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## **Diversification of Expectations and Buying Behaviours of Internet Users in the Context of Brand Activities in Social Media**

### INTRODUCTION

Social media (SM) introduced a fundamental change in the way of communication between organizations and individual users. It has been a challenge for companies that cannot send one-way messages, and they must learn to listen, engage and respond to Internet users. The growing role of marketing in social media is the result of an ever increasing popularity of especially social-networking sites. The presence in at least one of them is declared by 66% of internauts (an increase of 4% compared to 2014). Social media are regularly visited by 82% of registered users [CBOS, 2015].

### SOCIAL MEDIA

The growing power and potential of social media is testified by the number of active users. According to the study “We Are Social” 63,7% of all Internet users worldwide were using at-least one social networking site in 2014 [WEARESOCIAL, 2015], so it can be concluded that they are currently one of the most common ways of using the Internet in the world.

Originally the term “social media” was translated into Polish as “new media” but now the term “media społecznościowe” is widely accepted [Miotk, 2013]. M. Pelechaty presents seven characteristic of new media [Pelechaty, 2008]: participation, accessibility, adventure, revolution, creativity and personal-

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ization. It seems that the distinguishing feature of social media is the first of these characteristics – participation.

A. Kaplan and M. Haenlein define social media as a group of web-based application solutions which are based on the ideological and technological foundations of Web 2.0, and that allow the creation and exchange of user-generated content [Kaplan, 2010]. L. Safko considers social media as actions and behaviours of communities that gather in the network to share information, knowledge and opinions using the appropriate media in this communication [Safko, 2009]. E. Constantinides states that many practitioners and theorists equate the term social media marketing with user-generated content [Constantinides, 2014]. It can therefore be assumed that social media are Web 2.0 applications for creating, editing and dissemination of content created by the Internet users. The presented definitions have common attributes which are “community” and “content” created by this community. You can basically say that these are the two key phrases that fully capture the essence of a concept of social media.

Users of social media look for information and advice, exchange opinions, discuss and argue, and many other things every day in social media. They send messages to brand representatives and expect that someone will answer their questions. Channels of communication through which communities are formed are hundreds of thousands of blogs, microblogs, forums and social networking platforms used for making friends, interact and manage groups of people. Optimal communication channels allow discussion of many people, enable opinion leaders to reach out many Internet users and promote interactive discussions. The mentioned earlier communities are groups using different communication channels to initiate and maintain friendships, discussions and information exchange. It is within these frameworks that the most active recommendation mechanisms work and it is the easiest way to increase engagement. To understand communities, you need to be able to answer the question, why Internet users want to participate in them and how they want to act. Content in social media is what users come across and want to exchange. These can be both useless information as well as opinions and immediately shared and highly appreciated latest news. The biggest advantage of social media seems to be sharing of information without spatial, territorial restrictions, across borders and boundaries. Compared to traditional media SM allow to interact, so that internauts do not have to be passive recipients of messages sent to them. Content can be uploaded by everyone – Internet users, brand and commercial representatives. Anyone who wants to pursue their own social media communication activities, should know what effect they can bring – how many people have noticed it, who and how reacted, or is the brand image changing [Dorenda-Zaborowicz, 2012].

## MARKETING IN SOCIAL MEDIA

The literature identifies a number of ways to reach recipients with a specified content. Taking into consideration the use of the Internet and traditional media one could identify three models that illustrate the way of communication with potential consumers. These are [Leśniewska, 2006]:

- traditional model – the lack of opportunity to indicate individual users, the Internet acts as a further means of communication, which provides information compiled on the basis of other media,
- transitional model – the Internet plays a much more important role in the context of a communication channel, the use of extended database enables monitoring of Internet users, making it possible to adjust content to specific users,
- future model – a key role is played by the Internet, there is a constant collection of information about users and selection and analysis of data to customize the advertising content to specific tastes and requirements of the Internet users.

It seems that we are now at the stage of transition to the future model. An increasing number of people for whom there is no difference between virtual and real world will cause increased importance of marketing activities of companies on the Internet. Different types of businesses have noticed the potential that lies in social media and communities using them. The result is an increasing number of companies that choose to use social media to reach out to recipients [Dwornik].

Social media marketing efforts are actions aimed at promoting a product, service, website, events, etc. on the Internet. Unlike traditional advertising methods, it is achieved by building a community around the brand or organization. Thus, the company has the ability to influence decisions and behaviour of their customers. These activities are intended not only to boost sales, but also to build long-term relations between an organization and a client through counselling, exchange of opinions, debates, posting messages in the form of text, graphics or multimedia [Zarella, 2010].

Correct and skilful use your own e-communities brings many benefits to organizations. Perhaps the most favourable one (especially from the point of view of trade enterprises) is to increase demand for a product or service. For this type of organizations a great advantage will also be an increased publicity for a product or service. Thanks to social media companies get many reviews of products and services they offer, thus they can better respond to customer demand and avoid costs of conducting consumer preferences research. Nothing gets in the way that part of transactions also takes place via social media. Among other benefits worth mentioning are trust strengthening for organizations, obtaining explicit knowledge of customer demands and sometimes getting a free unique content for websites thanks to internavts' posts [Gustowski, 2007].

According to the Internet Standard 2015 report, greatest development of marketing activities with the usage of social media has begun to occur in late 2009 and 2010. A little earlier there was an increase in interest of social networking by people [Audience]. According to the Internet Standard 2014 report the majority of companies (88.1%) outsource such activities to interactive media agencies to create a community around the brand. For 72.9% the goal is to build brand awareness, whereas for 55.9% an important element is to increase sales. Aim for almost half of the studied companies is managing brand's reputation, while for 42.4% it is important to discover the needs of customers who are interested in the brand [Internet standard].

Social media marketing is therefore mainly two-way communication. Social networking sites can be used in situations where someone wants to communicate with other people talking openly. It is essential what a company has to offer, whether it is truthful and sincere in its statements and that it is open to the public, because no matter who sends a message in social networking sites, it is a community which has the last word [Kozierowska, 2011]. Interactions between the company's customers can add value by creating content, emerging of brand advocates and influencing purchasing behaviour by eWOM [Bruhn, 2012]. Users of social media (in most cases) seem to be focused on building and maintaining different kinds of relationship with others. They do not use social media because of companies' presence there. Thus ignoring this phenomenon and taking actions of a commercial or advertising nature cannot work in the long run. Internet users will ignore such enterprises at best. Hence the need to consider building relationships with users of social media [Piskorski, 2011].

## RESEARCH RESULTS

By analyzing the relationship of companies with social media users one should start with the reasons for using SM. Here are the results of research on a sample of 211 randomly selected Internet users who responded to questions concerning the use of social media. The aim of the study was to find the motives of following brands in social media and estimating differentiation in respondents activities in SM. The author wanted to find out the differences in motivations and ways of using social media as well as the impact of SM on purchasing behaviour.

The most important factor influencing the use of social media is ability to keep in touch with friends and relatives (70%), and every fifth respondent thinks that this is one of the most important reasons (Table 1). Slightly less important goal is to get information about promotions, discounts and new products. 32% of inter-nauts consider it important, while 20% of them see it as very important. Only 13% of respondents indicate this factor as the most important reason for the use of social media. Respondents also indicate that it is a nice way of spending leisure.

Half of respondents believe that the least important factor influencing the choice of social media is the opportunity to participate in games and competitions organized by companies. The respondents using social media do not state they do it just because it is trendy and everybody is doing it. The opportunity to meet new people in SM is also not important.

**Table 1. Factors influencing usage of social media**

	The least important	Of little importance	Important	Of big importance	The most important
Keeping in touch with friends	1%	1%	8%	20%	70%
Possibility of meeting new people	32%	24%	23%	14%	6%
Possibility of getting information on promotions, discounts and new products	14%	20%	32%	20%	13%
Participation in games, competitions and games organized by firms	52%	23%	16%	5%	3%
Nice way of spending time	11%	19%	34%	19%	16%
Adaptation to a new trend	46%	24%	18%	8%	4%

Source: own study.

Respondents were also asked about the reasons for observing the brands in social media.  $\frac{1}{4}$  of respondents follow the profile of the brand in social media because they like a brand and might be interested in information about a brand and expect information about promotions and some special offers. Over 14% of a studied group reported buying products of a certain brand as the reason for observation. Slightly less people (13%) are interested in the industry in which brands operate. Almost 8% of respondents follow profiles because of their friends, 7% believe that they publish exciting and interesting content, and 5% of people chose participation in competitions as a reason. Only 0.4% of the group admit they follow a profile of a brand because of negative experiences related to the brand and want to share them with others.

The confirmation of highly mercantile approach of a studied group to the presence of brands in social media is the distribution of answers to the question on the expectations from brands / companies in SM (Table 2). More than a half of respondents (56%) expect access to special offers and promotions. For 51% the most important is access to information that is not published anywhere else (exclusive content). For about  $\frac{1}{3}$  of the respondents possibility of a dialogue is the most awaited functionality. Other expectations were sequentially: company news, inspirations, entertainment.

**Table 2. Expectations towards brands' activity in social media**

Specification	%
Possibility of a dialogue with a brand	31%
Access to information not published anywhere else	51%
Entertainment	12%
Inspirations	24%
Company/brand news	28%
Access to special offers and information on promotions	56%
Other	4%

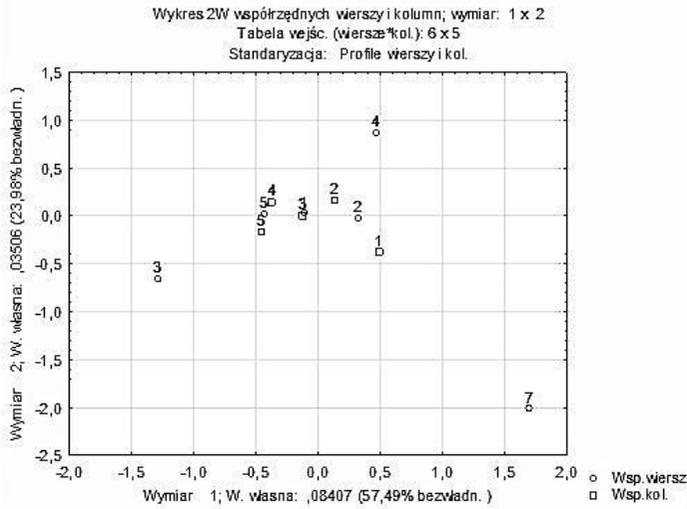
Source: own study.

It seems therefore that social media can have a significant impact on shopping habits. But customers' purchase of a product or service may be affected many other factors. The fact that the user is a fan of a particular brand and follows its profile does not mean that they buy far more of its products. Of course partially it may contribute to an increase in sales. Clients may be interested in an advertising on a fanpage, read a lot of positive comments from other users (including opinions of their relatives or families which can increase their trust). But one should not expect a sudden, rapid growth in sales of goods or services.

43% of surveyed people confirm that being a fan of a particular brand in social media causes that they recommend a product to friends. Only 28% of respondents gave the opposite answer, including only 3% that said that this fact does not affect that they recommend products to their friends or relatives.

Does the fact of being a fan / following a brand in social-media affect the increased level of purchasing its products? "Definitely yes" was the answer given by only 6% of respondents. "Partially yes" was answered by 27%. Approximately 46% of respondents state that they buy more in connection with the activity of the brand in SM.

In addition to promotional and recommendation opportunities that could have an impact on increased purchases, social media also pose a threat to companies associated with expressing of opinions on the Internet, also negative ones. Is this phenomenon strongly influencing the purchasing preferences of the respondents? It is worth noticing that respondents pay much attention to opinions on brands. To the question: "Does it happen that after reading negative opinions about a brand or a product / service you cancel the purchase of a product / service?" 12% said "definitely yes", and 45% "partially yes". Every fifth respondent does not give up purchases under the influence of negative feedback. About 19% of respondents do not have opinion in this topic. The analysis of correspondence shows that the tendency to abandon the purchase after reading negative opinions about a brand is noticeable in the age groups 23–29 and 37–43. While for the 16–22 age group the most frequently chosen answer was "probably not". No cancellation of a purchase is characteristic for older Internet users (age 44–50).



Zmn. dla wierszy: v52(6); Zmn. dla kolumn: v47(5);

Wart. własne: ,0841 ,0351 ,0195 ,0076; Łączne  $\chi^2=30,8534$   $df=20$   $p=,05$

**Figure 1. Chart of correspondence analysis for variables age and purchase/lack of purchase as a result of reading opinions in SM**

Source: own study.

## CONCLUSION

Social media are witnessing great interest among respondents. It is a part of the Internet with a huge potential and marketers should use it in a subtle and nonintrusive way. The research confirmed that keeping in touch with companies is not a number one rationale for Internet users to be present in social media. But, as following brands and companies might bring some benefits, customers try to use this opportunity. Although it is difficult to clearly confirm effectiveness of social media in purchase stimulation, it is clear that respondents expect special treatment and can, through their expectations and recommendations, influence opinions of other participants about the brand, and thereby influence the purchasing behaviour.

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### Summary

The growing power and potential of social media is testified by the number of active users. Spending time on social media is one of the most popular things people do on the Internet. Social media has changed the landscape of enterprises functioning on the market. Communication with customers has taken new forms and has created the possibility of relationships. Presented article shows the results of studies on the behaviour of Internet users in social media. Respondents indicate satisfaction with the presence of brands in social media. Users of social media want to chat, search for information and spend time with friends. They are there not for to follow companies. But as companies are present in social media internauts want some interactions with them. At the same time, it appears that the most desirable actions by companies are those associated with benefits for the involved Internet users (discounts, access to exclusive promotions). More than half of the respondents (56%) expect access to special offers and promotions. It is difficult to determine the impact of social media on increased purchases. At the same time one can notice the importance of recommendations and negative comments in social media. 43% of surveyed people confirm that being a fan of a particular brand in social media causes that they recommend a product to friends.

And over half of respondents would not buy a product after reading a negative review or comment about it. It cannot be ignored by companies. And although these are only declarations of respondents any company cannot underestimate such statements. Companies need to take care of the reputation and their presence in social media must be a result of a well prepared strategy.

*Keywords:* social media, Internet, purchasing behaviour

## **Dywersyfikacja oczekiwań i zachowań zakupowych internautów w kontekście aktywności marek w mediach społecznościowych**

### *Streszczenie*

Rosnący potencjał mediów społecznościowych jest widoczny w liczbie użytkowników. Spędzanie czasu w mediach społecznościowych jest jedną z najpopularniejszych rzeczy, które ludzie robią w Internecie. Media społecznościowe zmieniły krajobraz funkcjonowania przedsiębiorstw na rynku. Komunikacja z klientami przybrała nowe formy i stworzyła możliwości partnerskich relacji. Zaprezentowany artykuł pokazuje wyniki badań dotyczących zachowań internautów w mediach społecznościowych. Użytkownicy mediów społecznościowych chcą rozmawiać, poszukiwać informacji i spędzać czas z przyjaciółmi. Nie są w mediach społecznościowych z powodu obecności firm. Skoro firmy są tam jednak obecne, to internauci chcą wchodzić z nimi w interakcje. Respondenci wskazują na zadowolenie z obecności marek w mediach społecznościowych. Jednocześnie okazuje się, że najbardziej pożądanymi akcjami ze strony firm są te związane z korzyściami dla zaangażowanych internautów (zniżki, dostęp do wyłącznych promocji). Więcej niż połowa zbadanych (56%) oczekuje dostępu do specjalnych ofert i promocji. Trudno jednoznacznie określić wpływ mediów społecznościowych na zwiększenie zakupów. Jednocześnie widoczne jest wskazywanie na znaczenie rekomendacji i negatywnych opinii w mediach społecznościowych. 43% przebadanych potwierdza, że bycie fanem marki w mediach społecznościowych powoduje rekomendowanie jej znajomym. A ponad połowa respondentów nie kupiłaby produktu po przeczytaniu o nim negatywnej recenzji lub komentarza. Nie może być to przez firmy lekceważone. I chociaż jest to sfera deklaracji respondentów, to nie można lekceważyć takich stwierdzeń. Firmy muszą dbać o reputację i obecność w mediach społecznościowych, musi to być efektem przemyślanej strategii, jeżeli nie ma wyrządzić firmie szkód.

*Słowa kluczowe:* media społecznościowe, Internet, zachowania zakupowe

JEL: M30, M31