

SOCIAL MEDIA AS A FIELD FOR A COMPANY'S BRAND DEVELOPMENT

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Summary. Nowadays, the basic place of communication is of course the Internet, which has become an extremely popular social space, enabling users to meet various needs. Thanks to cyberspace, it is possible to exchange texts, images, films, symbols, etc. anywhere, anytime. These completely new forms of communication with a potential recipient are eagerly used by companies while building their image.

Convinced trust in the brand can be guaranteed by a positive, honest, authentic opinion and a good image of the company. Awareness built on reliable information provides a person with a sense of security and conviction of making the right choice. Effective communication between the company and the customer is a condition that must be met in order to gain the trust of a potential client.

Key words: the Internet, communication, image, brand, media

INTRODUCTION

Efforts undertaken by commercial organisations (but also for example non-profit organisations) in social media largely decide their success, they form the basis of functioning in the market. Prime determinants here are primarily a great number of users of relevant services, their desire for interaction as well as their involvement in exchanging information. Effectiveness of campaigning depends on knowledge of the clients (their attitudes, preferences, determinants of making their decisions etc.), and also on the ways they use the net [Antczak and Antczak 2018].

Particular forms of communicating over the Internet (forums, chats, social networks and others) make it possible to carry on a discussion on chosen subjects, to post comments, to improve and share knowledge. The Internet is an element of everyday life for a great number of people who cannot imagine functioning without it. It has become an element of social order, enabling contact within and between communities using various appliances, thus implementing interpersonal, mass, public and private communications [Pease 2001, 43].

The means of communication under discussion are implemented in a common field using modern technologies. Therefore, the Internet considerably facilitates communicating, informing, establishing and consolidating interpersonal contacts. Online relationships are links characterised by physical remoteness but at the same time emotional closeness [Ben-Ze'ev 2005].

Nowadays, one can observe the enormous role which the Internet fulfils in human private and professional lives, as well as on personal and business relationships. It is essential for individuals, whole communities and the world, primarily in regards to its most important features: a) global extent; b) the easy availability of offered services; c) multi-media [Molga 2016].

Together with the development of this medium its role in interpersonal communication is increasing. It is a convenient tool, used in many different fields of life (relations with culture and art, shopping, searching information, learning and improving, doing business etc.). It has revolutionised means of communication, inspires human activities, creates possibilities and perspectives [Siuda 2006, 181].

Company management means not only flow of information and materials, but also communication processes, due to their importance for the results achieved by the unit and efficiency other processes carried out there [Czekaj 2012, 21]. Marketing communicating is particularly essential, both to external (clients, contractors, competitors) and internal recipients (workers). This communication constitutes one of the levels of cultivating and keeping competitive advantage, it is based on coordination of promotional activities to gain a purchaser, through sending and receiving particular content [Pilarczyk 2010, 120].

The dynamically developing competitive environment of economic activity is largely formed by development of the IT community. The role of careful choice of communicative channels, used to create precise and convincing marketing messages, is systematically growing [Kotler 2005, 951].

The subject of this paper is to reveal the importance of social media and the changes in perceiving the role, place and forms of public relations, both by widely known organisations and by individual users of electronic media. Apart from studying the literature, the own research carried out and its results are presented here, they concern the influence of the Internet on brand positioning and taking decisions on the market.

1. THE INTERNET AS MEDIUM IN THE CONTEMPORARY WORLD

Nowadays it is hard to imagine the world functioning without the Internet. Properly used (many cases of abuse and unethical behaviour on the net are observed) it can be useful for individual persons and societies, businesses, institutions and states. It has the following values: a) educational – facilitates

access to information, includes many valuable reliable sources (although we should remember other sources which do not bear any value); b) communicational – enables intercommunication, arranging matters and solving problems, improves sending messages (private and business); c) establishing contacts – the Internet is the environment for getting in touch with others, overcoming geographical and cultural barriers, creating communities [Wojtkowiak 2013, 136].

The Internet is the medium offering communication in the broad sense, it facilitates the work of people and their performance. Nowadays, running a business activity without the Internet is practically impossible, because potential clients can search the best information about companies and their offers online, anywhere and anytime.

This all enables firms to build their corporate image, enhancing their brand using public relation tools. Their goals can be listed: building and establishing their corporate image, intercommunication with media and the environment, as well as developing a journalist base and Internet portals.

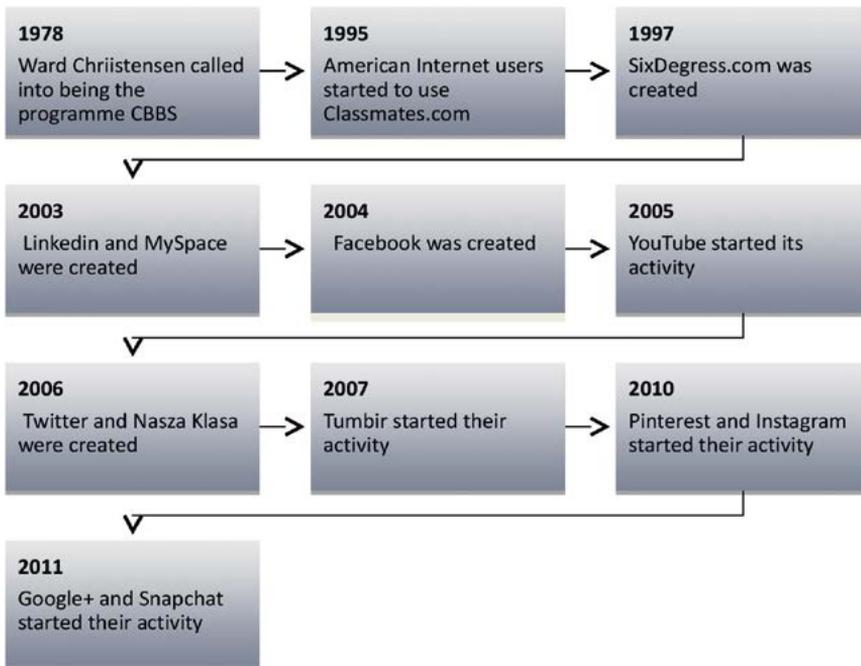
Marketing activities leading to building the brand are called branding. Therefore, these are the efforts supporting corporate identity (what the company does, the quality it provides, its reputation and the confidence it inspires). The main goals in building a corporate brand are: providing fast message content; increasing credibility; causing positive emotional reaction; motivating clients; increasing the level of client loyalty.

Activities directed at marketing and public relations are favourable, that is to say, all the tools which enable the creation of a corporate image foster it. Therefore, branding consists in expressing and emphasizing what is valuable in an organisation or product (characteristic features, competitive advantage, values, quality, vision, mission, etc.). Building the brand has its strategic character and aims to gain clients' loyalty and faithfulness to the brand. The tools used to build the brand can be traditional and Internet-based [Antczak and Antczak 2018].

2. HISTORY OF SOCIAL MEDIA

The first social networks were created in the United States at the end of 20th century. Picture 1 shows the chronology of creating the following services and the rapid pace in which they started to function. Nowadays we even cannot imagine everyday life without using them.

Picture 1. History of social networks.



Source: <https://blog.brand24.pl/40-lat-minelo-jak-jeden-dzien-czyli-krotka-historia-mediow-spoecznościowych/> [accessed: 19.05.2019].

Classmates.com. allowed their users to keep in touch with their schoolmates, while SixDegrees.com. with families and acquaintances. The latter service additionally created the possibility to make private profiles, send information to other people, search for users with similar interests. In successive years some new portals were created (Friendster.com, Tribe.net and LinkedIn), the breakthrough was the year 2003, they started the portal Myspace.com (one of the most popular services nowadays) [Szewczyk 2011, 383].

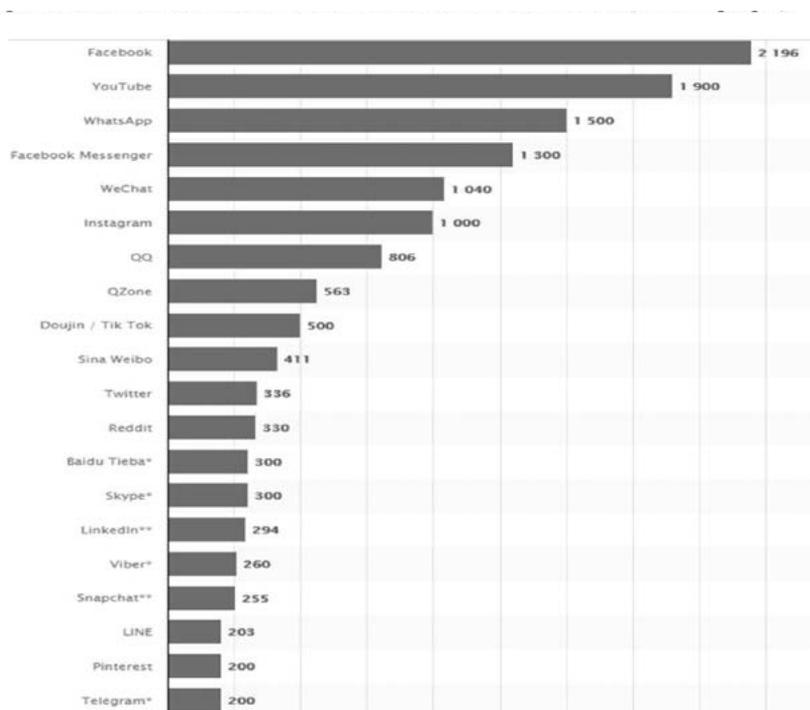
In Poland social networks have been functioning for several years and they become more and more popular every year. In 2001 the social network Fotka.pl was started, it enables transmitting pictures, evaluating them and commenting, and particularly making friendly relationships. During the succeeding years the following services have been created: Grono.net – portal functioning similarly to Facebook, enables building groups of acquaintances and theme groups; NaszaKlasa.pl – portal enabling searching for acquaintances from school years; Kwejk.pl – entertainment portal; Demotywatory.pl – entertainment portal; Wykop.pl – entertainment portal.

In their first years of functioning the relevant media were treated only as forms of entertainment and a way of communicating. Their functions have

become richer over time, they started to be marketing, political, and educational tools. Their essential task is to find acquaintances, introduce yourselves and your achievements and to obtain employment [Garwol 2017, 51].

The unusual popularity of social networks being observed over the years means that lots of activities from real world are also possible in the virtual world. For years, people have been able to get in touch with others, find new acquaintances and friends, express themselves, share their ideas, participate in common events without leaving homes. Services allow anonymity to be preserved, while also meeting similar people (with similar problems, fears, sense of humour etc.). The importance of relevant media is emphasized by the number of users.

Graph 1. Number of active users of social media in the world in 2018 (millions people).



Source: <https://socialpress.pl/2018/07/najnowsze-dane-na-temat-uzytownikow-mediow-spoecznościowych-na-swiecie> [accessed: 12.05.2019].

The data presented from July 2018 indicates that leading social portals gathered over one billion users from all over the world. For many years the leader has been Facebook (about 2.2bln users), then YouTube (1.9bln people), WhatsApp (1.5bln people), and Messenger (1.3bln users).

3. SOCIAL NETWORKS AND THEIR USE BY CONTEMPORARY AGENTS

The 21st century is a time of social intercommunicating based on digital transmission of information including marketing information. For a long time social media have been gradually replacing traditional media (press, television, radio), playing a progressively greater role in creating the image (of a person, brand, corporation).

Social media are named and defined in different ways. They are described as online communities, new media, digital media. They are the media, that create the possibility to co-create and exchange different content – knowledge, information, opinion, comments, transmission [Gustowski 2014, 90]. They enable direct intercommunication of users, who can exchange particular content. The universality of the Internet and appliances available for use on it allow individuals and organisations quick and easy connections with recipients offering particular information (texts, graphics, pictures, films etc.) [Podraza 2017].

Social media services constitute a type of Internet community, which provides its users with particular portals; they meet their needs to contact each other and they provide wide interaction due to exchanging information, interests and experiences [Frankowski 2009, 16].

Social media also provide various forms of electronic communication, which can be used thanks to the newest computer technologies, particularly the Internet. This primarily includes websites, e-mails, camcorders and digital cameras, digital data integration from telephones, and the so-called virtual reality environment [Witczak 2013, 91]. This is also a type of process of creating and spreading information, transformation, saving and exchanges, which are objects of social communication of individual or mass character. The Internet and mobile telephony are the principal technologies that reinvigorated the development of relevant media. These media are mainly characteristic by: a) multi-mediality – media involving multiple sensors in the process of coding and decoding the communication; b) individualization – enables a particular recipients' group to be reached with personalised information, adjusting the communication to the needs of individual recipients; c) interactivity – enables so-called feedback to be generated in real time, gathering information about recipients' reactions to communications sent to them; d) immateriality – information is presented digitally; e) portability (multifunctionality) – many platforms and solutions for using digital content, also ease of copying contents of communications without losing their quality; f) permanence of communications – very long lifespan of relevant information; g) availability – media provide information anytime and anywhere; h) social aspect – permanent contact with others (people, subjects), creating and keeping a sense

of attachment, belonging [Kowalski 2006, 263]. The features of social media mentioned above, show potential for effective use in marketing activity.

4. BUILDING CORPORATE IMAGE

In Polish literature we often meet two names *trade mark* and *brand*. The term trade mark is used in Polish legal system, while the term *brand* is used in economic sciences. English counterpart of Polish marka is brand (as a verbal noun brand means „żelazo do wypalania piętna”). The word is associated with the story on the territories of contemporary United States. The first breeders of cattle branded their herds of cattle using brand iron, and that brand enabled to determinate the animals' origin and guaranteed their good quality as well [Murphy 1991, 2].

One of the most frequently cited definitions of the brand in subject literature is that proposed by *American Marketing Association*, used by Ph. Kotler and T. Watkins, while in Polish literature by K. Białecki: Brand means: “name, term, pattern or combination of them created to identify goods or services of the sellers or their groups and to distinguish them from among the competition” [Kotler 2005, 410].

According to H. Pringler the brand is a symbol of promise what can be anticipated from the product or service, consequently it is the prediction what to expect from the people involved in product delivery [Pringle and Gordon 2006, 23].

The definitions of trade mark and brand indicate that their authors are in agreement that the basic function is primarily distinguishing the products and branding them. Brand (trade mark), usually placed directly on the commodity or its packing, establishes informal relationships with a consumer, however the term *brand* and *firm* should be distinguished, as used in regulations. Though the firm is the name as well, used by the entrepreneur running his business and is aimed to individualise the subject on the market [Kidyba 2012, 98].

After considering the essence of the brand, its main functions have to be indicated. In literature one can find the term that the brand as economic and legal category plays numerous functions, the most important of them are: guarantee, promotional, distinguishing, symbolic on identifying.

The basic function of the brand is its distinguishing function, and discriminants have one goal: to cause distinction among other competitive products. Thanks to the brand, over the last decades, the branded products can be distinguished from other goods of the same producer [Kotler and Pfoertsch 2007]. It should be indicated as well that the brands which include the name of the entrepreneur (e.g. Henry Ford) play not only distinguishing function but also identification one, different than in case of economic transactions using the brands not including the information about the owner of the brand [Kay 1996].

Promotional function of the brand, also known as advertising, causes that the brand can be used in the process of communication between the organisation and the recipient, including all the forms of promotional activities acknowledged as advertisement, acquisition, promotion, public relations and sponsoring [Antczak and Antczak 2018].

The essence of the promotional function of the brand is that: a) potentially and actually it is used for the promotion of the company as the essential permanent element of the process of communication with the market; b) it can be the medium of promotional content addressed to a target group of the brand. As mentioned above, the brand is a part of the process of communication between the company and market environment, and as the components of the process the following elements are indicated: object, thing (any fragment of reality), we refer to, so called brand reference as sign; signs and code assigning the signs to their references; medium; sender; recipient (potential or factual purchaser); disturbances in the process of communication: *physical noise* associated with precise transfer, *semantic noise* consists in non – adjustment the code to the recipient of communication and *disinformation* means transmitting false communication [Sznajder 1998].

The company should shape the brand using the language and symbols which are used by the recipients of the brand to make the message as comprehensible as possible. It limits the possibility of appearing the noise in the process of communication which can lead to improper perception of the meaning by the recipient [Witczak 2011].

The brand (apart from mentioned above) brings the following advantages for the purchaser: makes the purchasing decisions easier particularly having great variety of goods and brands on the market; reduces the risk associated with purchasing; supports the process of interpretation of the information by purchaser; increases satisfaction of possession the branded product; is mental shortcut of associations appearing in recipient's awareness as a result of different experiences [Kotler and Keller 2015].

To sum up, building the brand is the lasting process which requires from the company the preparation of long-term strategies so that every undertaken activity could be well memorised by the purchaser of the product or service.

The authors accept different models associated with elements consisting the brand image for example P. Kotler indicates six associative groups connected with the brand, there are the associations: with characteristic features for branded products (brand symbolising luxury or high quality); with benefits of purchase, using or possessing branded product (possessing a branded car can cause emotions connected with possessing the car associated with prestige); connected with values (brand of the producer is associated with healthy life style); with particular national culture (e.g. McDonald – American culture, Junkers – German culture); with features of the users of branded products

(RMF Classic – the radio for people with good artistic taste); with particular features of personality [Kotler 2005].

Appearance on the Internet the social networks, blogs, communications was the beginning of rapid transmission of information about new brands. The brand image built by organisations has been tested, the opinions of the Internet users started to play a decisive role in strategies of the companies in regards to lack of the control of expressing opinions by the users. Short text message downloaded on social service influences on the purchasing decisions of other users. Small local groups transform into the big communities, often the international ones, hence, the transfer of information directed towards the recipients has the great importance. The benefits and possibilities are unlimited but always they bear high risk. Building the image by social media is named Social Media Marketing or Social Media PR. Mutual communication of participants of the social media brings the strongest image effect [Budzyński 2018].

Research and case studies carried out by analysts indicate that the Internet market in Poland is going to develop dynamically over the nearest few years. The access to the Internet is becoming more and more common what causes the increased interest of this medium, and gives the chance to develop various branches.

Thanks to that, the organisation can afford to create and improve its corporate image, get the community together through aiming at the target group, obtaining brand identification, and also improving their effectiveness in case of management crisis. Public Relations activities are run on the Internet by the tools i.e.: a) the Internet service online press office, where information concerning corporate activity is broadcast. It allows quick connection with journalists and target recipients facilitating their work. It constitutes encouragement to provide with information available in show-window advertising; b) blog – the so called Internet diary, where an author uploads the content, available to read and intercommunicate by making comments; c) online press conference – broadcast online, enables participation in the conference without the need to organise the meetings, commute and waste time; d) mailing – effective and fast carrier of information related with products and the company itself. This is a form of advertising created by public relations specialists, that, in the shape of text or graphic file, is transferred to journalists; e) social media – including Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, Pinterest, Snapchat, Tumblr, LinkedIn or You Tube. They provide bilateral intercommunication between organisations and their business environment, help to make relationships and exchange opinions; f) NPRS (Net Public Relations Synergy) – a model of managing communicators using positioning tools, aiming to promote indicated aspects of image-communicational strategy in the Internet search engine; g) VIDEO tools – they provide voice and picture live transmissions; h) Webpage – portal aiming to present the firm image, its activities, mission

and views, as well as its available products. This is the Organisation Internet flagship.

The most popular social media are presented in picture 2.

Picture 2. Examples of popular channels of social media logos.



Source: own work on the basis of the Internet webpages.

The present power of the Internet should indicate how huge is its role in the functioning of the company. “Social media [...] allow the firms to speak publicly, check in on the Internet and support other communicational efforts. Due to their speed and currency, social media stimulate firms innovativeness and give full knowledge about clients’ needs” [Kotler and Keller 2006, 586].

In our contemporary world this is a norm to search services and commodities via the Internet, this is why it is crucial to attach importance to press office or website, because this is the company flagship. Adjusting aesthetics and artwork of the webpage, comprehensibility and clarity of information, and also the possibility to use everything efficiently, are essential. Care of these elements, their high quality can have a great influence on recipients. The interested person improves the brand awareness and knowledge. Implementing e-public relations tools allows extending the range of activities, improves intercommunication with recipients, contributes to effectiveness of brand activities.

5. RESULTS OF OWN RESEARCH

The good brand image is the measure of its success. Nowadays the market is competitive practically at every branch. Inducing clients’ interest, attracting them to the brand and building the base of regular recipients is not an easy goal to achieve. To be succeeded in this process is depended on the actions we undertake. The brand credibility and reliability of communication are the factors for potential clients which decide of purchasing, as they build the trust and create the so called bound between the brand and recipient. This is why many companies, being aware of the advantages which could be brought by modern public relations, decide to use their activities and strategies.

The main goal of the research carried out is to show the importance of the activities within public relations in the process of shaping the brand image. The bare talent or vision are not sufficient factors to provide success of the brand. Its idea is building and consolidating the long lasting relationships with

recipients, as well as gaining the trust of the environment and the positive opinion. Systematic and proper communication aims to achieve the expected attitudes and subsequently the activities.

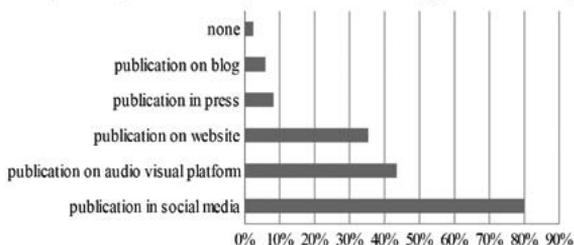
The following goal of the research carried out is to present the image as an essential factor in the process of creation the brand. In the face of great competition it is not easy for the brand to be distinguished and at the same time to gain competitive advantage on the background of competition. In the conditioning of the contemporary market the brand is a type of point of comparison which allows the consumer to evaluate the material features of the commodity and related non-material values. Nowadays the brand image has become one of the essential factors influencing on consumers' decisions. The brand has the influence on the potential client's opinion about the goods offered by it. The image is the way of perception of the brand by its recipients, as well as their convictions and associations related to the brand. Generally, the good image of the brand starts its recognition and positive associations, which as a consequence, should result in real benefits for the brand.

An interesting approach is to research the influence of different methods and forms of interaction on consumers' decisions at the market, including the importance of the brand and using social networks in this process. The research was carried out in April 2019 using an Internet survey, available on Facebook for three days, completed by respondents in Poland. 155 persons were interviewed and their age was not predetermined.

Some of the results of the research directly associated with the relevant subject are presented to the needs of this paper. The first substantial question (with the possibility of multiple answers) is related to the type of publication which has the strongest influence on the interviewee. The respondents most often chose publication on social media (80%), while publication on audio-visual platform (in other words, YouTube, Vimeo) was chosen almost half as often – 43.5%, the other possible answers “publication on website” – 35.3%, “publication in press” – 8.2%, “publication on Blog” – 5.9%, “none” – 2.4%.

Graph 2. Form of publication profoundly influences respondents.

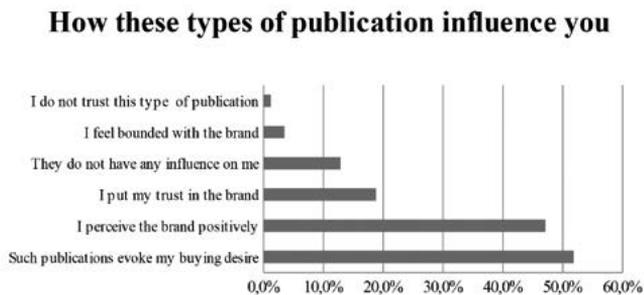
What do you think, which form of publication has the biggest influence on you?



Source: own research.

The next question, also with the possibility of multiple answers, should show respondents' reaction to publications of this type. Over half of interviewees (51.8%) admitted that publications evoke their desire to buy. A sizeable proportion of interviewees said that due to such publications the brand is perceived positively – 47.1%. The answer “I put trust in brand” – 18.8%, “I feel bounded with brand” – 3.5%. The rest variants – “publications do not have any influence on me” – 12.9%, “I do not trust these kinds of publications” – 1.2%.

Graph 3. The way in which publication influences respondents.

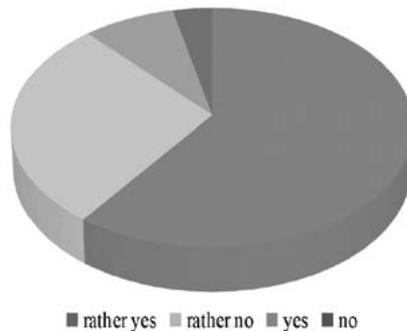


Source: own research.

The last part of the research concerns the credibility for recipients of communications sent by a brand (firm). The majority of interviewees (60%) said that such information is rather credible for them, with 28.2% replying rather not. Only 8.2% declared definitively for communicators' authenticity, as against 3.5% negative answers, indicating lack of trust in them.

Graph 4. Evaluation of published content concerning products and brand services.

Do you think that uploaded information associated with products or services is credible?



Source: own research.

The research carried out proved that the vast majority of interviewees pay attention on content of publications uploaded or communicated by a brand. This result demonstrates that, in this way, a corporation's brand can contact a potential client, encourage him/her, introduce itself with an offer, even including its philosophy and the message sent with it.

CONCLUSIONS

Many commercial organisations disseminate their profiles on their own. Others use specialists' services and marketing agencies, however, their common goal is increasing the number of purchasers and proponents (potential clients). Corporations face social pressure to be noticeable online, to be active in relevant services and be up to date providing current information.

According to the results of the research carried out, the most influential form of publication was found to be communication uploaded in social media, which makes it, in regards to its influence, the most attractive place for brand message. The next most effective agent was found to be publications on visual platforms like YouTube or Vimeo, and those published on websites. It is worth noticing that publications in the press or on blogs do not have great influence on recipients. Therefore, it is important to analyse the offer of sites for publishing information. The appropriate choice creates unusually great possibilities for the brand. Content and place of communication offer an impressive potential, since more than half of the interviewees claim that publications make them wish to buy. Moreover, for many recipients they are a kind of stimulus, due to which they positively perceive the brand, at times inducing trust, which unquestionably positively influences the corporation's image.

It should be mentioned that social media are still a relatively new, dynamically developing area, which has not been entirely discovered, and creates huge possibilities. Use of these services by companies is an impressively popular phenomenon, which is researched and analysed primarily by corporations aiming to reach clients more effectively and thus to influence their purchasing decisions.

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MEDIA SPOŁECZNOŚCIOWE JAKO POLE DO ROZWOJU MARKI FIRMY

Streszczenie. Współcześnie podstawowym miejscem komunikacji jest oczywiście Internet, który stał się niezwykle popularną przestrzenią społeczną, umożliwiającą użytkownikom zaspokajanie różnorodnych potrzeb. Dzięki cyberprzestrzeni możliwe jest wymienianie między sobą tekstów, obrazów, filmów, symboli, itp. w dowolnym miejscu i czasie. Z tych zupełnie nowych form komunikowania się z potencjalnym odbiorcą korzystają, naturalnie, firmy budując jednocześnie swój wizerunek.

Zaufanie i przekonanie odbiorcy do marki, może zagwarantować pozytywna, szczerą, autentyczna opinia i dobry wizerunek firmy. To właśnie budowana świadomość, oparta na wiarygodnych

informacjach, zapewnia zainteresowanemu poczucie bezpieczeństwa i przeświadczenie o prawidłowym wyborze. Skuteczna komunikacja między przedsiębiorstwem a odbiorcą to warunek, który należy spełnić, aby zyskać zaufanie potencjalnego klienta.

Słowa kluczowe: Internet, komunikacja, wizerunek, marka, media

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