
The Employee as Prosumer: Exploring Prosumption Behavior in Polish SMEs – A Case Study Analysis

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Abstract:

Purpose: The study aims to assess whether employees of small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) in Poland are treated as prosumers and to identify typologies of companies in the context of the prosumption of employees. The study aims to understand and explain the extent to which employees in the SME sector are involved in production and decision-making processes and the implications of this for their role and satisfaction at work.

Design/Methodology/Approach: The study is based on a literature analysis and empirical research among employees of Polish SMEs. It uses a methodology at the intersection of qualitative and quantitative research, allowing for a deeper understanding of employee behaviours.

Findings: The research shows that consumer behaviour has a significant impact on employees' engagement with their duties, staff turnover within the company, and the quality and efficiency of their work. Respondents clearly recognised the benefits of consumer activities, such as an increased commitment or reduced turnover.

Practical Implications: The practical implementation of the right approach towards the workforce in the management of organisations can significantly contribute to their competitiveness and innovation. Organisations should focus on supporting employees in their presumptive activities and encouraging them to become more involved in the company by supporting the development of employees' competencies and valuing their efforts.

Originality/Value: By concentrating on the function of prosumption activities in the management of small and medium-sized enterprises, the paper significantly adds to the literature focusing on prosumption. Its uniqueness is based on theoretical concepts and actual research findings, which have been combined to provide readers with a better understanding of how the proactive behaviour of employees can influence organisational management in an ever-changing environment.

Keywords: Employees, prosumption, active engagement, management, organisation, company.

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1. Introduction

Employees in today's businesses must be more adaptable, dedicated, and proactive in their personal growth and task fulfilment due to the complex and dynamic environment in which they operate. In this regard, prosumption is a notion that is becoming more and more prominent in management theory and practice.

This phrase, which was coined in 1980 by Toffler and combines the words "production" and "consumption," originally described consumer activity in which customers actively participate in creating goods and services. Prosumption is becoming increasingly important in the workplace these days, as workers go from being passive workers to active contributors that add their ideas, initiative, and knowledge to the organisation's worth (Shah *et al.*, 2020).

Research indicates that this phenomenon is especially relevant to knowledge-based and technology-based businesses, whose competitiveness is largely dependent on innovation and adaptation (Ritzer and Jurgenson, 2010). While acting as prosumers, employees do more than just their formal responsibilities - they commit to decision-making, innovation, and development processes, offering new ideas and improvements. But in order to foster such an attitude, the correct environment is needed, including rewards that push workers above and beyond the call of duty and an open organisational culture that encourages creativity.

Studies on the presumptive behaviour of workers reveal that people's dedication and job happiness can be greatly impacted by their active involvement in the production process (Glembocki and Dunn, 2010). A greater sense of motivation and identification with the organisation is fostered by taking part in the development of

organisational value and being conscious of how one's actions affect the performance of the business (Korzynski, 2013).

However, the use of the prosumption concept necessitates the modification of management models from the standpoint of human resource management. This includes providing room for bottom-up initiatives as well as increasing the decentralisation of decision-making processes (Kent *et al.*, 2022, Cova and Dalli, 2009).

Nevertheless, it is crucial to be aware of the possible drawbacks of prosumption in the workplace and its many advantages. Studies indicate that overworked employees may experience issues if they are expected to be very proactive and their employers do not offer them enough resources or assistance (Fuchs, 2011). Moreover, poorly controlled prosumption can cause uncertainty in the assignment of tasks inside the company, which lowers team productivity (Humphreys and Grayson, 2008).

In conclusion, presumptive behaviour by employees has a significant impact on modern organisations' creativity, effectiveness, and general competitiveness. When appropriately motivated and supported by management structures, employees who participate as co-creators of processes in addition to performers can add value to a business. Improved knowledge of the factors that promote prosumption in various industries and the development of effective management techniques that encourage employees to play an active role in the company can result from more research into this phenomenon.

2. Literature Review

Since its initial introduction by Alvin Toffler in the early 1980s, the term "prosumption" has been the subject of much discussion by academics in the fields of socioeconomic and consumer studies. Scholars who have studied the concept in the context of consumer behaviour include Brodie *et al.* (2013), Czuba (2017), and Samuel *et al.* (2018); those who have studied its socio-economic implications include Cova and Dalli (2009), Ritzer and Jurgenson (2010), Bellekom *et al.* (2016), and Ma *et al.* (2019).

Prosumption began to receive more attention in the early 2000s, which prompted studies into new developments in conventional production paradigms in marketing research. Diverse academics have seen prosumers as cooperative co-creators with businesses, a concept known as "value co-creation", according to Prahalad and Ramaswamy (2004). This concept casts customers in the role of active contributors to the development of a final value.

Adding to this, Cova and Dalli (2009) introduced the idea of the "working consumer," highlighting the customer's contribution to value production through social interactions and immaterial labour in addition to economic value generation.

The term "craft consumption," invented by Campbell, describes how customers actively participate in the creation, manufacturing, and use of products (Birau, 2024).

In their contribution to this discussion, Watson and Shove (2008) used the term "do-it-yourself" (DIY) to characterise situations in which consumers create things for their own use while assuming a variety of roles, including builders, designers, inspectors, and evaluators. This view was reinforced by Wolf and McQuitty (2011), who emphasised the importance of do-it-yourself (Do-it-yourself) activities in prosumption (Carney and Déméné, 2022).

Last but not least, Leadbeater and Miller (González Reyes, 2021) proposed the concept of "pro-am" (professional amateur), characterising those who, despite lacking official training, establish professional standards in their side projects and attempts. This idea illustrates even more how consumers' co-creation roles within the prosumption framework are evolving.

Prosumption represents a transition from traditional consumption to more interactive processes, and as the notion develops, it provides insightful information about the shifting dynamics of consumer interaction and their increasingly collaborative role in value generation.

According to earlier studies, a prosumer is a person who produces and uses goods and services mainly for their own needs, but this perception has changed with time. According to a more contemporary definition, prosumers are people who add value not just for themselves or their households but also for their communities and social networks (Tapscott and Williams, 2006). This change is a reflection of prosumers' increasing distinction as informed, capable performers in the digital economy.

Using digital technology, especially Web 2.0 platforms, contemporary prosumers actively participate in creating, testing, and using goods and services. They participate in co-creation processes, offering ideas, criticism, and expertise that help shape the final offers. They are no longer passive recipients of value. Prosumers frequently utilise their power to affect larger communities in addition to their own consumption (Seran and Izvercian, 2014).

The difference between producers and consumers needs to be clarified as a result of prosumers' increased participation in value creation due to the proliferation of digital tools and platforms. Thanks to their easy access to multiple information and collaborative platforms, people may participate in crowdsourcing projects, provide direct input to businesses, and co-create others' shared inventions.

The traditional consumer-producer relationship has changed due to prosumers' power to shape the direction of goods and services, making them essential members of social and economic ecosystems. Because they have the ability to direct the flow

of products and services, the traditional consumer-producer association has transformed, and they are now integral parts of social and economic ecosystems.

What is more, the nature of digital communities means that prosumers' contributions can quickly spread across global networks and amplify their impact on the economy. Whether because of product reviews, influence on social media or participation in collaborative projects, prosumers have become central to shaping market trends and innovation. This transformation shows a broader shift towards a more participatory, democratised approach to production and consumption.

3. Materials and Methods

The main goal of the study is to assess whether employees of small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) in Poland are treated as prosumers. The second goal is to identify typologies of companies in the context of employees and their active, prosumptive behaviours.

The study aims to understand the extent to which employees in the SME sector are involved in production and decision-making processes, as well as the implications of this for their role and satisfaction at work.

We define employee prosumption as a set of activities that indicate the involvement of employees in both production and decision-making processes within the company. These activities include employee participation in creating products or services, involvement in decisions about their work and the company's processes, initiating and implementing their own ideas for improvement, receiving feedback and engaging in appraisal and professional development systems. A detailed description of the items included in the *EPA* is presented in Table 1.

Table 1. *Items included in the Employee Prosumptive Activity (EPA)*

Prosumptive Activity of Consumers	
Item 1	<i>The company supports employees in self-seeking development opportunities</i>
Item 2	<i>Employees are involved in local community activities</i>
Item 3	<i>Employees can suggest activities for the local community</i>
Item 4	<i>Employees are encouraged to share ideas for improving working conditions</i>
Item 5	<i>Employees are encouraged to share ideas for greener practices within the Company</i>
Item 6	<i>Employees are encouraged to get involved in improving the Company's processes</i>
Item 7	<i>Employees are given a real opportunity to create an incentive system by offering expected benefits</i>
Item 8	<i>Employees are encouraged to share ideas on changes to structures and/or procedures</i>
Item 9	<i>The company rewards employee participation in all areas</i>

Source: Own study.

In order to assess the degree of presumption among employees in SMEs, a questionnaire was developed consisting of questions on the above-mentioned activities (Table 1).

The questionnaire was designed to cover different aspects of presumption and its internal consistency was confirmed by a Cronbach's alpha coefficient of 0.97, indicating high reliability of the measurement tool. Data were collected among employees and owners of 280 companies in the SME sector in Poland. A detailed description of the group parameters in question is presented in Table 2.

Table 2. Research sample

	Variable	Number
Gender	Female	151
	Male	129
Age	18 – 24	6
	25 – 34	78
	35 – 44	79
	55 and more	62
Place of residence	Village	49
	Town (up to 20,000 inhabitants)	27
	City (20,000 to 99,000 inhabitants)	75
	City (100,000 to 500,000 inhabitants)	80
	City (more than 500,000 inhabitants)	49
Occupational status	Fixed-term/trial/replacement contract of employment	77
	Employment contract for an indefinite period	166
	Civil law contract (contract of mandate/works contract)	16
	Self-employment	21
Wykształcenie	Vocational and lower	8
	Secondary	92
	Higher	180
Stanowisko	Staff Member	57
	Administrative	79
	Specialist	98
	Managerial	46
Size of the enterprise / Number of employees	10 -50	111
	51 – 100	75
	101 – 150	36
	151 – 200	33
	201 – 250	25
Status of the company	Family business	61
	Not a family business	219
Type of enterprise	Manufacturing company	70
	Service company	175
	Trading company	35

Source: Own study.

The data collected was subjected to detailed statistical analysis in order to identify correlations between different aspects of prosumption and to extract a typology of companies.

The analysis included an examination of the correlations between indicators of prosumption activity to understand the interrelationships between different aspects of prosumption. In addition, relationships between these indicators and demographic and organisational data such as company size, industry, employment structure and other metric characteristics were analysed. A cluster analysis was also conducted to identify companies that differed in the degree and nature of the prosumption of employees.

4. Results and Discussion

Correlations between indicators of prosumption activity:

Significant positive correlations were observed in the correlation analysis between the different elements of employee prosumer activity, suggesting that all these factors form one coherent aspect.

The highest correlations were observed between the following parameters: item 2 and item 3 ($r=0.79$), item 7 and item 8 ($r=0.76$), item 7 and item 9 ($r=0.75$), item 5 and item 7 ($r=0.74$), item 8 and item 9 ($r=0.73$), and item 4 and item 6 ($r=0.72$).

These high correlation values indicate a close relationship and a strong joint influence of these parameters on the aspect of prosumer activity under study (APP). In addition, significant correlations are also found between item 6 and item 9 ($r=0.69$), item 4 and item 8 ($r=0.68$), and item 5 and item 8 ($r=0.68$), highlighting the significant links between these parameters.

The remaining correlations oscillate between 0.51 and 0.67, indicating their smaller but still significant relationships with the aspect analysed. In summary, the positive correlations between all parameters suggest that they form a homogeneous and well-defined dimension, which confirms the coherence of the prosumer activity concept studied.

In the context of the correlation analysis of APP-related items, relatively low correlation values were observed with various demographic and occupational variables. In particular, the correlations between the items and seniority in the company are slightly higher, with seniority showing correlations of around 0.17 with questions relating to Item 1, Item 2, Item 5 and Item 6.

The highest correlations relate to the position held, particularly with Item 4 ($r=0.225$), Item 3 ($r=0.205$) and Item 8 ($r=0.204$).

In comparison, other variables such as gender, age, locality, occupational status, education, years of work, company size, type of company, company status and province have very low correlations.

Although the correlation values are not very high, they suggest that position and seniority in the company may have some influence on the responses regarding prosumer characteristics.

These results indicate that, although these correlations are moderate, they may provide valuable information on the impact of these variables on prosumer perception and activity in the population surveyed.

Cluster analysis:

In order to identify groups of companies that differed in their presumptive treatment of employees, a cluster analysis was conducted. The key tool to determine the optimal number of groups was the ‘elbow’ method.

This method involves creating a graph illustrating changes in a measure of internal group cohesion as a function of the number of clusters. Initially, adding new groups significantly improves cohesion, but after a certain point, further increases in the number of groups cease to provide significant benefits, and changes become marginal.

The point at which the graph stabilises and forms a characteristic ‘elbow’ indicates the most appropriate number of groups. Figure 1 illustrates this process and shows the optimal number of groups is 4.

Using the elbow method, it was possible to identify four different groups of companies that differ in the way they presumptively treat their employees. Each of these groups has unique characteristics that reflect different approaches to involving employees in production and decision-making processes.

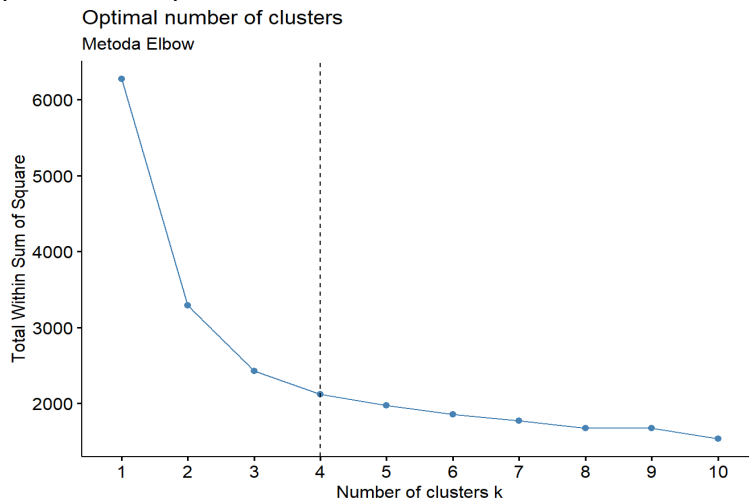
The remainder of this paper will detail each cluster, its key characteristics and the differences between them in order to better understand how different companies implement presumption practices and their impact on employee engagement.

Cluster 1, comprising 68 observations, is characterised by relatively high mean values for most of the variables studied, exceeding 3.3. This suggests that respondents in this cluster have positive evaluations regarding all aspects analysed. In particular, the high values for Item 1 and Item 3 stand out, indicating high prosumer activity and strong support from the company for self-development and suggestions for local activities.

The graph (Figure 2) illustrating the average item values in this cluster confirms these observations, showing that the ratings for these aspects are the highest compared to other clusters. Specialist positions dominate in this cluster, accounting

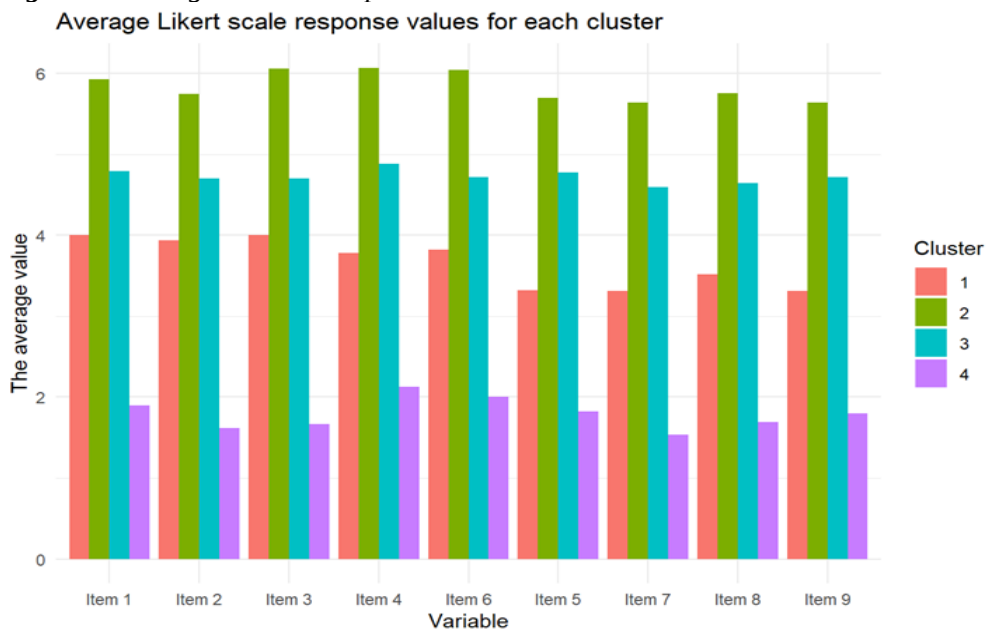
for 37% of all employees, which may explain the high ratings due to their greater responsibility and influence on company operations. In second place are administrative positions (26%), followed by executive positions (21%).

Figure 1. Elbow method graph showing changes in internal group cohesion as a function of the number of clusters.



Source: Own study.

Figure 2. Average Item values per cluster

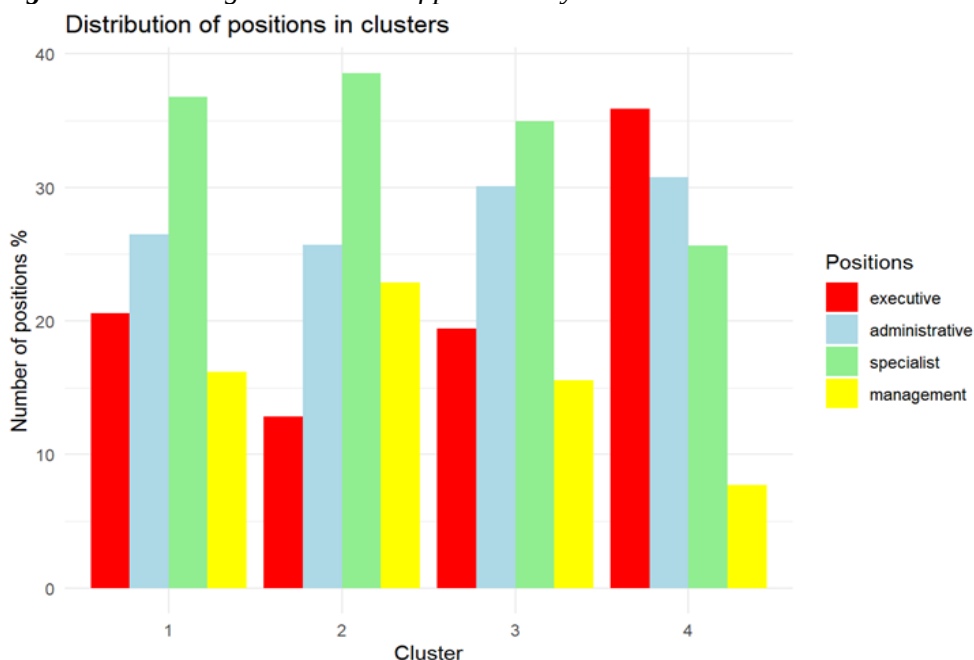


Source: Own study.

Managerial positions are the least represented, with 16%. The graph (Figure 3) of the distribution of positions in cluster 1 shows that the presence of numerous professionals, with greater responsibility and influence over the company's operations, can explain the high ratings. Administrative positions also contribute to positive evaluations, although to a lesser extent than specialist positions, while the presence of executive positions may lower the average values in this category.

The most significant percentage of employees in this cluster have between 3 and 5 years of experience in the company, suggesting some employment stability. In contrast, 24% of employees have been working for the company for over 15 years, which may prove their high loyalty and long-term commitment.

Figure 3. Percentage distribution of positions by cluster



Source: Own study.

Cluster 2, comprising 70 observations, has the highest mean values of all variables studied, exceeding 5.6. This indicates positive attitudes towards prosumer activity and community involvement. Respondents in this cluster present very high scores for each aspect, suggesting their really high motivation and commitment to these areas.

The job structure is dominated by specialist positions, which comprise 39% of all employees in the cluster, which is a significantly higher proportion than in other clusters. This is followed by 26% of employees in administrative positions and 23% in managerial positions. Executive positions are the least represented, accounting for

13% of the total number of employees. The high average values may be partly due to the presence of managerial positions, which tend to have a significant influence on decisions regarding prosumer development and activity.

Also, the significant number of professionals contributes to the high scores, indicating their strong commitment and motivation. As in Cluster 1, 24% of employees have more than 15 years of seniority in the company. However, unlike in Cluster 1, the percentage of employees with shorter experience is lower in this cluster. This may suggest greater staff stability and long-term commitment to the company.

Cluster 3, consisting of 103 observations, is characterised by average ratings at a moderate level, ranging from 4.7 to 4.9. This means that respondents in this cluster express positive, albeit less intense, opinions compared to Cluster 2. Such a result may suggest that, although overall satisfaction with support and development opportunities is present, respondents' commitment is not as strong as in the other groups.

Cluster 3 is dominated by specialist positions, which comprise 35% of all employees. This is followed by 30% of employees in administrative positions and 19% in executive positions. The smallest percentage is represented by managerial positions, which occupy 16% of the total employees. This distribution may influence moderate ratings - professionals may have less intense engagement or support than groups with higher average ratings.

Administrative and executive positions also contribute to the company's performance, but their impact is less significant in engagement. It is also worth noting that cluster 3 stands out for having the highest percentage of employees with experience of 3 to 5 years, which may influence their rating. On the other hand, 17% of employees have been with the company for more than 15 years, indicating a significant proportion of long-standing employees who may have different perspectives and experiences than new team members.

Cluster 4, comprising 39 observations, has the lowest average below 2.1, suggesting negative attitudes towards prosumer activity and company support. Respondents in this cluster may be less satisfied with opportunities for growth, community involvement and suggested improvements. This cluster is dominated by executive positions, accounting for 36% of all employees, followed by administrative (31%), specialist (26%) and managerial (8%).

The low averages may be related to the dominance of executive positions, which tend to have less opportunity to influence decisions and support from the company. Additionally, the low proportion of managers may indicate a limited ability to influence company policy, which may explain the negative attitudes observed.

It is also worth noting that cluster 4 has a higher proportion of employees with less seniority, i.e. less than 1 year and between 1 and 2 years, while the lack of employees with experience of 14 to 15 years is a significant feature of this cluster. This diverse profile of employees may further influence the perception of support and commitment from the company.

Additionally, a correlation analysis was conducted between prosumer activity and selected dependent variables: willingness to leave the company, commitment and job satisfaction. In order to assess the relationship between prosumer activity and these variables, three key indicators were considered:

Item 10	<i>Low level of rotation</i>
Item 11	<i>Engagement of employees</i>
Item 12	<i>Satisfaction with work</i>

In the statistical analysis, the Shapiro-Wilk test showed that the data did not have a normal distribution, which necessitated the use of Spearman rank correlation, appropriate for data with a non-normal distribution. The results of the Spearman correlation analysis revealed significant correlations between prosumer activity and the variables studied.

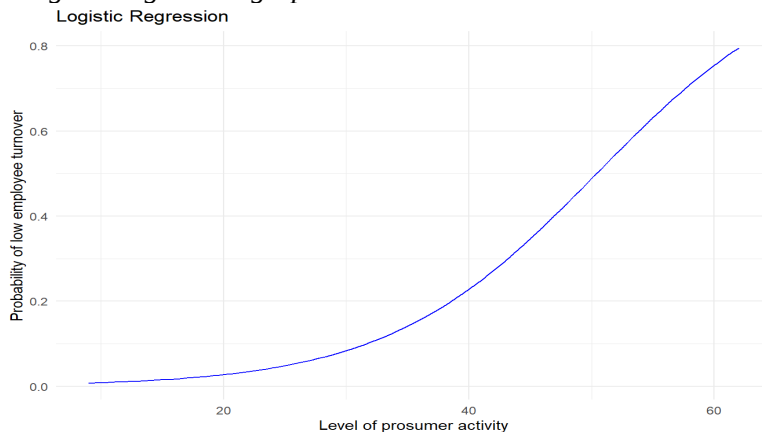
A correlation of 0.616 indicates a moderately strong positive relationship between prosumer activity and low employee turnover (Item 10). A correlation of 0.626 indicates a moderately strong positive relationship between prosumer activity and employee engagement (Item 11). The strongest relationship was observed for the job satisfaction variable (Item 12), for which the correlation was 0.724, indicating a moderately strong positive relationship. These results highlight the relevance of prosumer activity in the context of the variables studied.

In order to examine the impact of the treatment of employees, in terms of their role as more or less active prosumers, on the decision to leave the company, the level of commitment and job satisfaction, an analysis was conducted using a logistic regression model. This model makes it possible to assess how different factors, such as how employees are treated, affect the probability of a particular event or decision.

The logistic regression analysis revealed that higher levels of prosumer behaviour among employees negatively correlate with staff turnover. This means employees actively participating in prosumer activities are less likely to leave the company (Figure 4).

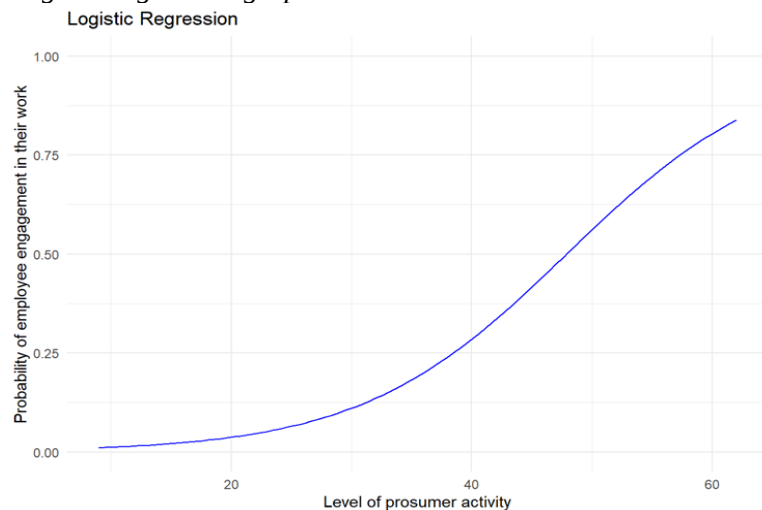
Furthermore, the analysis showed that higher levels of prosumer behaviour increase the likelihood of higher levels of work engagement. Employees who actively participate in prosumer activities show higher levels of commitment to their job responsibilities (Figure 5).

Figure 4. Logistic regression graph



Source: Own study.

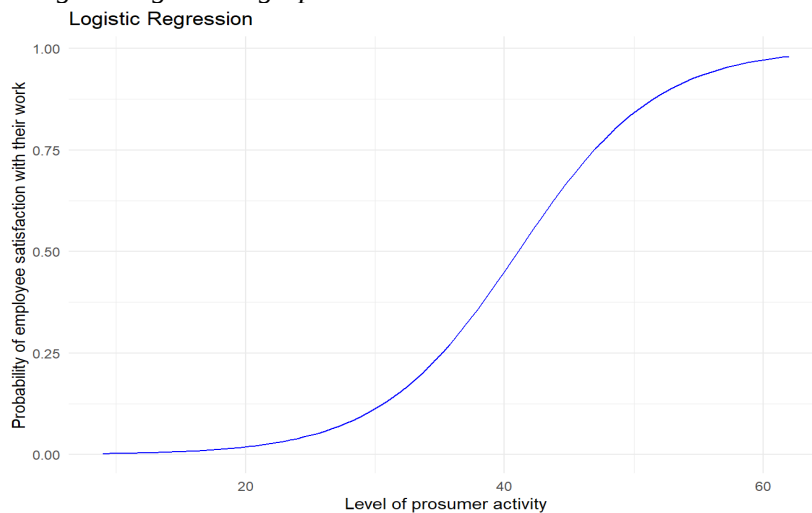
Figure 5. Logistic regression graph



Source: Own study.

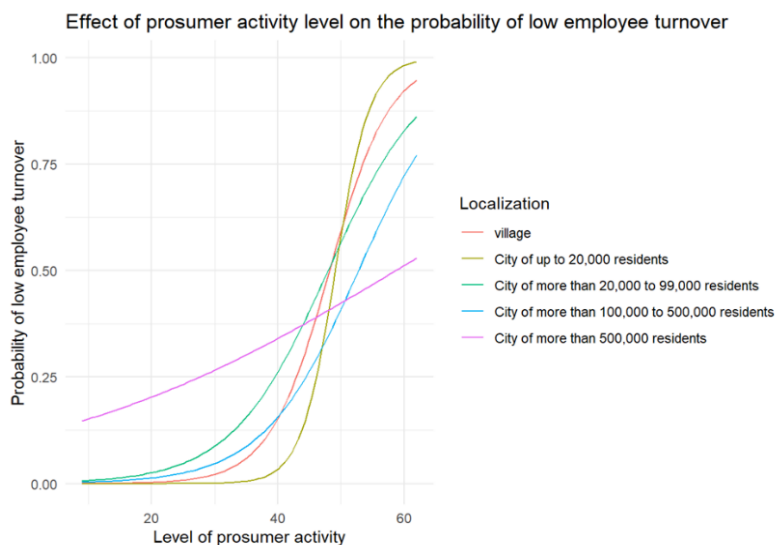
Additionally, the results of the analysis indicate that higher levels of prosumer behaviour have a positive impact on job satisfaction. Employees who engage in prosumer activities are more likely to express job satisfaction (Figure 6).

In the next step of the analysis, interaction variables were added to the logistic regression model, focusing on the low level of staff turnover. The analysis showed that the variables related to the company's size and the interactions of these variables with the level of prosumer activity do not have a statistically significant effect on the low level of staff turnover. Also, the status of the company as a family or non-family and the interactions of these variables with the level of prosumer activity do not significantly affect turnover levels.

Figure 6. Logistic regression graph

Source: Own study.

In contrast, the residence variables and their interactions with the prosumer activity level show a statistically significant effect on the probability of low levels of employee turnover.

Figure 7. Effect of prosumer activity level on the probability of low employee turnover – localisation

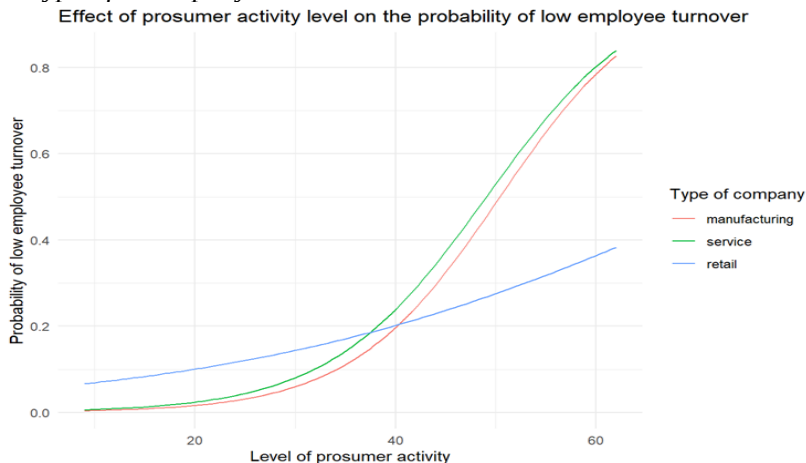
Source: Own study.

This effect is statistically significant (Estimate: -0.17420, p-value = 0.02) and particularly pronounced in large cities (over 500,000 inhabitants), where the

probability of low turnover is lower compared to smaller towns (Figure 7). In addition, it was noted that companies with a commercial nature tended to have a lower probability of low employee turnover (Estimate: -0.09435, p-value = 0.09) (Figure 8).

Additionally, the analysis showed that the effect of prosumer activity on the probability of employee engagement was not affected by the size of the company, place of residence, dominant company activity, and nature of the company (family vs. non-family). The p-value for these variables was greater than 0.05, suggesting no statistically significant differences. Similarly, the effect of prosumer activity on the probability of employee job satisfaction was not affected by company size, dominant company activity, or the nature of the company.

Figure 8. *Effect of prosumer activity level on the probability of low employee turnover – type of a company*



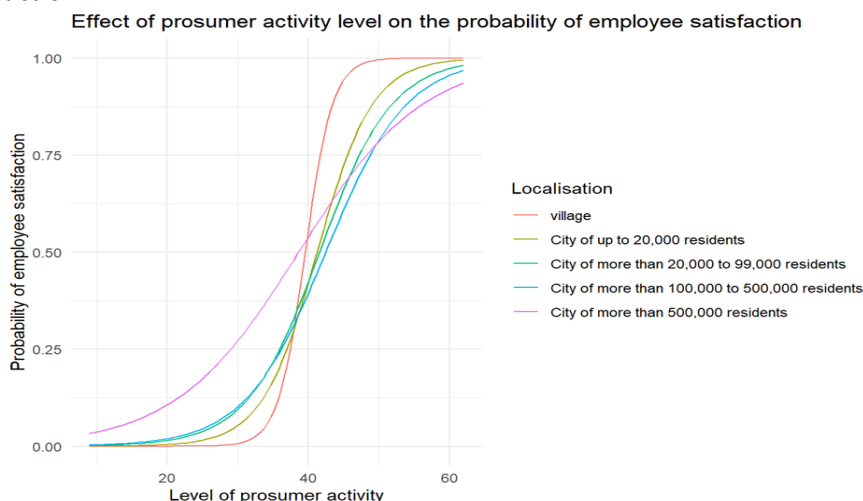
Source: Own study.

In each case, the p-value was greater than 0.05, suggesting no statistically significant differences. However, variables such as the level of prosumer activity and place of residence significantly impact the probability of employee job satisfaction. Prosumer behaviour contributes to employee satisfaction, but this effect is less pronounced in medium-sized and large cities than in smaller towns (Figure 9).

5. Conclusions

Modern prosumption literature in the context of SMEs underlines the necessity to actively involve employees in innovative processes. SMEs should definitely develop a culture of openness for creativity and support employees who want to propose new solutions. That would give them a more innovative and inventive role in the process of product creation, which could benefit from a more customized offer.

Figure 1. Effect of prosumer activity level on the probability of employee satisfaction



Source: Own study.

The authors would also recommend creating formal structures for innovation support, such as platforms for ideas, innovation management systems, or regular brainstorming sessions. Such an approach allows regular, systematic decision-making and better use of employees' potential, who can act as prosumers. The research suggests that many SMEs do not have formal structures for innovation management which significantly lowers their ability to fully use innovative ideas.

Investing in digital technologies, such as cloud systems or cooperation platforms is crucial for improving creative processes in SMEs. They facilitate employees' more effective participation in innovative processes, cooperation and real-time interaction. Those technologies allow better co-creation of products with customers, which strengthens mutual relations and eases fast product tailoring.

The key aspect of employees' as prosumers development is also their commitment to building relations with consumers. Employees of SMEs, thanks to direct contacts with customers, can implement innovations that better fit the particular needs of the market. That is the reason why enterprises should create mechanisms and structures to systematically collect feedback from customers, which, in turn, would be used for further product improvement.

Human resource management in small and medium enterprises requires space for innovations and creativity. SMEs should effectively manage employees' time in order not to overload them with operational activities. Employees must have a sufficient amount of time and resources to be able to engage in innovative processes. This requires flexible managerial strategies.

Another important aspect is the prevention of job burnout. In small and medium companies, where employees too often play too many roles, the risk of job burnout increases. Support mechanisms such as emotional support or a work-life balance policy are therefore recommended.

Investing in the development of employees' competencies should include both technological and creative skills as this seems to be very helpful in being prosumptive. Regular training, courses and workshops should, therefore, be standard in SMEs. The introduction of motivation and reward systems for innovative ideas.

Employees engaging in creative processes should be adequately rewarded – both financially and non-financially, e.g., through the possibility of carrying out their own projects and launching their own solutions. Such a motivation supports the culture of innovativeness in a company.

Finally, SMEs should strive to systematically monitor the effects of innovative activities. Regular evaluation of those effects and collection of feedback from the staff allows for continuous improvement of the creative processes, which, in the long-term range, will benefit both the enterprise and its customers.

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