

Article

The Relation between Sustainable Development Trends and Customer Value Management

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Abstract: The sustainable development movement is an essential trend that can resist the excessive consumption and over-exploitation of resources. There have been considerable changes in the perception of the term “sustainable development” over the last 30 years. Difficulties in implementing the principles of rational use of natural resources have resulted from a general conflict between the objectives of economic development and the increasing dynamics of industrial production, the quality of the environment and the objectives of environmental protection. This research goal was to describe ways of linking sustainable development trends and the customer value management process. Research also aimed to indicate what this relationship drives. In order to process the collected individual in-depth interview (IDI) material, the author applied a qualitative analysis. As a result of the exploratory research, it was found that there is no complete agreement on who is responsible for implementing the sustainable development assumptions: producers or customers. However, the process of linking sustainable development trends and customer value management can be pointed out. According to this study, as those who make purchasing decisions, customers are the axis of this relationship. On the basis of the results of this research, as long as customers buy particular products, they will be offered by producers.

Keywords: sustainable development; customer value management; circular economy; experience economy; information and communications technology (ICT)

1. Introduction

It is important to identify appropriate methods for implementing the idea of sustainable development because, while there is an increasingly noticeable understanding that change is needed, the steps taken in this direction are still not enough. It is significant that all actors in the process of implementing sustainable development see it as a value generated for themselves.

Sustainable development responds to the current needs of people without limiting future generations from being able to meet their needs [1]. Sustainable development requires partnership and is now generally accepted by not only politicians but also producers and end users [2]. Nevertheless, its implementation is not easy and needs effort on the part of stakeholders and break out of past patterns. One of the main challenges is the question of how participation in sustainable development trends can generate value for both producers and end users.

The main aim of this paper is to describe ways of linking sustainable development trends and the customer value management process and indicate what drives those connections. This goal is meaningful because it is necessary to deepen the relationship between sustainable development trends and customer value management since the effect of this combination can be significant for improving the overall well-being of contemporary consumers who still tend to focus on mass consumption.

The author assumed that there is a relation between sustainable development trends and customer value management because it can provide benefits to both producers and end users. However,

the assumptions of sustainable development are still not being fully implemented; for this reason, it is important to examine why these two aspects are not developing complementarily to each other.

The current state of the research shows that sustainability policies have developed and spread from the global to the local level of governance over the last several decades. The idea of linking environmental, social and economic issues emerged in the 1970 United Nations International Development Strategy and the 1972 UN Conference on the Human Environment in Stockholm. The 1980 World Conservation Strategy introduced the term “sustainable development” [3].

This evidence indicates that the implementation of sustainability policies has not contributed directly to customer value management. The question now is, does the relation between sustainable development trends and customer value management exist? This paper addresses this question via qualitative research.

In order to verify this research question and achieve the main aim, the author combined the desk research method and qualitative research in the form of individual in-depth interviews (IDI). The scenario was divided into an introduction, a summary and three substantive parts. The respondents were representatives of enterprises and clients of those enterprises.

The study achieved interesting results indicating that there is still no complete agreement on who is responsible for implementing sustainable development assumptions and changes: producers or customers. Nevertheless, the process of connecting sustainable development trends and customer value management can be pointed out. As those who make purchasing decisions, customers form the core of this process.

According to this research, as long as customers buy, for example, products in plastic packaging, they will be offered by producers. Moreover, companies should have evidence that the customer’s view of the perceived value for money is driven by sustainable development ideas. Then, they will build the concept of customer value management based on the sustainable development philosophy as well as sharing economy, circular economy and experience economy principles.

The relation between sustainable development and customer value management studied extended previous research concerning design thinking in customer experience management conducted with managers in entities from the SME sector in Poland [4]. Furthermore, it supplemented publications on the experience economy in the context of the challenges of the modern economy [5], where expert interviews with coordinating strategic processes in enterprises were carried out. Experts came from various European countries, but they all represented entities from the creative sector (such as fashion, ICT, multimedia production, audiovisual arts, advertising, graphics).

The paper’s scientific contribution is also a current description of the activities undertaken by the surveyed companies from Poland, Germany and Sweden in the field of CVM and sustainability in the face of changes in the market caused by the COVID-19 pandemic.

2. Theoretical Background

The confluence of changes in technology (like internet, mobility, the rise of e-commerce, online peer communities) and enhanced concern for the environment has shaped new forms of trade practices which are participative, peer-oriented, and more or less informal—revitalize, augment and expand the original boundaries of collaborative consumption into a booming phenomenon [6].

Collaborative consumption is characterized by the fact that consumers could be, if they so desire, both receivers and providers of a given resource which is directly related to the concept of sharing and the sharing economy.

Sharing is a phenomenon as old as humankind, while collaborative consumption and the sharing economy are phenomena born of the Internet age [7]. As the nature of the Internet is unpredictable and allows for a speedy transfer of information within the global community, the consequences of such two-way communication are impossible to predict or control, therefore management and internal stakeholders must be very careful in expressing personal attitudes on websites and social networks [8].

It can be concluded that digital transformation, and consequently the emergence of websites and social networks, significantly changed the power structure in communicating.

As a result of the sharing economy, customer experiences are rapidly rising worldwide and deeply changing the structures and models of customer purchasing attitudes and needs. Inspired by principles of sustainable development and consumption, its starting point is the idea that every underutilized resource is a wasted resource [9]. The role of corporate social responsibility goals in achieving sustainable development is also a critical issue for aligning businesses to this end [10]. Commitment of organization to contribute to sustainable economic development working with employees, their families, the local community, and society to improve their quality of life should be good for business and for development [11]. Corporate responsibility strategy is relevant for the successful business of modern organizations [12]. Social responsibility has been proven to be a powerful tool for increasing brand value and awareness [13].

Customer experiences co-exist with increasingly personalized consumption based on the intangible values accompanying the concluded transaction, such as feelings, smell, prestige, impressions, mood or atmosphere, store appearance, service behavior, product packaging, the method of providing the service, and the method of communication with the customer [14]. This accompanying value could also be an adherence to sustainable values.

A circular economy, in which growth is gradually decoupled from the consumption of finite resources, is crucial. Its principles are to design out waste and pollution, keep products and materials in use, and regenerate natural systems. The advantages of such an approach are substantial [15]. Circular economy assumptions are no longer just fashionable postulates but are increasingly reflected in consumer behavior and business strategies. The road to a redefinition of the economy is, however, long, given that ‘development’ and ‘sustainability’ are two goals that are often in opposition [16].

A new look at customer value management is therefore important, not only through the prism of value that customers deliver to the company but also through the prism of the value that the company offers to its customers. Customer Value Management (CVM) entails the optimization of the value of a company’s customer base. CVM focuses on the analysis of individual data on prospects and customers. The resulting information is used to acquire customers and to drive customer behavior with the developed marketing strategies in such a way that the value of all current and future customers is optimized [17].

The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, adopted by all United Nations Member States in 2015, provides a shared blueprint for peace and prosperity for people and the planet, now and into the future. At its core are the 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), which are an urgent call for action by all countries—developed and developing—in a global partnership. They recognize that ending poverty and other deprivations must go hand-in-hand with strategies that improve health and education, reduce inequality and spur economic growth, all while tackling climate change and working to preserve our oceans and forests [18].

Cooperatives, as well as civil society organizations and philanthropic organizations, all of them being entities that make up the social economy [19], play a major role in achieving the SDGs [20]. This UN 2030 Agenda is a worldwide road map that was conceived as a transformative change [21]. The Figure 1 below shows the list of the 17 sustainable development goals.



Figure 1. The 17 sustainable development goals (SDGs) [22].

For the goals to be achieved, partnership and common understanding for the common good are necessary. Sustainable development is an offer for everyone. A sustainable offer, on the other hand, can be seen as value for the client. A sustainable offer can also be a link between sustainable development trends and customer value management.

While customer value marketing is a marketing strategy designed specifically for marketers on the basis of the concept of customer value and marketing automation [23], it cannot function in isolation from current trends. Customer value management (CVM) aims to improve the productivity of marketing activity and the profitability of the business by identifying the value of different customer segments and aligning marketing strategies, plans and resourcing accordingly [24]. One of the most important outcomes of marketing automation should be improved customer experiences [25].

3. Materials and Methods

Customer value management focuses on building the highest possible customer value over time and, in practice, on maximizing revenue per customer. However, for the client to generate revenue, he or she must return. What is more, the client must now identify with the company and its offer; it must fit into his or her life model and beliefs. In the era of sustainable development goals, it is important to analyze customer value management.

The author asked the managers of the entities, “In what way should these activities be carried out in practice?” These organizations belonged to the sector of micro-small and medium-sized companies in which the CVM concept was implemented.

The companies came from three countries: Germany, Sweden and Poland. EU countries are very diversified economically, similarly to the countries of the Baltic Sea macro-region. Despite their proximity, the economic development and market structure are different.

Sweden is an example of an economy where the creative sector plays a significant role [26]. In Germany, manufacturing industry remains particularly important for the economy [27]. In Poland, there is a shift away from old economic concepts in favor of a service-based economy [28]. Despite the differences, managers from each of these countries face similar management problems regarding CVM or SDG, as indicated by the study.

The author chose these countries to be able to get deeper conclusions in the context of ways of linking sustainable development trends and the customer value management process. Despite general economic differences, it turned out that the managers had many identical experiences.

The respondents were representatives of the management. Twenty in-depth interviews were conducted. The Table 1 below shows the sample information.

Table 1. Research sample.

	Germany N = 5						Sweden N = 5						Poland N = 10							
Country (number of experts)	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1
Years of professional experience	5	10	8	10	8	8	10	10	9	9	10	5	10	10	15	7	5	11	8	4
Gender (female/male)	F	M	M	F	M	F	F	M	M	F	M	M	F	M	F	F	F	M	F	F
Education	Bachelor	Master	Master	Master	Master	Master	Master	Master	Master	Master	Master	Bachelor	Master	Doctorate	Doctorate	Master	Master	Master	Master	Bachelor
Sector/number of employees	SME/9	SME/19	SME/31	SME/10	SME/15	SME/24	SME/43	SME/14	SME/9	SME/11	SME/52	SME/8	SME/14	SME/21	SME/19	SME/34	SME/18	SME/6	SME/11	SME/14
Industrial sector	Manufacturing	Finances	IT	Education	Advertisement	Education	Finances	Transport	Hotel	Manufacturing	IT	IT	Advertisement	Advertisement	Finances	Transport	IT	IT	Hotel	Finances
Presence in the markets	EU	National	EU	National	EU	National	National	EU	EU	EU	EU	EU	EU	EU	National	EU	EU	EU	EU	National
CVM	Implemented																			

Purposeful sampling techniques were selected for this qualitative study. Purposeful sampling is a technique that qualitative researchers use to recruit participants who can provide in-depth and detailed information about the phenomenon under investigation. It is subjective and determined by the qualitative researcher generating the qualifying criteria each participant must meet to be considered for the research study. The criterion that had to be met by the interviewees was the implementation of the CVM policy in their company. Participants took part in the study voluntarily. Recruitment of participants took place by invitation sent by e-mail.

In order to verify this research question and achieve the main aim, the author used triangulation methods, combining the desk research method and qualitative research in the form of individual in-depth interviews (IDIs). In part, interviews were conducted online because of the international nature and restrictions arising from the pandemic. Interviews were moderated by the author. They lasted about 40 min and were registered in accordance with the principles of anonymity of the interviewees. Transcriptions from interviews were carried out and analyzed. Interviews focused on three main research issues:

1. Deficits in information on the relation between sustainable development trends and customer value management;
2. Deficits in information on the determinants of a possible relation between sustainable development trends and customer value management;
3. Deficits in information on how to increase the implementation of sustainable development goals based on CVM assumptions.

The problems presented to the respondents determined the interview scenario and research questions. The interview began with an introduction to the general assumptions of the conversation and ended with a summary of the main conclusions. The main part has been divided into three areas:

1. The first part involved issues of sustainable development policy implementation in companies;
2. The second part focused on ways of implementing customer value management;
3. The third part focused on the relation between sustainable development trends and customer value management and issues connected with the current global economy situation and the COVID-19 pandemic.

The interviews were intended to explore patterns and verify the assumption that there is a relation between sustainable development trends and customer value management, because it can provide benefits to both producers and end users. The qualitative study allowed us to positively confirm this assumption.

4. Results

Sustainable development is development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs [29]. Despite the grandeur of this provision, it is still difficult to implement. In the opinion of entrepreneurs:

“When developing the company’s strategy for the next year, we think about ecology, sustainable development, it is important to us and it is important for customers who value a balanced approach however, it is not so simple and not all assumptions can be implemented.” (Expert 3)

“Every year in the company, we try to implement changes that are supposed to bring our entity closer to being sustainable.” (Expert 9)

“We do . . . pay attention to issues related to sustainable development because we know that customers are more and more demanding in this respect. Therefore, we anticipate that only such companies will survive in the long term.” (Expert 2)

Surveyed entrepreneurs mentioned that the main activities that they carried out were related to pro-environmental solutions, such as reducing the use of plastic or water in production, as well as the implementation of solutions targeted at vegans, such as chemically unprocessed raw materials, especially plant ones. Thus, these activities are mainly in line with goals such as the following:

Goal 3: Good health and well-being; Goal 6: Clean water and sanitation; Goal 9: Industry, innovation and infrastructure; Goal 12: Responsible consumption and production; Goal 13: Climate action.

Thus, it can be noted that many areas among the surveyed companies are undeveloped, including those particularly important for employees, such as:

Goal 8: Decent work and economic growth; Goal 10: Reduced inequality; Goal 16: Peace and justice strong institutions; Goal 17: Partnerships to achieve the goal.

Above all, the respondents pointed out that the production method or packaging policy tried to be based on the assumptions of sustainable development and a circular economy. As they pointed out, in this type of approach, they are motivated by consumers who are increasingly paying attention to such aspects.

Furthermore, as indicated by the respondents,

“Shortening of the communication process means that clients play an important role in exerting pressure on implementing solutions, e.g., environment-friendly. An important role here is played by social media, which enabled close contact with buyers. Thanks to this, we can easily direct the offer to customers, and they can easily express their opinions, or group in communities that have greater impact.” (Expert 15)

In a similar tone, many respondents spoke about the impact of clients. It can be said that clients have a significant role in the decision-making process of implementing solutions based on sustainable development. Furthermore, entrepreneurs assume that these introduced solutions will be an incentive for clients. That is why respondents said,

“Implementing sustainable development principles can generate profits not only for producers but also end users. It is difficult to assess who benefits from it more but ultimately it brings benefits to everyone, to [the] whole society.” (Expert 8)

The determinants of the implementation of the CVM concept, as indicated by respondents, were mainly:

1. *“willingness to grow the enterprise and increase profits”* (Expert 2),
2. *“implementation of marketing automation programs”* (Expert 7),
3. *“modernizing the concept of marketing policy”* (Expert 11),
4. *“implementation of social media management policy”* (Expert 13).

Respondents were well aware that the CVM concept will work when consumers are moved to the most valuable customer segments. For this reason, activities such as marketing automation were undertaken to better understand the specific needs of recipients. The shortening of communication channels and the widespread use of social networking services—thanks to the universality of mobile devices and information and communications technology (ICT)—have enabled better customer management through the possibility of the targeted selection of the offer. Moreover, the respondents indicated that the current COVID-19 pandemic has significantly contributed to the online consumer life. Thanks to this, communication with recipients, according to many, has become very close, despite the lack of physical contact. Contact through the network leaves a lot of usable information that can cause an increase in the value of a given customer for an entity.

Interviewees who were asked to indicate common features of implementing sustainable development assumptions and CVM agreed that

1. *“there are many common aspects”* (Expert 1),

2. *“it is necessary to re-integrate with standard business thinking”* (Expert 3),
3. *“the common feature is offering customers value that allows them to return to the company and move to the segment of more valuable customers”* (Expert 17),
4. *“the offer inscribed in the assumptions of sustainable development is in line with current trends so it responds to the needs of customers which maximizes CVM”* (Expert 12).

Entrepreneurs emphasized that in the era of sustainable development assumptions, concepts are developing intensively:

1. The sharing economy, aimed at reducing excessive consumption because often people do not need to purchase a given item and use it incidentally, which means they can share it;
2. The circular economy, an economic system aimed at eliminating waste and the continual use of resources;
3. The experience economy, which is based on the experience of buying and using by emphasizing the effect that goods or services can have on people's lives.

Their level of implementation is not equal, and it is different between, e.g., Sweden, Germany and Poland. Nevertheless, it sets trends in the strategy of entities. According to the respondents, a more complete combination of sustainable development assumptions and CVM would be seen by offering the experience of the concept of sustainable development as a value for the client.

The global quarantine economic crisis means less money in consumer wallets. The sales of a number of products that are not necessities will fall. Thus, enterprises should offer their clients high value, identifying with their clients' views. Thanks to this, customers will come back, and CVM will grow.

The COVID-19 pandemic will significantly affect markets, at least in the short term. According to respondents,

1. *“it is possible that consumers will avoid crowded sites for some time and choose online purchases, which will facilitate the management of automated marketing”* (Expert 16),
2. *“customers will shop more prudently, through more limited budgets, it is important to provide them with exceptional value, e.g., based on the principles of sustainable production”* (Expert 2),
3. *“consumer ethnocentrism presented at the beginning of the pandemic will deepen, consumers will want to support local production, so it will be worth to emphasizing this aspect as a value”* (Expert 4).

Furthermore, the respondents said,

“It can be said that there is relation between sustainable development trends and customer value management because of providing benefits to both producers and end users. It seems to me that the broad dimension of both the concept of sustainable development and CVM should be emphasized, then the issue of benefits leaves no doubt.” (Expert 20)

Entrepreneurs responded to the question, “Why are these two aspects not developing complementarily to each other?”

“The approaches to both issues are quite selective. Issues of sustainable development are addressed in the aspects for the easiest companies, and they should be looked at comprehensively, e.g., without deterring from meeting the needs of local communities. However, CVM is often approached only as a monetization of customers, not a precise delivery of products, impressions, or values that they expect, so as to maximize their profit and enterprises.” (Expert 18)

According to experts, the process of linking sustainable development trends and customer value management can be pointed out and should start with a focus on customers and what the company can offer to them. Developing customer value should be synonymous with developing a strategy that fits the company's business into the concept of sustainable development. Then, the process of moving customers between segments towards the most profitable should be determined.

As the respondents recalled, their contact with clients has been somewhat strengthened. Thus, entrepreneurs recalled the following observations of consumer behavior:

1. Consumers discover new suppliers because they spend more time searching, e.g., on the Internet, what they need;
2. Consumers are interested in orders for home delivery more often than those for personal pickup;
3. Consumers are looking for local companies that will provide them with what they need, not only because they are closer but also because they want to support a local micro-business in the face of the pandemic;
4. Consumers do not want to waste anything, so they want to make good purchases that will last them for a long time so as not to redo this process unnecessarily;
5. Consumers buy more prudently, e.g., because they have to take into account limited financial resources more often.

According to interviewees,

1. *“collaborative economy, sharing economy is a modern phenomenon, I read in PwC report that sharing economy firms grow much faster than the traditional operating companies. At the moment, so much is changing in the habits of the clients in connection with the pandemic that our company will also be wondering how to include the sharing economy concept in its strategy”* (Expert 14),
2. *“implementing the concept of circular economy is not easy, it requires a definite reorientation in the case of our company, but we think of circular economy on a smaller scale in our company, at the moment we transfer a significant part of our production waste to local designers and artists who use it for example for their artistic installations, giving this waste a second”* (Expert 12),
3. *“it seems to me that the way of building customer experience is changing, because customers are currently changing a lot, so it’s worth not only to follow trends but to create them”* (Expert 4).

Just because the customer path has changed does not mean that the value of experience has lost importance. The experience of the purchase is no longer culminating at the service point but at home. A few years ago, the Zero Moment of Truth (ZMOT) was described in the purchasing process. According to this model, before making a decision, the potential customer searches the Internet for as much information as possible about the product that interested him or her. When planning a marketing strategy, you simply cannot miss this point [30].

The ZMOT model has now gained additional significance. The experience of consumers should be built a little differently at the moment. It is a chance to verify the CVM policy, base experience on the concept of sustainable development and support it with ICT capabilities. Using social networking services (SNS) is not just personal: through SNS, people can collect information, share experience and influence others to make decisions [31].

Nowadays, the experience of consumers is not less important than it was a few months ago, and it is possible that it is even more important because, as entrepreneurs recall, customers are buying more prudently. According to entrepreneurs, recipients are waiting for packages with purchases as though they were an event or a gift. The results of this are, among others, relationships with the unboxing of parcels on social media. The fact that physical contact is limited does not mean that the impression is not built.

Entrepreneurs pointed out that the principle that “in the face of danger, people unite” now works: they have grown close to clients, and clients want to support local businesses in the age of the pandemic. Therefore, it is worthwhile for managers to take advantage of this opportunity without straining it. According to some of the respondents:

“Actions currently taken should be informative, communicative, but not promotional, lined with questionable intentions”. (Expert 3, Expert 7, Expert 11)

Consumers have their needs and will not stop buying, and it is important for entrepreneurs to think about how to provide them with other things in a different way and to build value around it in accordance with the principles of sustainable development.

The Figure 2 below shows the illustrated relationship between sustainable development and customer value management, which manifests itself as a focus on the client. This focus may take various forms; however, as pointed out by the respondents, it begins with determining value for customers. The second step can be the specific construction of a value proposition, taking into account the assumptions of the experience economy and circular economy. Thus, entrepreneurs have come to the point at which the development experience is seen as a value for the customer. Experience, in this case, is not enough; therefore, sustainable development values have become a value for the customer. This is why sustainability standards in the enterprise can be treated as a value proposition. This kind of approach enables the entity to construct a sustainable offer as a value for the customer.

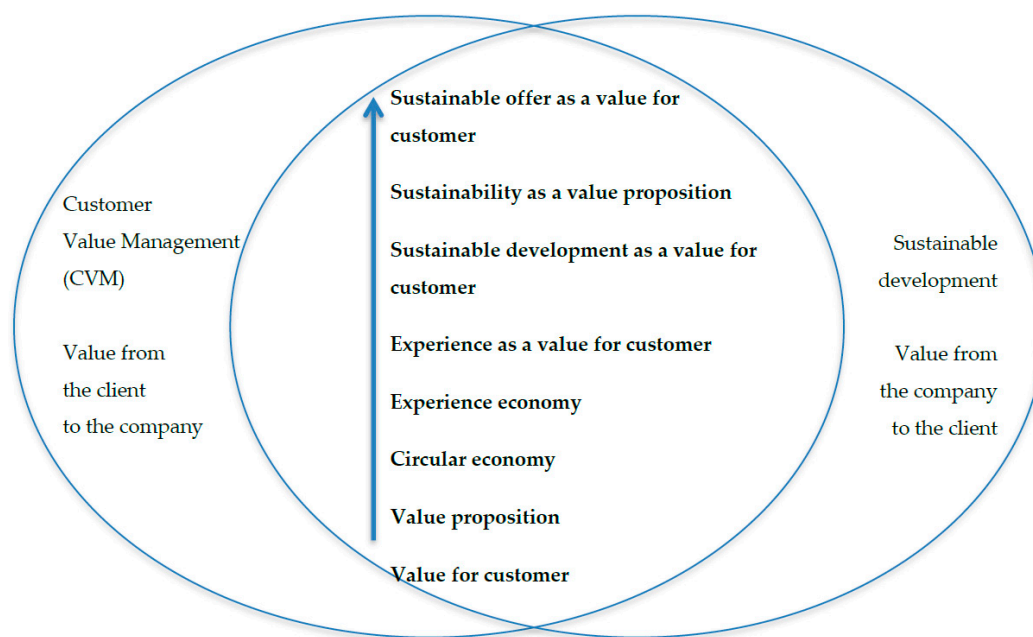


Figure 2. Relation between sustainable development and customer value management.

A sustainable offer, in the proposed definition of the author, can be stated as an offer that takes into account the assumptions of the sustainable development policy based on sustainable goals and delivers value and experience to customers in a way that preserves natural sources.

Experience is the last stage in the evolution of the economy, which aims to obtain maximum value from the market [32]. Anyone working in front of customers must therefore act in a way that draws them into the experience. What every company—no matter its offerings—needs to do, then, is create an experience that first gains potential customers’ attention, then gets them to spend time experiencing their offerings and, finally, causes them to spend their money by buying those offerings. Once a business identifies that dimension, it should pursue solutions to help customers experience less sacrifice [33].

5. Discussion

The results of the study indicate that potential hindrances of the work, according to the respondents, are the existing understatements, such as determining who is more responsible for being the driving force of change or responsible for its implementation. According to the surveyed entrepreneurs, the opinions were divided:

1. Producers are responsible for implementing sustainable development assumptions,

2. Customers are responsible for implementing this type of concept.

Nevertheless, it was agreed that the axis of the process of linking sustainable development trends and customer value management is formed by those who make purchasing decisions, namely, customers. When making these decisions, they assess the offer proposed by the entity.

The author assumed that there is a relation between sustainable development trends and customer value management because it can provide benefits to both producers and end users. This assumption has been verified. Furthermore, according to the study, the axis of this relationship is formed by customers, as they are the ones who make purchasing decisions.

The relationship between sustainable development and customer value management manifests itself as a focus on the client. This is why sustainability standards in the enterprise can be treated as a value proposition as a result of focus on the client. This concept enables the entity to construct a sustainable offer as a value for the customer which will be based on:

1. Sustainable development goals;
2. Sharing economy and circular economy concepts.

Goods and services alone are no longer sufficient to satisfy consumers. The global economy is less dependent on satisfying real everyday needs and more on satisfying experiences in which every (even trivial) activity, supported by appropriate consumer behavior, is creating a fascinating act [34]. The question remains, why not link it to the goals of sustainable development?

Meeting the socio-environmental expectations of consumers is possible thanks to understanding these needs through the channels provided by information and communications technology (ICT). ICT solutions allow for monitoring and conducting in-depth segmentation of recipients due to many different variables. Furthermore, community-centered development can be built with a special focus on the possible contribution of ICT in the future of sustainable communities [35].

The use of artificial intelligence (AI) and machine learning in CVM has huge potential. It offers the possibility of creating more personalized communications and, as a result, lower churn and improved cross-selling and up-selling. To successfully embrace AI in CVM, companies need to make sure that their data and approaches to storing data are in a fit state and to prepare for the inevitable impacts on roles and responsibilities within the marketing function [36].

AI can accelerate the transition to a circular economy. AI can enhance and enable circular economy innovation across industries in three main ways [15]:

1. Design circular products, components, and materials. AI can enhance and accelerate the development of new products, components, and materials fit for a circular economy through iterative machine-learning-assisted design processes that allow for rapid prototyping and testing.
2. Operate circular business models. AI can magnify the competitive strength of circular economy business models, such as product-as-a-service and leasing. By combining real-time and historical data from products and users, AI can help increase product circulation and asset utilisation through pricing and demand prediction, predictive maintenance, and smart inventory management.
3. Optimize circular infrastructure. AI can help build and improve the reverse logistics infrastructure required to 'close the loop' on products and materials by improving the processes to sort and disassemble products, remanufacture components, and recycle materials.

In the current era of excessive consumption, environmental strain, the coronavirus pandemic and the transference of many activities to the Internet, creating a sustainable offer as a value for customers can be crucial for the further competitive activities of entities.

Websites should be used as a knowledge hub for customers. A company's success depends on its businesses remaining active. As a result of COVID-19, lots of possible tools to create remote offices have gained popularity. Creating an offer for a client in such a complicated time is difficult. However, there are many tools that can facilitate this. Trying to profit during the coronavirus is understandable, but entrepreneurs should avoid doing so [37].

According to this research, as long as demand is reported, supply will continue to exist. Respondents said that as long as customers buy, for example, products in plastic packaging, they will be offered by producers. Respondents cited the example of Coca-Cola [38]. The company should have evidence that the customer's view of the perceived value for money is driven by sustainable development ideas. Then, they will build the concept of customer value management based on the sustainable development philosophy as well as sharing economy, circular economy and experience economy principles.

In the case of the Polish entity, it was the clients who, in large part, required the entrepreneur to change the concept of packaging, describing the situation as follows: The consumer is looking for more "eco" solutions. This is where the field for action, or rather cooperation of cosmetics companies, the legislative sector and recyclers, appears [39].

According to McKinsey, by rethinking packaging, a company reduces production costs while enhancing its brand [40]. The document titled "Our Packaging Future" sets out the collective impact framework necessary to deliver the 2025 targets, focusing on three key outcomes:

1. Packaging designed for circularity;
2. Improved collection and recycling systems;
3. Expanded markets for used packaging.

Driving these outcomes should be a series of interdependent strategies co-designed by key stakeholders within the packaging value chain [41].

These goals are also a promise to customers, a more balanced offer by companies, so they are a promise of value. There are a number of areas in which similar provisions should be made and concrete steps should be taken. How much it should be done is indicated by the United Nations 17 sustainable development goals.

Goods and services promoted by sharing business models are emerging in the place of the older model based on private propriety and a consumerist view of society. This is strongly connected with circular economy strategies, particularly in reference to the European goals of waste prevention and reduction and resource valorization. The sharing economy can contribute to the circular economy as well as to sustainable development [9].

COVID-19 might become known as the disaster that triggered a more sustainable way of living [42]. There can be a significant change in both demand and supply. The Customer Value Marketing strategy redefines Outbound Marketing by using advanced methods of dynamic customer segmentation based on RFM:

1. Recency;
2. Frequency;
3. Monetary analytics.

These are based on behavioral analytics used to create multi-channel processes in real time, along with the stages of the customer's life cycle, from generating leads to the most advanced customer segments, cultivating long-term cooperation. Thanks to ICT, this process can be even more effective; thus, it is worthwhile for managers to observe the needs and behavior of consumers so that it is possible to develop a sustainable offer as a value for the customer.

A variation of the RFM model is the RFE Model: recency, frequency, engagement is an extended version of the RFD model [43]. The last variable is user involvement. Engagement, however, is particularly important in building customer value. When the consumer identifies with the values of a given entity because they also reproduce what he or she believes, the commitment of the conscience increases, which significantly affects the customer's attachment to the given entity. Commercial marketing campaigns are not necessarily different from environmental and social actions.

In this study, entrepreneurs said that technology enables remote work in the pandemic and also allows contact with the customer and the implementation of remote transactions. This is the case even

where it was not previously implemented or even considered by the given entity. By transferring economic life to network technology, companies are still growing during a pandemic. So far, strong ICT entities are becoming stronger. It could be that the only ones with real immunity are the tech giants. In this way, COVID-19 has accelerated their rise [44]. This consolidation of power, combined with Big Tech's control of data, automation, robotics, artificial intelligence, media, advertising, retail and even autonomous tech, can also be alarming.

Technology companies are also looking for new opportunities for their activities after the pandemic, designing various types of solutions to facilitate the lives of people in new relationships. Thus, post-pandemic experience design takes on a new dimension in business models [45].

Technology companies also directly provide solutions that are allowing other companies to operate more effectively during the pandemic. Traditional customer insight techniques, such as surveys, often have a lag between their launch and results readout. At a time when conditions can change from hour to hour, that time can be far too long to deliver useful perspectives. Companies should look to quick and novel ways to keep a pulse on consumer sentiment. In Italy alone, Facebook has seen a 40–50 percent increase in usage since the crisis began. The surge in online usage now underway offers an opportunity to tap into insights from social media to rapidly understand consumer sentiment and develop new ideas [46].

Frontline employees are a company's eyes and ears on the ground. Nevertheless, this source of insight often goes largely overlooked: while 78 percent of frontline employees report that their leaders have made customer experience a top priority, nearly 60 percent say they believe that their ideas for improving that experience often go unheard. Tools and technology now exist to rapidly collect and aggregate real-time ideas and feedback from frontline employees. Investing in these can make a critical difference in the rapidly changing current environment [47].

Sustainable marketing can play a very important role in the process of joining the sustainable development trend and customer value management. Sustainable marketing, defined as planning, organizing, implementing and controlling marketing resources and programs to satisfy consumers' needs while considering social and environmental criteria and meeting corporate objectives [48], puts an emphasis on expectations that also cover experience. Now, we can notice more than ever that we have entered the value era, in which consumers are no longer market targets but intelligent partners with expectations [49]. Understanding the market, as well as the needs of the people, businesses and organizations that form it, is crucial. Dynamic technological progress constantly causes change among consumers, creates new market solutions and thus develops the concept of marketing and CVM. The idea of sustainable marketing seems to be a business model that could meet the people as well as natural environment needs, increase the efficiency of the development of global society, create new jobs, and raise the level and quality of life.

Sustainable marketing policy should be followed by sustainable innovation in entities. Sustainable innovation and design are not essentially related to new technologies but to the rethinking of approaches to address the need for growth while reducing negative environmental and social impacts [50]. As a sustainable innovation, offering additional services for products is rapidly emerging as an increasingly important consideration for manufactories [51]. Adding the word 'sustainable' to the word 'innovation' results in a broader approach to change. Sustainable innovation focuses on the social changes made possible as a result of innovation [52]. Thus, sustainable innovation involves developing and applying new business practices in a way that contributes to sustainability targets [53].

The main implications for companies from this study are that implementation of a sustainable offer that takes into account the assumptions of the sustainable development policy based on sustainable goals and delivers value and experience to customers in a way that preserves natural sources. Moreover, more frequent use of clients' non-invasive analysis of their behavior through the use of modern ICT technologies should be implemented. Customer behavior analysis should be more frequent as customers are the axis of the process of linking sustainable development trends and customer value management. The implementation of the assumptions of selected SDGs due to positive relation

between sustainable development trends and customer value management should also be more frequent, because sustainability standards in the enterprise can be treated as a value proposition as a result of focus on the client. Meeting the socio-environmental expectations of consumers is particularly important in economic conditions during and after the COVID-19 pandemic. Subsequent implications are that for possibility of creating more personalized communications, companies should use AI and machine learning in CVM also websites, social media should be used as a knowledge hub for customers. Companies should rethink packaging, to reduce production costs while enhancing its brand and circularity, while collaborative consumption should be analyzed more by companies, as a sharing economy can contribute to the circular economy as well as to sustainable development and sustainable offer. Those implications for practice can significantly affect the creation of a sustainable offer by entities, which will simultaneously be sustainable innovation.

6. Conclusions

In this paper, the focus was on links between sustainable development trends and the customer value management process. Research aimed to indicate what this relationship drives and indicate that they are customers. In connection with this result, the author proposed sustainable offer, which can be a concept of the offer combining CVM and sustainable goals policy in entities. Sustainability is a megatrend [54]. Today's economy is experiencing a series of economic, ecological and social problems affecting all populations. The sustainable development movement can resist the excessive consumption and over-exploitation of resources. Recent months have redefined the relationship between supply and demand to some extent. Intensively developing enterprises and economies have been forced to face the new situation: a completely new dimension of disruption due to the coronavirus. The economic slowdown is, however, temporary, because the world's economy has not stopped but has changed significantly. This paper scientific contribution is also a current description of the activities undertaken by the surveyed companies from Poland, Germany and Sweden in the field of CVM and sustainability in the face of changes in the market caused by the COVID-19 pandemic.

New challenges have emerged, but new opportunities have also appeared. The importance of creativity now is as high as ever. Creativity and sustainability have sometimes been described as contradictory phenomena: they are described in ways that place them in opposition to each other [55]. Nevertheless, creativity has also been proposed as a tool for sustainable development.

Research results show that management creativity will help in the implementation of a sustainable offer that takes into account the assumptions of the sustainable development policy based on sustainable goals and delivers value and experience to customers in a way that preserves natural sources. Links between sustainable development trends and the customer value management can be strengthened by addressing the real needs of the client. Moreover, those links can be enhanced through a sustainable offer and through the use of new technologies in CVM.

The above recommendations and proposed directions will therefore have an immanent impact on many entities in COVID-19 pandemic and post pandemic time.

Demand and supply will react to the new situation. However, it is a unique time to redefine the relation between sustainable development trends and customer value management. On the basis of the opinions of entrepreneurs, the author proposes that focus be placed on the client, who is a link between these approaches as a social entity and as a consumer, and that a sustainable offer be created as a value for the customer. At present, this thoughtful, sustainable offer could be very fertile ground.

In the pandemic, enterprises offering basic necessities are developing. Products that are not prioritized will go down in the hierarchy of needs. Thus, producers of many goods may have a problem with their sales in the current situation. It is worth using this time to redefine business models to start providing the value that recipients really need in respect of the principles of sustainable development.

Certainly, in the future CVM and sustainable development links should be still analyzed. Therefore, there is a premise for further empirical research and scientific considerations in this particular field. This would lead to formulate a model including customer reviews. This research has, of course,

its limitations as a piece of qualitative research, and as research directed at one group of respondents. Due to the fact that further verifications would require long-term research, there is a premise for additional research in this regard. Especially due to the fact that the COVID-19 pandemic changes not only the approach of entrepreneurs, but also of clients and, consequently, entire markets. The research results presented in this work supplement the current knowledge in the field of relation between sustainable development and customer value management in Baltic countries through the prism of companies management staff in first months of COVID-19 pandemic in Europe. Study described in the paper extends the current knowledge in the field of internal conditions affecting the implementation of the sustainable development goals and the customer value management process. The added value of the analysis presented in the paper is the study of the relations between sustainable development goals and the customer value management and indication what this relation drives. This knowledge is important for enterprises especially now in the context of turbulent economic environment due to COVID-19 pandemic. Further research should deepen this issue given the dynamically changing situation in the market.

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