

Social media in the context of marketing innovations— based on own research among service companies from Szczecin

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Abstract: Based on observation of the market and the need for change the process of creating marketing innovations in service companies in *Szczecin*, the author adopted as the aim of the article the identification of new marketing solutions for the service market by way of an evaluation of the possibility of taking advantage of social media potential and social media activities carried out by local companies. In assessing the tools characteristic of new media and the attitude of companies towards these tools, an attempt was made to identify opportunities for companies to use social media. As part of the research, a questionnaire was used that was targeted at owners and managers of local companies from *Szczecin*. The study was expanded to include virtual ethnography, which involved observation of a company's profile on social media. The article presents a proprietary classification of social media by social channels and their functions. The author has paid particular attention to breaking down social media not by the technology they use, but by their practical applications.

Keywords: marketing innovations, social media, service companies

1. Introduction

Contemporary companies face a large challenge—functioning and competing in rapidly changing market conditions. Methods of building relationships with customers used to date are falling into oblivion and become forgotten. The products and services offered are continuously subjected to change to meet the swiftly changing customer needs.

The experiences of local companies prove that companies that offer products that are both innovative and meet customer expectations win against the competition. Researchers from around the world and business professionals agree that the most important role of contemporary local companies is continuous improvement of products and services (Cushman and King 1995). The literature on the subject highlights that innovations are changes whereby a company assimilates the

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knowledge it has acquired. As J. Wiśniewska claims, innovations are considered to be the main factor determining the development of modern companies (Wiśniewska, 2010, p. 31). Therefore, companies that want to be thought of as innovative should focus on acquiring information on how to improve their products, services and ways of communicating with customers.

According to Drucker, innovations permeate all areas of a company's activity and these can be changes in product design, marketing method, offered price, service for a customer, or communication method (Drucker, 1993, p. 25). A special type of innovation in terms of local companies is marketing innovation, including its possibilities arising from taking advantage of the potential of the attractiveness of social media. The popularity of services, development of social networking sites and other channels of communication creates unlimited opportunities for local companies to directly communicate with all stakeholders. The development of new technologies and association of various social and economic planes are headed towards involving social media users in joint decision making and co-creating the company, in both virtual and actual terms, for example, in stores or premises with a fixed location. Innovation using new media can be not just about the community as a whole, but about specific users. The rapid development of online services is an opportunity for companies that in their quest to be thought of as innovative or pro-consumer they focus their activities on new channels of communication.

Social media only gained popularity in Poland in the last several years, and this has resulted in a research gap due to a lack of scientific studies devoted to social media in local companies. However, the author hopes that the examples of small and micro service companies from Szczecin outlined in this article will be an inspiration for other metropolises and for the commencement of research not only in corporations with advanced IT and customer service departments, but also in small and micro companies such as hair salons, cosmetic clinics, restaurants and food outlets.

The aim of the article is to highlight new marketing solutions for the needs of the service market by way of an evaluation of the possibility of making the most of social media and social media activities carried out by local companies. To achieve this goal, the research methods involved the use of a comparative analysis of concepts and conclusions published in the scientific literature. Empirical studies were also carried out among local companies from Szczecin to analyze their social media activity based on virtual ethnography. The author used Polish tools, i.e. Brand24 and Sotrender, to monitor the firms. The research tools allowed her to analyze the companies' social media activity and define their involvement. The research results led to many conclusions that refer to the processes of building marketing innovation in the field of social media.

2. Marketing innovations

Innovations are associated with the technical and technological sphere, and are often incorrectly equated to discoveries, while the social aspect of innovation is often ignored. On the other hand, an integral component of creating a company based on knowledge is innovative solutions, not only from the field of technology and economics, but also social activities. Local services such as restaurants and food outlets, hair salons, cosmetic clinics and consultancy are increasingly penetrating into the market economy, and are being noticed in the virtual world.

This refers to new operating regions, such as creating marketing innovation together with using the latest channels of communication, such as social media (Pawlak, 2015, p. 227).

At present, marketing innovations are becoming one of the main methods of improving effectiveness not only for large corporations, but particularly for micro and small companies. The term *innovation in service provision* means every implementation of a new or improved process of service provision or any crucial element that forms part of this service, for example, communication with customers via Facebook, WhatsApp or Instagram, that is successful and accepted by market participants. The first use of social media to communicate with customers can be a manifestation of innovation. However, as noted by Jacek Chwałek (2014, p. 88), such a general term does not take into account the diversity of innovations that can have very different effects.

The meaning of innovation in services depends mainly on the type of innovation. The term *marketing innovations* has been defined for the purposes of economic practice by the OECD (Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development) as “A new marketing method involving significant changes in product design or packaging, product placement, product promotion or pricing, or business model, arising due to a new marketing strategy of a company” (*Innowacja marketingowa*, 2020).

A distinctive feature of marketing innovations among other changes within the scope of marketing strategies is the fact that they rely on the implementation of a marketing strategy that is new for the company. It must be part of a new marketing concept or strategy introducing significant changes compared with current marketing methods. Marketing innovations do not include seasonal, regular or routine changes to marketing tools, or marketing methods that have been previously used to acquire new markets (Szymański, 2012, p. 266). The goal of marketing innovations is to better satisfy the needs of customers and open new markets, for example, enter the online world and run a YouTube channel increasing the demand for services rendered at a fixed location. The author presents examples of marketing innovation activities in Table 1.

Table 1. Examples of innovative activities in the area of marketing innovations

Innovation plane	Characteristics	Examples of activities
Product	Significant changes in the project and product design constituting an element of a new marketing strategy. Changes in the packaging of such products, such as food products and beverages, where the packaging is the main determinant of the appearance of the product.	A change in the form and appearance of products not leading to a change in their functional or performance features. Another example can be the introduction of significant changes in the form, appearance or taste of food or beverages, such as the introduction of new flavours of a food product or acquiring a new customer segment.
Price	Innovations within the scope of pricing involve the use of new pricing strategies for the sale of products or services of the company on the market.	The first use of a new method—correction of the price of a good or service depending on demand (for example, when demand is low, the price is also low). The introduction of a new method allowing customers to choose the desired features of a product on the company’s website, and then checking the price and the chosen combination of features.

Promotion	New marketing methods within the scope of product promotion involve the use of new concepts for promoting a company’s goods or services.	Introduction of a system of personalized information, for example, that obtained based on using Facebook. First implementation of product promotion by opinion leaders, famous people or specific trendsetting groups.
Distribution	Implementation of new sales channels.	First implementation of a sales system via Facebook or Instagram. The implementation of new concepts for product display in the form of products being presented by bloggers or influencers.

Source: Author’s own elaboration based on the OECD, 2018, pp. 69–75.

Based on the above-mentioned examples, it can be noted that the breakdown of marketing innovations as per the marketing mix simplifies the classification of innovation.

The share of entities that have introduced marketing innovations increases along with the value measured based on the number of employees, as seen in Figure 1. As can be seen from the Statistics Poland report (Figure 1), in the services, the percentage of companies implementing marketing innovations in entities with 250 employees or more was four times that in entities with 10–49 employees. Such a result may indicate greater awareness of medium and large companies about innovative solutions for building relationships with customers.

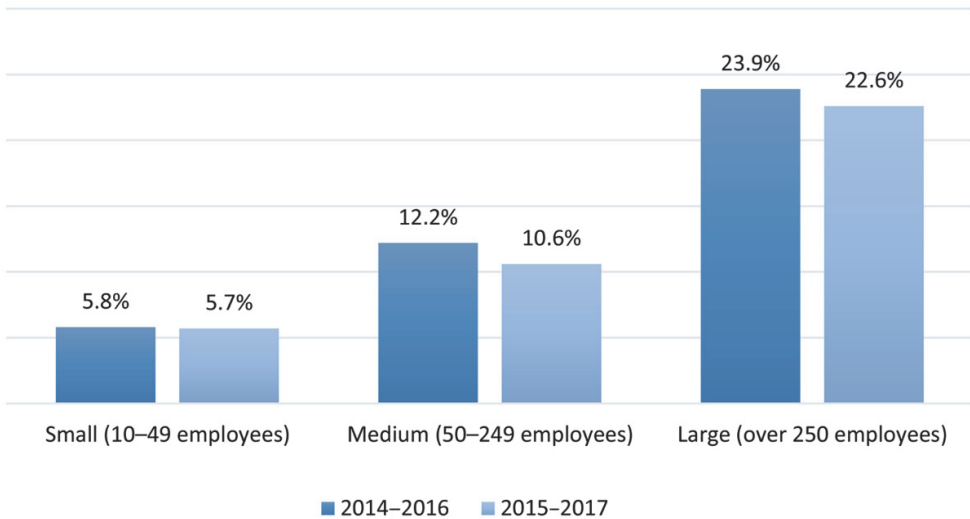


Figure 1. Implementation of marketing innovations in service companies in 2014–2017

Source: Author’s own elaboration based on Statistics Poland reports.

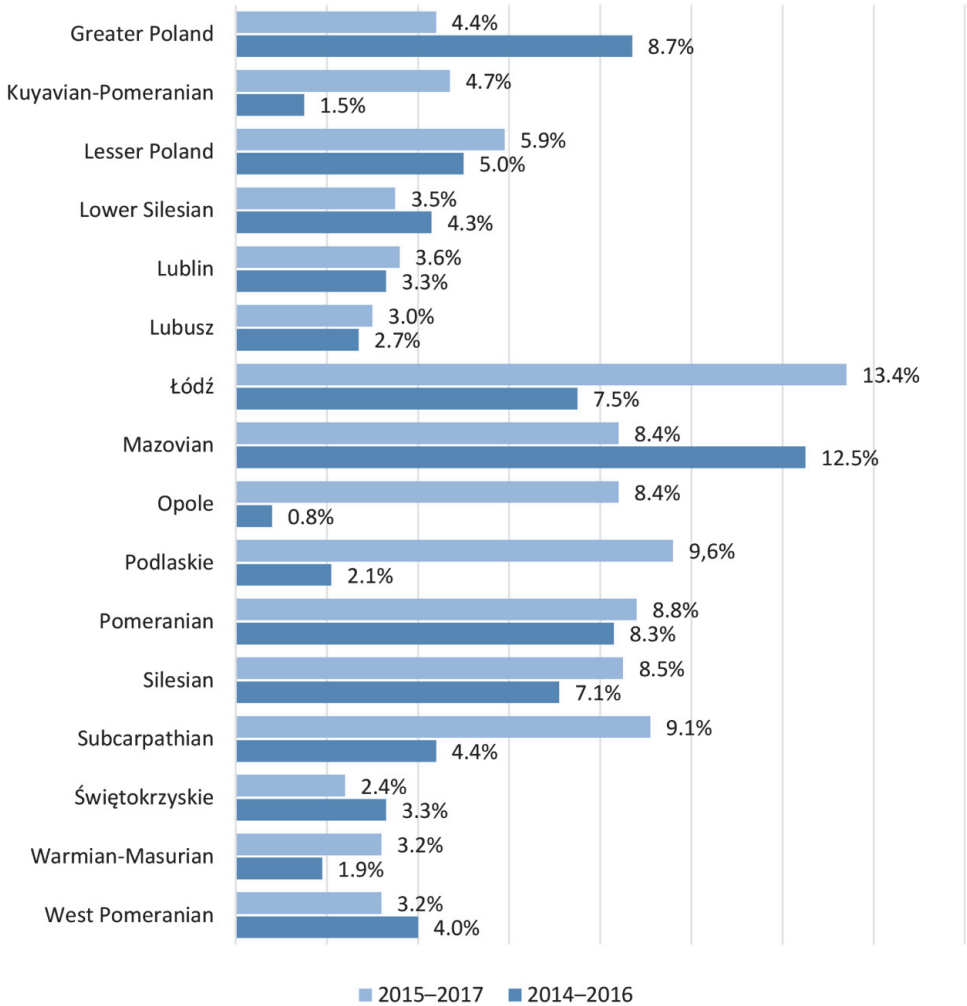


Figure 2. Service companies that in 2014–2017 implemented marketing innovations by voivodeship

Source: Author’s own elaboration based on Statistics Poland reports.

Compared with 2014–2016, most voivodeships saw an increase in the percentage of service companies that implemented marketing innovations. The highest percentage increase among service companies was noted in the Opole Voivodeship (by 7.6 percentage points) (Statistics Poland, 2018).

3. Social media presence of companies

Studies on the innovation of companies focus on the increasing role of not only internal organizational factors, for example, absorptive capacity (Glabiszewski, 2016; Glabiszewski and Zastempowski, 2016; Limaj and Bernroider, 2019) and innovation capability (Aas and

Breunig, 2017; Alves et al., 2017), as well as external environmental factors (Assink, 2006). The Internet has become the basis for mass exchange of information among customers. Abandoning traditional forms of marketing (radio, television, banners, posters, flyers, newspapers), consumers are increasingly demanding more control over their media consumption, which is closely related to their convenience. When using social media, contemporary consumers expect access to notifications and news anywhere, anytime. With each passing day, social media are transforming into an increasingly influential channel of communication with customers. The latest Digital 2020 report presents an increase in Polish social media users. In January 2020, 50% of the Polish population actively used social media, spending on average two hours per day using them (Digital, 2020). This result shows that local companies can use social media to easily reach their desired target group while decreasing the costs of promotional activities. As highlighted by Weber, the activities of companies on social media must be based on a completely new method of communicating with consumers in the digital environment (Weber, 2009). On the other hand, Drury explains that as a result of the growth of the network of relationships on the Internet, establishing contact with customers has become the main element of social media marketing activities. Until recently perceived as a one-dimensional link, marketing has now become a multi-dimensional process that covers both the company as well as the customers (Drury, 2009). Turkish researchers agree with this view—in their opinion, the development of social media to date has impacted traditional purchasing processes, and content marketing is no longer the only way to build customer confidence (Bitiktas and Tuna, 2020). Social media allow companies to create groups of local customers, encouraging them to share ideas, which can later be used by the organizations in the creation or development of products and services. In 2019, one in three companies in Poland were using at least one social media. The most popular tool was social networking sites (Table 2).

Table 2. Enterprises using social media

Business size classes	Year	Use of social media				
		Social networks	Enterprise's blogs or microblogs	Multimedia content-sharing websites	Wiki tools	At least one of the following
		In % of total enterprises in a group				
Small	2016	20.9	3.5	6.8	1.9	22.5
	2017	23.1	3.5	6.6	1.6	24.2
	2018	25.8	3.8	7.1	1.7	26.9
	2019	32.2	4.7	10.5	1.8	33.2
Medium	2016	30.9	6.7	13.3	2.8	33.6
	2017	35.5	7.1	15.7	3.8	38.4
	2018	38.5	7.7	16.4	3.3	41.1
	2019	45.6	7.8	20.7	3.7	47.2

Large	2016	49.8	16.6	32.4	12.2	54.4
	2017	54.6	18.7	35.9	12.6	58.4
	2018	60.1	20.4	39.1	13.1	63.8
	2019	67.7	24.0	46.5	14.8	70.5

Source: Author’s own elaboration based on GUS, 2019.

An analysis of the above-mentioned data gives rise to the statement that the awareness of small and medium enterprises of social media activities is lower than that of large corporations. The growth trend (Figure 3) shows that year on year, increasingly more companies are using social networking channels to communicate with their customers, which is the basis for the conclusion that the popularity of marketing innovations in companies is increasing.

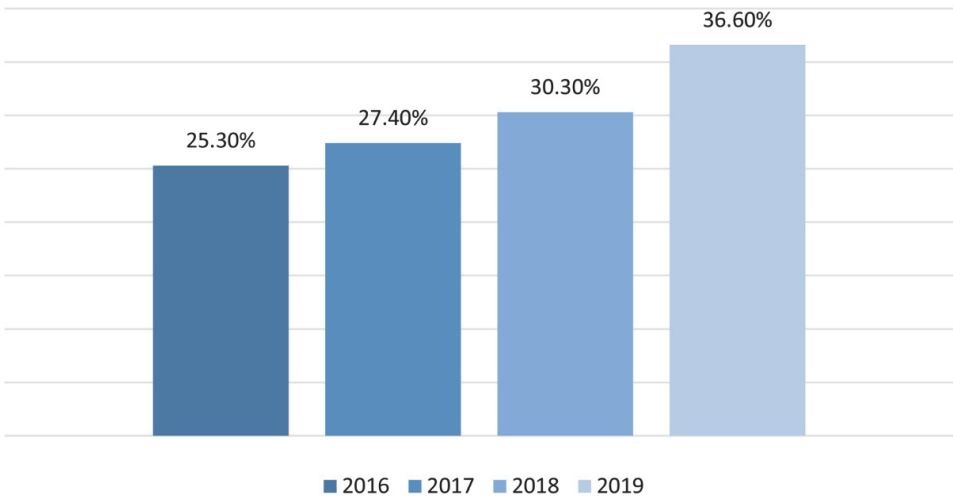


Figure 3. Use of social media by Polish companies in 2016–2019

Source: Author’s own elaboration based on Statistics Poland reports.

4. Social media and their effectiveness

The term *social media* covers a wide range of channels of communication referred to as Web 2.0. They include numerous social networking sites, which bring together people, for example, based on their place of residence, interests or problems. The next significant channel of communication is forums and discussion groups, often created linked to news sites and the websites of companies, newspapers and publishing houses. Another form of online media that enables dialogue with communities is blogs and microblogs. Content communities, which allow users to exchange multimedia files, are also becoming a popular social medium. They enable online community members to easily share their views on a given topic (Fabianiak-Czeraniak, 2012). Social media and their rules of activity are based on functionality and reach.

The author pays particular attention to breaking down social media not by the technology they use, but by their practical applications. Based on numerous reports about Web 2.0 (Firat, 2019; Wamuyu, 2018; Koban, 2018; Kaplan, 2010) and efforts being made to present the source of the building of marketing innovation, Figure 4 presents the author's own classification of social media. According to the author, these categories may overlap and should not be treated as a rigid key that can unambiguously break websites or online services down.

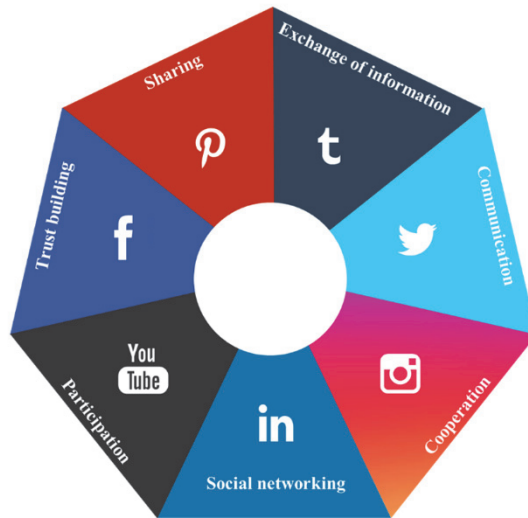


Figure 4. Classification of social media by social channels and their functions

Source: Author's own elaboration based on own observational material.

1. Social media targeted at joint participation associated with the term *user-generated content* (UGC) and related to content shared publicly online, the authors of which are not full-time professionals, but people who without previous experience want to share content on the YouTube channel (Flasiński, 2015). This is a great opportunity for micro and small enterprises to, at low cost, advertise their business by sharing content about the specifics of their services.
2. Social media targeted at sharing information, i.e. blogs/ microblogs. As Sebastian Kotuła said, "it's the development of the blogosphere that broadened the category of content creators to practically every person. Such a classification makes a consumer a prosumer, someone like a 'wreader'. The term *wreader*, which is a combination of the words *write* and *reader*, means someone who is a writer and a reader at the same time—a creator and consumer" (Kotuła, 2007). Blogs can help companies promote their business through specialists and opinion leaders who are well versed on the topic and thus create the image of the enterprise. Due to their interactivity, blogs allow easy creation of communities, decrease the distance between a company and consumers, and present a humanized picture of the company, all of which is usually not possible using a conventional website (Mazurek, 2008). Such activities are characteristic of the social networking channel Tumblr, on which users can register to create a blog, in which they can choose from seven different types of posts based on the

type of content being shared: text, photo, link, chat, quote, audio and video (Bourlai, 2018, p. 47). By using Tumblr, companies can use their blog to inspire the use of their services. The main users of Tumblr are young people, so enterprises interested in this target group have a great opportunity to share information with potential customers.

3. Social media targeted at mutual sharing by classification of fragments of text assigned to a specific fragment of information (text, multimedia file) (Zieliński, 2008). This classification allows users to search company websites for relevant material (for example, information on a new product) in a quicker and more efficient manner. In terms of marketing innovations, companies can analyze consumer preferences, as well as sites that are frequently visited and recommended to other users (Miller, 2007). An example of such activities is the social networking channel Pinterest, which allows users to search for and browse interesting or creative ideas. Visual materials and links to specific sites are stored on the user's virtual boards, which can be organized however the user likes. This is a helpful tool for companies, as it can increase traffic directed from a Pinterest account to a blog or company website for free (szybkielajki.pl, 2019).
4. Social media targeted at collaboration. User collaboration in the forms of social tagging means that users of, for example, Instagram, can quickly and easily completely for free help advertize their favourite company by tagging its profile on their account. A specific feature of Web 2.0 is public tagging, which is unlike rigid categorization of information by one person.
5. Social media targeted at building confidence. The impact of consumer confidence on increasing the value of a company is largely underestimated by managers. Building user confidence towards a site creator brings about many benefits, such as increasing the intensity of use of the site, increasing the number and quality of content shared (the user is more willing to share personal information), increasing the share of the site in overall online communication, and encouraging the use of paid services available on the website. Research results show that Facebook is the most popular social media domain (2.45 billion users around the world) (Statista.com, 2020). In Poland there are 21.2 million Facebook users, and it's the second-most popular platform after google.pl (26.5 million). Facebook brings together approximately 55% of the Polish population (Gemius, 2019) and offers the opportunity to create company fanpages that enable dynamic interaction with users, thus building confidence.
6. Social media targeted at communication enable not only promotion of a company's products and services, but also facilitate enterprises in establishing contact with and presenting themselves to users who are influencers, i.e. people who are influential in a given sector. An example of such activities is the social networking channel Twitter, where communication is brought to the forefront using hashtags, which make it easier to establish relationships and highlight the values of a company, and for the company to present itself as an expert in its industry. As the user analysis carried out by Pawlak shows, Twitter is an attractive virtual place for promotion of micro and small enterprises (Pawlak, 2016).
7. Social media targeted at establishing and maintaining relationships. Despite the fact that social media are mainly associated with dialogue with final customers on B2C markets (Deszczyński, 2012), they can also be used for professional communication on the B2B market (Cawsey and Rowley, 2016). Among hundreds of virtual communication platforms, LinkedIn and its 415 million members from over 200 countries (including just

under one million from Poland) seems to be the best platform for establishing business cooperation (LinkedIn, 2016). It makes it possible for even small and medium enterprises, including micro companies, to have an easier option for starting international expansion, which until fairly recently was reserved only for large entities (Vollmer, 2013).

Knowledge of the opportunities and applications of specific social media allows firms to build relationships with customers in an innovative way. The future of every company includes being open to new communication methods, more activity in online communities, and using the Internet to enter into interaction with potential buyers.

5. Use of social media by micro and small companies from Szczecin

Quantitative research supported by qualitative analysis were conducted by the author between January and March 2020, and focused on activities undertaken by companies on social media. The study looked at 31 local companies from Szczecin in the cosmetics, hairdressing, restaurant and food outlet industries. As part of the research, a questionnaire was used that was targeted at owners and managers of the companies. The studies were broadened to include virtual ethnography, which is a qualitative research method constituting the application of a set of methods and techniques used in anthropology for the virtual environment, with an unchanging epistemological message (Etnografia, 2020). The selection criterion was local micro and small companies. When asked whether their business uses social media, 62% of respondents answered “yes”. The second question was about using paid Facebook advertizements—56% of respondents said that they do use them. In the second question, the respondents were asked to indicate the reason why they advertize their company’s profile on Facebook (Figure 5). The majority of respondents (51%) use Facebook advertizements to acquire new customers. Only 9% stated that a Facebook ad increases the use of services at a fixed location.

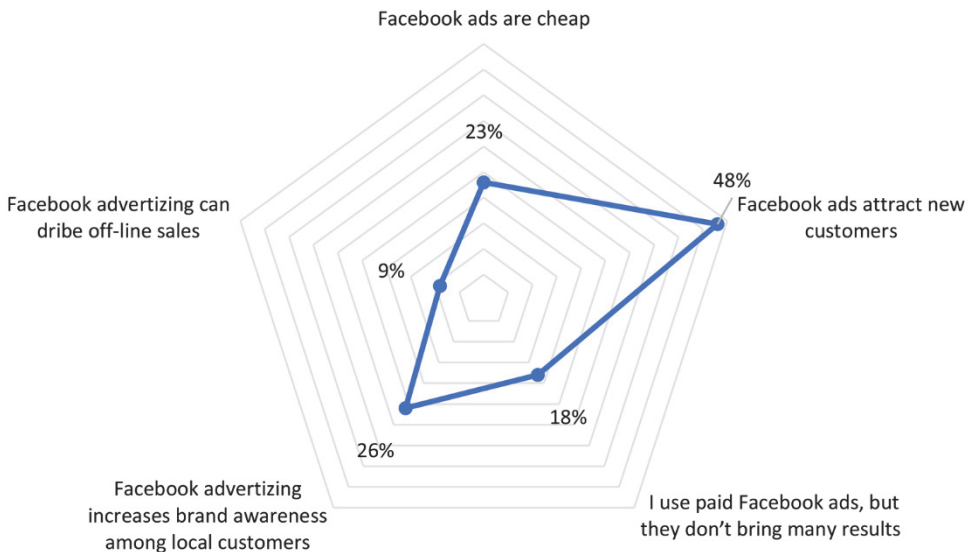


Figure 5. Why do companies advertize their business on Facebook?

The research included observation of selected virtual communities of local companies, and an analysis of the content published on sites related to them. As part of the research needs, the fanpages of local companies from Szczecin with Facebook accounts are considered as an area of activity of virtual communities. The results of the study using virtual ethnography show that among companies that declared that they use social media, 86% have a company fanpage on Facebook, but less than half (41%) actively participate in building a community. The average time for publishing posts is 10 days. A lack of regularity in adding posts may indicate a low level of involvement of micro and small companies. When asked whether the company uses the services of a marketing agency to advertize their business online, 69% of respondents said that they do not. The respondents were also asked to indicate the reasons why they do/ do not cooperate with marketing agencies. The results of the study are shown in Figures 6 and 7.

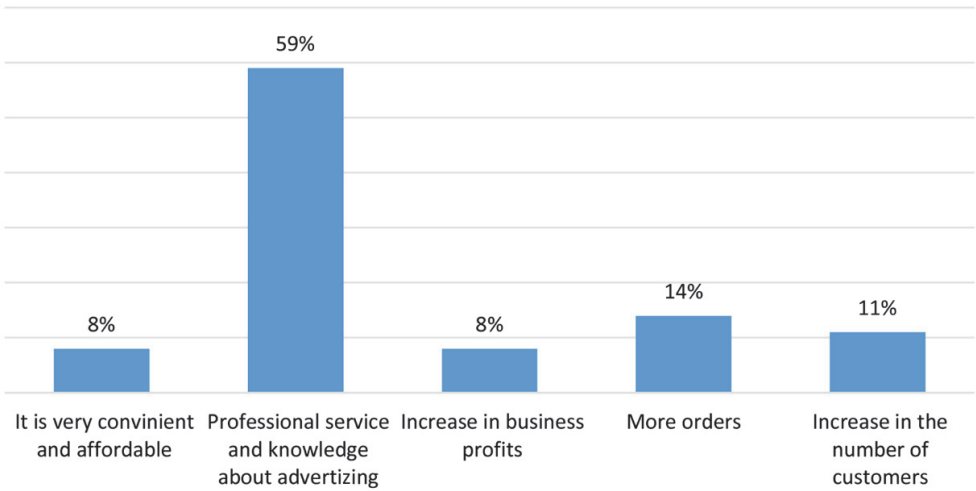


Figure 6. Why does the company use the services of a marketing agency?

Source: Author’s own elaboration.

As can be seen in Figure 7, 59% of users use marketing agencies because experience and professionalism in the operation of online tools can impact the effectiveness of social media activities. Companies that do not use marketing agencies claim that they do not need external companies to advertize online (51%), while 26% of respondents said that the prices of marketing agencies are too high to be able to use their services.

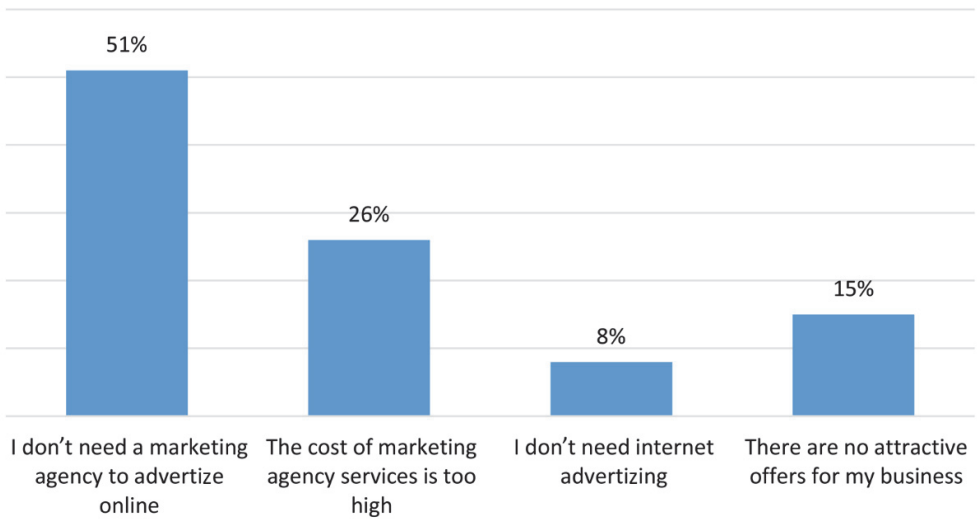


Figure 7. Why does the company not use the services of a marketing agency?

Source: Author's own elaboration.

A key element of the virtual communities of local companies is having a dialogue between the company and its fans. This is why it is extremely important to respond to all fan comments, and to conduct advertizing activities on Facebook in a deliberate manner. The proper overseeing of Facebook advertizing accounts can help local companies build relationships with potential customers. As it is seen in Figure 7, 51% of companies do not use marketing agencies because they have no such need, not because of the high costs, which can mean a lack of awareness about the effectiveness of marketing agency services.

6. Conclusion

In summary of the considerations presented in this report, it should be noted that the introduction of marketing innovations by service companies can be a great opportunity to develop the business. New marketing solutions for the services market can include active communication with customers using social networking channels, such as Facebook and Instagram. As the Digital2020 report shows, the number of social media users is increasing year on year, which creates a good opportunity to establish relationships with potential customers from around the world. The use of social media is due to the response to market demand, but also the unlimited reach and involvement of stakeholders, including, in particular, customers who regularly use the services of companies with fixed locations. Marketing innovations should refer not only to technological changes, but first and foremost to new habits and behaviours of companies, which should become the creators of messages on new social media and websites. The results of the study show that companies from Szczecin do not take full advantage of the potential of customers on social media—the lack of regular posts on company fanpages decreases the opportunity to build relationships with customers. The study using virtual eth-

nography shows that 86% of companies surveyed have a company fanpage on Facebook, but less than half (41%) actively participate in building a community. Fanpages are an important source of information about the company, and are often the first point of contact in terms of news on the company's offer. Local companies from Szczecin should not ignore the potential of Facebook and its advertising activities. Properly conducted Facebook advertising campaigns are becoming a crucial element of the marketing innovations of companies, and owners of local small businesses should focus not only on having a Facebook fanpage, but also on active, regular and proper marketing activities using Facebook.

In an environment where competitors implement new, better marketing activities, innovations are currently one of the key factors determining competitive advantage for service companies. The above considerations should become the rationale for micro and small companies, which compared with large corporations are not very active on social media. Business owners should focus on the essence of marketing innovations, which can improve the process of building relationships with customers thanks to communication on social media. The author is considering future research involving a comparative analysis of the SME sector building a virtual community using Facebook.

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Media społecznościowe w kontekście innowacji marketingowych – na podstawie badań własnych wśród przedsiębiorstw usługowych ze Szczecina

Abstrakt: Na podstawie obserwacji rynku i potrzeb zmian w procesie tworzenia innowacji marketingowych w przedsiębiorstwach usługowych w Szczecinie autorka za cel artykułu przyjęła identyfikację nowych rozwiązań marketingowych dla rynku usługowego poprzez ocenę możliwości wykorzystania potencjału mediów społecznościowych i działań w nich podejmowanych przez firmy lokalne. Badając narzędzia charakterystyczne dla nowych mediów oraz podejście przedsiębiorstw do nich, podjęto próbę identyfikacji możliwości wykorzystania mediów społecznościowych przez przedsiębiorstwa. Media społecznościowe zyskały popularność w Polsce dopiero w ostatnich kilku latach, co spowodowało powstanie luki badawczej,

w której brakuje opracowań naukowych poświęconych mediom społecznościowym w firmach lokalnych. Do przeprowadzenia badań wykorzystano kwestionariusz ankiety, który był skierowany do właścicieli oraz menedżerów firm lokalnych ze Szczecina. Badania zostały rozszerzone o metodę etnografii wirtualnej, która polegała na obserwacji profilu firmy w mediach społecznościowych. W artykule została przedstawiona autorska klasyfikacja mediów społecznościowych według kanałów społecznościowych i ich funkcji. Autorka artykułu zwróciła szczególną uwagę na podział mediów społecznościowych nie ze względu na wykorzystaną w nich technologię, ale ze względu na zastosowania praktyczne.

Słowa kluczowe: innowacje marketingowe, media społecznościowe, przedsiębiorstwa usługowe
