can create an image of the venue as a safe place. As far as that image is concerned, the results from the pictorial survey showed that slightly more respondents preferred formally dressed doorstaff. However, the examples given in focus groups show that doorstaff dress is only a peak of an iceberg and much more has to be done immediately in order to improve security and safety, and changing attire of doorstaff will not change their attitude and behaviour. To minimise future occurrences of some of the problem incidents our respondents described, door staff should be qualified and be offered a career structure which makes a "potentially violent occupation more respectable" (Pratten 2007b:85). This can be aided by introducing a similar system to the UK where door staff must hold a qualification in order to be employed. However, also learning from the UK, door staff believe that this qualification should also include more practical elements to the training and assessment (Pratten 2007b).

Design factors

Tangible elements outside a venue can entice customers inside by reducing purchase risk (Knowles/Howley 2000). Respondents also had particular preferences for the spatial functionality and layout of the nightclub and bar

servicescape (Bitner 1992). The responses to the pictorial survey demonstrate a marked preference for group seating (sofas). Seating at bar stools was least preferred option. This was explained by respondents in focus groups who find the provision of comfortable seating very important. They need somewhere comfortable to sit and relax, and somewhere to socialise with friends who may not like to dance. However, when it came to positioning of the dance floor there was no agreement on an ideal position from either the focus group or survey respondents. Survey respondents showed slight preference towards dance floor “surrounded on all sides by people”. “Near the bar” and “away from the bar” were both ranked by many respondents as least preferred option. Therefore finding the right solution satisfying all customers may be a very difficult task.

Other Issues of Service Quality

It should be noted that the provision of low priced alcohol continues to be perceived as a core offering (Lovelock et al. 1999), but has considerably lesser importance for survey respondents than music. The price sensitivity of our respondent can be best showed by the total percentage of respondents ranking “everyday low alcohol prices”, “happy hours” and “buy-1-get-1-free” as their first or second preference – 41.7% and 70.4% respectively. However, binge drinking amongst young people is another issue which is attracting attention among legislators who are increasingly calling for limits to price promotions on alcohol. Therefore, using non-price mechanisms to attract customers could be seen to be a more sustainable business strategy. Moreover, pub managers’ efforts to promote responsible drinking can be seen to evidence their commitment to corporate social responsibility, which can also align well with their consumers’ and other stakeholders’ values, which can then be used as “a defence against criticism or even a form of advertising” (Pratten 2007a:63)

Conclusion

The research was aimed to analyse the needs of nightclubs and bars customers in Poland. It indicated that since a prime motivator for all customers for a visit are other people, the presence of mixed clientele is likely to attract male as well as female customers. As a venue’s interior may be used to attract customers to enter, further attention needs to be paid to nightclubs and pubs décor. This research has found interesting insights into types of seating and the location of dance floor. Communal seating, e.g. sofas, serves as motivators for a majority of customers. In terms of the dance floor’s location, respondents preferred when it is ‘surrounded on all sides by people’. Confusingly, respondents cites both ‘near the bar’ and ‘away from the bar’ as their least preference most frequently.

The level of security inside a venue tends to be inferred by customers from the level of security outside of a venue. Our respondents noted a preference for formally dressed doorstaff. However, focus groups indicated that much more has

to be done in order to persuade customers that the venue is safe. This becomes the most important factor in deciding which venue to patronise.

Polish students appeared to be strongly attracted by lower prices and special offers. However, it emerges that the industries can indeed gain and maintain competitive advantage in this saturated market without relying on price promotions on alcohol if attention is paid to other service offerings such as the provision of the entertainment that meets the needs of the target market, with particular attention being paid to the music in pubs and clubs.

Service with a smile was important to all, implying that highly effective customer service training should also be considered by venue managers in the hospitality industry in post-communist countries which may, in the past, have had to place much less focus on such an issue.

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