

COMMUNICATION OF POLISH CITIES IN SOCIAL MEDIA

*Łukasz Sułkowski**, *Dominika Kaczorowska-Spychalska***

Abstract

Background. Dynamic development of social media imposed a necessity of looking for new methods and tools to reach customers. It also concerns cities that increasingly apply solutions that proved successful in business. Thanks to using a variety of social media they can communicate with specific groups of stakeholders and create their image more effectively than before.

Research aims. The aim of the article is to determine the essence and scope of social media usage in the process of communication of Polish cities.

Method. The article was written on the basis of available literature and the author's own research. The research comprised 120 biggest Polish cities and was conducted using an online questionnaire, which resulted from the purpose and subject of the research. The research was conducted in the period between 30.05.2014 and 15.06.2014.

Key findings. Individual tools of social media offer broad opportunities for the process of cities communication. However, the effectiveness of actions carried out by means of them depends not only on the idea but also on knowledge, competence, commitment of people responsible for their implementation. Moreover, a city budget is undoubtedly a factor that determines the level and scope of using social media in the strategy of Polish cities' communication.

Keywords: Communication, Social media, City branding

INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND

The growth in dynamics and character of competition between various territorial units that have been observed both at a national and international level, imposed a need for looking for new methods and tools in implemented process of communication. Strategies that have been applied so far, more and more often turn out to be not effective enough and do not guarantee a chance to reach a specific group of stakeholders. Nowadays, commercial success belongs to these entities that skilfully prepare marketing strategies, taking into consideration a specific character of a given market. This refers also to cities and regions which function in an extremely competitive environment (Manczak, 2012, p.166). As a result, authorities of specific territorial units become increasingly interested in possibilities of applying tools and methods that so far have been solely typical of modern business. However, the assumed analogy between

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a company and a city cannot merely depend on exact imitation of methods and instruments used in business communication, which results from a wider diversity and multidimensionality of settlement units. While living in „so-called conversation economy or conversation age, when brands have to constantly conduct a dialogue – contact communities, interact in multilateral relations” (Jurkiewicz, Majewska & Sołtysińska, 2012, p.21), social media offers the cities an opportunity to optimize an applied communication strategy through diversification of dialogue channels and tools.

The purpose of this article is to determine the scope and role of specific social media tools in the process of cities communication. The first part of the article presents a city as a commercially active entity. Its essence and some aspects of communication process were discussed based on the reference books with special regard to social media.

The latter part of the paper presents the results of the authors own study that deals with the essence and level of adaptation of social media to an implemented strategy of Polish cities communication. In particular special attention was paid to the reasons for using social media, measurement of their effectiveness as well as evaluation of future actions in the analysed period. The authors also attempted to identify the groups of stakeholders for whom social media is a crucial aspect of the communication process in individual settlement units.

The problem analysed below is of crucial theoretical importance as it concerns an area of new, fast-developing spheres of market communication. In terms of practical aspects, the analysed problem is truly significant because promotion of cities becomes a key issue of marketing practice in the area of public management. Online communication undoubtedly has a strong impact on consumers behaviour and decisions, which definitely should be recognized by cities. Thus, what is required as an integral element of a strategy applied to build a city's brand is special knowledge on interactive online technologies and their implementation (Dinnie, 2011, p. 90).

City as a Market Entity

According to a popular conventional definition, a city is a historically shaped settlement unit characterized by high intensity of buildings, a small number of rural areas, a majority of the population working outside agriculture (in industry or services) and showing a typical urban lifestyle (Majer, 2010, p.119). It is not, however, perceived as a fragment of space but as a dynamic, socio-economic system that interacts with its environment and can consciously influence its own development. Cities not only compete with one another over various factors of development, but they undertake various actions whose aim is to increase their attractiveness (Manczak, 2012, p.167). Cities must be functional and functionality means observable benefits. A city must function as a destination for employment,



industry, housing, public transportation and recreational attraction (Winfield – Pfefferkorn, 2005, p.23).

According to some theoreticians a city nowadays is merely an abstraction, a point of view, a way of analysing social phenomena.

(...)It is a specific socio-spatial structure in which processes of selection, concentration, invasion and succession take place. (...)It is a common composition of community that is a manifestation of social experience, offering the people today an opportunity to reproduce a way their predecessors perceived the world (Majer, 2010, p.83).

The city is increasingly often perceived as a result of ongoing civilization processes. Thanks to which it takes a multidimensional character and ongoing processes interpenetrate, deciding on their uniqueness and specificity. A city is a peculiar combination of material elements which intertwine – e.g. buildings, with nonmaterial elements – services, events, atmosphere which together evoke a certain effect (Proszowska-Sala, Florek, 2010, p.20). It is then, full of contradictions; inhabited by numerous ethnic groups, representatives of many diverse cultures, social layers, followers of different religions. It is exceedingly fragmentary, full of contrasts and frictions, so it must have many faces. Its openness makes it attractive to a growing number of residents (Rykwert, 2013, p.25). Its attractiveness depends on a number of factors. On the one hand, it is its history, symbols, rituals, language, regional products or monuments. On the other hand, it is also a current road infrastructure, investment and tourist attractiveness or a level of availability of these attributes, which in the opinion of residents, are considered key issues (workplaces, housing infrastructure, availability of education, medical centers, etc.) As a result, a city is becoming closely linked to the society that creates it and influences its current identity.

However, a city is also a contemporary market entity that possesses certain resources, conducts diverse activities, invests and is directed at meeting the needs of individual groups of stakeholders. To achieve this, it uses its knowledge, skills and key competences. The analogy to a modern enterprise seems obvious. Concepts of settlement unit management should then be based on the output of management sciences as well as theory of organization, and entrepreneurial thinking should be a basis for decisions made in economic self-government institutions. This is a preliminary condition for their development (Szromnik, 2012, p.23). Growth of competition and increasing expectations of individual groups of stakeholders requires to undertake new actions from the perspective of settlement units, which are directed at building a market advantage. A crucial element of this process is concentrating efforts on creating value for the recipient. What also proves to be a key issue is getting to know their needs and to satisfy them as well as creating them while thinking about increasing customer satisfac-



tion (Mruk, 2008, p.20). It also concerns a strategy of communication implemented by cities and regions. Implementation of methods and tools, their integration and ability to connect channels, forms and contents must to a greater extent, concentrate on encouraging curiosity and desire among recipients of specific messages through generating experiences and related emotions. In the near future this process will become a key factor in implemented strategies, helping to define both a brand and its market from the perspective of specific cities and regions.

Conditions for Using Social Media in Communication Strategy of Settlement Units

Communication in territorial marketing, while taking a specific type of product (including public value), social importance of the product, social (apart from economic) effects of transaction in territorial market into consideration, plays a significant role in (Duczkowska-Piasecka, 2013, p.195):

1. Building awareness of citizens, residents, clients – stakeholders of a territory, towards actions of public authorities: their intentions, arguments, choices;
2. Honest information about the abovementioned issues;
3. Convincing stakeholders about the reasons for decisions made by public authorities;
4. Building confidence in decision-makers and public institutions;
5. Achieving marketing purposes;
6. Informing about various issues: actions, current and future activities;
7. Reminding stakeholders about their position, benefits they can have while living and acting in a given territory, rights and duties of stakeholders and public authorities.

Development of new technologies has definitely changed the manner and tools by which cities should communicate with their recipients. This, however, requires being present in many channels, actions directed at creating positive experiences and tools enabling interaction. Marketing communication is probably one of the most innovative spheres of human activity. Not only achieving success but survival in this sector depends on potential, creativity of people developing newer, more surprising methods of reaching awareness of recipients of products, services, effective transmission of a marketing message and strengthening it (Konkol, 2010, p.19). To be able to influence individual groups of stakeholders cities must appeal to their emotional sphere. Emotional branding is in such cases a key element of communication strategy, influencing a position and possibility to achieve a market advantage. Its essence includes first of all, moving a burden from current consumption of goods and services to the process of creating relations, often at irrational level, but in a way that a client recognizes its value. Emotions can influence every step of decisions-



making process – from evoking desire for purchase in response to a need, to their influence on making a choice between offers, to emotions evoked by after-purchase state (satisfaction or disappointment) and resulting consequences (Radyno, 2014, p.38). The battleground of the future is for the hearts and minds of each consumer. The winners will be those that provide a balanced value proposition by leveraging both rational and emotional benefits relevant to their customers. Only organizations willing to add emotional value can expect to achieve and long term competitive advantages. (Robinette, Brand, & Lenz, 2001, p.32). Social media here seems to be a perfect tool creating a new reality and changing current behaviour patterns, especially in two groups of stakeholders: tourists and residents of individual cities. Computer technology is dramatically changing the way communications are effected today. Interactive communication is rapidly becoming a reality (McKenna, 1991, p.122).

Social media offer a wide range of diverse communication tools. They mainly include social networking services, blogs, micro-blogs, content channels such as You Tube, discussion forums, virtual worlds of games, etc. They are not only connected with public relations and advertising, but they also concern customer service departments, customer relationship management, sales, operations, human resources and research and development (Kerpen, 2013, p.174.). They offer cities a wide spectrum of possibilities to influence stakeholders, to learn about their needs, expectations, to create new spaces, experiences, image management, etc. Social media can be a powerful way to target potential and current customers, track the return on investment of the campaigns down to the last penny, and grow the influence of the business (Maffin, 2014, p.27).

Social media require, however, openness, authenticity and commitment. What also matters here is an equivalent dialogue, in which stakeholders are not only recipients of messages but also their senders. Sharing funny content, opinions, multimedia effects (graphics, films, pictures, etc.) is the real essence of social media. The character of these media based on interactions between users and allowing to create, offer and share their contents, has opened a new, very attractive, but also very demanding area of communication (Kuziak, 2013, p.125). We need to know how to use these new social means so as to open up the possibility of communicating with the largest number of people (Smith, 2010, p.194).

The problems that appear in this process can result from both technical issues, as well as an ability to conduct a dialogue in a systematic and sophisticated way. Forms of aggressive and intrusive advertising mainly lead to avoidance of all contacts with a certain sender. Unfortunately, communities generally tend to be very choosy. In order to gain recognition and achieve a measurable success, the actions must be conducted in a very careful, appropriately planned and delicate way (Podlaski, 2011,



p.122). Moreover, the results of implemented strategies will not be noticed in a short time. Changing awareness of message recipients or undertaking specific actions is not immediate, as it can be observed in case of the activities that aim to increase sales quickly (Miotk, 2013, p.132). The Internet introduced new rules and conditions. Building own communities, establishing contacts, creating relations, generating values are the actions of long-term character. It is important that cities do not lose patience, willingness and faith in what is worth doing. Today's communities are open to stronger interaction than before with brands. However, one important condition must be met: in exchange for devoted time, a brand must offer an added value – show understanding of needs, genuinely help and give valuable responses (Jurkiewicz, Majewska, Sołtysińska, 2012, p.21).

METHOD

The purpose of research conducted was the assessment of the level and scope of using specific social media tools in communication strategy of cities in Poland. The crucial factor was the determination of reasons for using social media in the communication strategy of settlement units and preferences concerning instruments used in this area. What also was of huge importance was the identification of range and methods of evaluation of effectiveness of individual social media tools in a strategy implemented by a specific city.

The research was conducted in the period between 30.05.2014 and 15.06.2014. It targeted a group of 120 biggest Polish cities in recent years. Taking into consideration the subject and the purpose of the research the authors decided to apply an online questionnaire technique. Finally, 38 cities took part in the research, which accounted for 31.6% of all the cities included in the research. A measurement instrument was a survey questionnaire that consisted of 25 questions, of which 3 were demographics questions. They concerned the province in which a city is located, its position as a central city and the number of residents.

However, a generalizing value of presented results is limited considering a relatively small research sample. The research in the discussed area is currently a subject of further deepened studies and analyses.

RESULTS

Social media were used by 36 out of 38 cities participating in the research. The predominant group was composed of cities with a number of residents that was greater than 100,000 (11 respondents) as well as ranging from 40,000 to 60,000 residents (9 respondents). The biggest group included the cities from Śląskie province (9 respondents) as well as Łódzkie, Pomor-



skie, Wielkopolskie provinces – 4 respondents respectively from each of them. No cities from Lubuskie, Opolskie, Podlaskie and Świętokrzyskie provinces took part in the research. The analysed group comprised seven cities that are province main cities.

Seventeen cities among the ones that declared their presence in social media had been using them for between one to three years and some of them longer than three years. There were only two cities that declared that they had been using social media for a period shorter than a year. It may be assumed that generally cities have knowledge and skills to effectively accomplish aims connected with their communication strategy. Workers responsible for social media activities are mainly employees from City Promotion Departments, which was pointed out by 23 cities. There were only eight cases in which specially appointed teams of people with relevant education and commitment deal with social media and five cases in which other solutions were used, such as a Social Communication Office, Social Information and Consultation Office. None of the examined cities used an Advertising Agency or Media House.

The most important reason for which cities decide to be present in social media is a willingness to build their positive image, which was indicated by 34 cities (Figure 1).

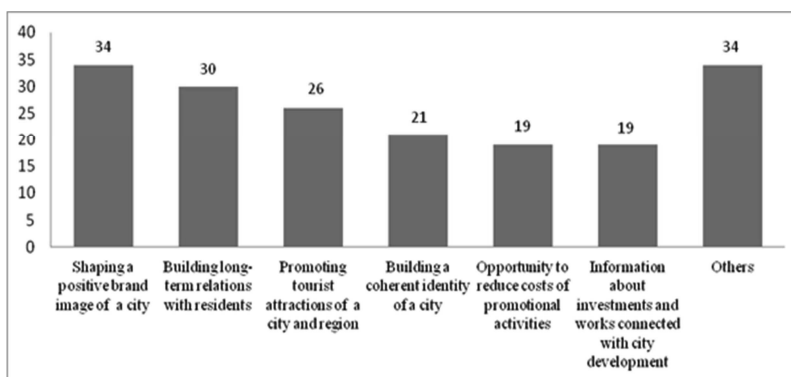


Figure 1. Reasons for Using Social Media in Communication Strategy in a Group of Analysed Cities

Source: Own study.

An opportunity to establish firm relations with groups of stakeholders i.e. residents, in this case was also crucial (30 respondents). Besides, they pointed out at using social media to promote tourist attractions (26 cities). This channel of communication turned out to be useful in building a coherent identity for a settlement unit, especially when it uses more than one social tool. To a much lesser extent cities noticed social media potential in



informing about conducted investments (19 respondents). 34 respondents indicated also other reasons for using social media. 15 of them took advantage of social media in the process of solving problems, e.g. social ones whereas for 14 of them social media were just a tool of promoting their own investment advantages. Five cities participating in the research confirmed that social media are useful in the process of informing about cultural-entertainment life, academic or sports potential and hours of work in basic offices in the city. A similar method was also applied while conducting activities in ecology and economy. Five cities participating in the research confirmed that social media are useful in the process of informing about cultural-entertainment life, academic or sports potential and hours of work in basic offices in the city. A similar method was also applied while conducting activities in ecology and economy.

All cities participating in the research use social media to establish contacts with residents. In their opinion they are the most important group of stakeholders to whom messages should be sent by means of this medium. Thirty cities are certain that this method of communication is also worth using to contact tourists. These two groups of stakeholders are, in the eyes of the analysed cities, the most important recipients of messages. Single cities use social media to contact investors (9 respondents), enterprises from their region (6 respondents), electorate (3 respondents) or institutions of public administration (2 respondents).

Respondents, first of all, use social networking services and declare being present in more than one portal. Simultaneously, six examined cities acknowledged that social portals are the only social media tool they use. The most popular is Facebook, where all examined cities have their profiles, The less popular ones are Twitter and Nasza Klasa, where respectively 15 cities are active. Portals such as Instagram or Pinterest were used by every fifth respondent and Foursquare was used by only five respondents. Such results are compatible with popularity of individual portals in Poland and preferences of their users. Among other tools of social media You Tube channel is extremely popular as cities can place short films promoting specific elements that make them unique such as e.g. monuments, tourist attractions, infrastructure, etc. Fourteen examined cities cooperate with bloggers, trying to increase recognition and reach as a wide group of recipients as possible. Six respondents have their own Internet forums and only two analysed cities are present in external forums. Settlements units explicitly limit a variety of applied tools within social media concentrating their activities on these that are currently the most popular ones. Taking into consideration main groups of recipients of this communication strategy, as it was pointed out by examined cities, such actions seem fully justifiable.



Among factors determining an interest in a city in social media the facts mentioned most frequently were pictures and films showing a given place, its residents and atmosphere (Figure 2). Another important factor was also competitions that were indicated by 29 respondents and multimedia elements (24 respondents) which can increase engagement and willingness to start interaction with a message recipient. What was also stressed here was a way of conducted communication, especially attractive forms, in readers' opinions, were texts placed in social media and controversial issues discussed in a city profile. The least important factor were comments by other participants in the ongoing discussion.

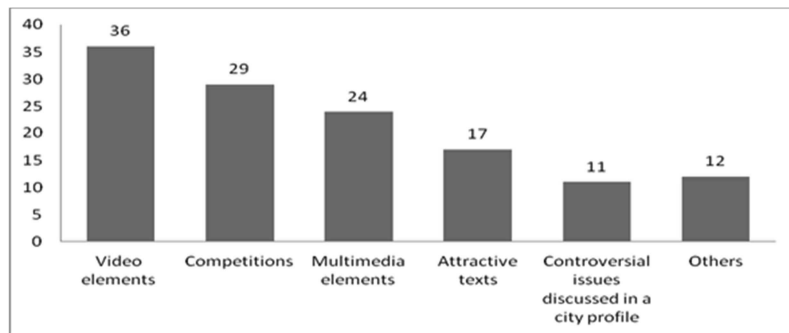


Figure 2. Factors Influencing Interest in the Presence of Cities in Social Media in the Opinion of Analysed Cities

Source: Own study.

The most important problems that cities face in social media (Figure 3) were, first of all, the ability to build readers' interest and evoking their engagement in a conducted process of communication (14 respondents). It can be assumed that this problem concerns the selection of appropriate methods and techniques of conducting a dialogue which might evoke emotions and provoke to revisit a given profile or a city forum. Another problem was critical opinions placed by recipients in a conducted communication process. Such phenomena as „trolling” and „hating” become, unfortunately, a common way of expressing offensive criticism of people and places. Another problematic issue, according to respondents, can be ways of moderating ongoing discussions, so that they were useful and interesting in the readers' opinions and a necessity to make posts in a systematic way. Technical issues and too extensive scope of communication process, however, turned out to be the least important problem (4 respondents). Availability of IT technologies definitely influenced the growth of competence and knowledge in this area. At the same time 14 cities declared that they do not have any problems concerning their presence in social media.



These were mainly the cities that had been present in social media for longer than three years. It can be assumed, then, that the length of time had an impact on their skill and competence in this area.

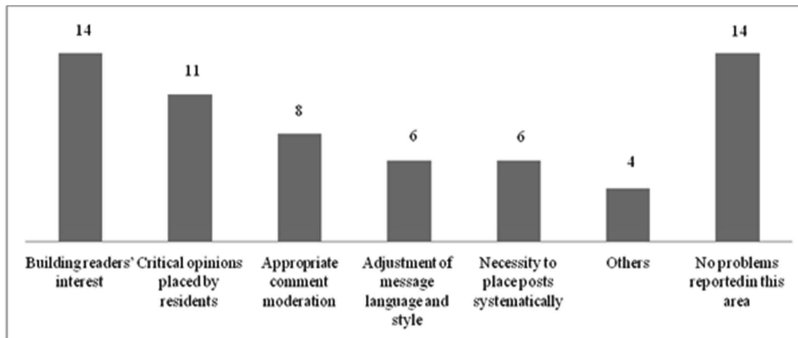


Figure 3. The Most Important Problems That Analysed Cities Encounter With Communication in Social Media

Source: Own study.

25 cities participating in the research measure the effectiveness of activities conducted in social media. Unfortunately, as many as 11 cities admitted that they do not make any assessment in this area. There was one province capital in this group. It can be assumed that cities with this status possess wider knowledge and possibilities (financial, technical) in a discussed area. In the group of entities that do not make any assessment a predominant group were respondents that had been present in social media for less than three years. It might be explained by the lack of sufficient knowledge in this area, conviction of their infallibility, reluctance to undertake such actions or financial aspects. As a results, however, undertaken actions can generate benefits that are smaller than expected, finally leading to discouragement and abandonment.

Among the most common tools of effectiveness measurement of activities conducted in social media was the number of „fans”, which was indicated by 22 analysed cities. 19 respondents also verify a number of people who participate actively in ongoing discussions, and 15 cities check frequency of visits by individuals. For 11 cities a number of users recommending a city profile and city image among other Internet users was also of crucial importance. There were only three cities that controlled the length of time that readers spend on a city profile and the frequency of their posts.

Nearly all cities are certain that the next year will bring a significant increase of interest in social media in communication strategy of cities and regions (35 respondents), including usage of mobile devices as well. As

a result, more and more cities enable downloading of various applications for mobile devices by means of social media, e.g. profile on Facebook. It mainly concerns mobile tourist city information, mobile guide or virtual tourist routes. They usually use QR codes (28 respondents), geo-localization (8 respondents) and augmented reality (5 respondents). There was only one city that expressed the opinion that growth of interest in social media in communication strategy will not increase in the next year, and there were two cities that did not express any opinion on this matter.

The units examined, unfortunately, do not assign large amounts of money on actions conducted in social media. As many as 32 cities participating in the research spend no more than PLN 10,000 in a year and there is one city that spends an amount between PLN 10,000 – 40,000 on this purpose. There were only three cities that declared expenses at the level between PLN 70,000 – 100,000 a year. These were province capitals which could matter in terms of their prestige and a bigger budget available. They had been using social media for longer than three years, so it can be assumed that their knowledge and experience in the area of using social media in communication strategy is relatively big. As a result, they can undoubtedly conduct a campaign in the field of cross media marketing and non-standard actions.

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

Every brand that aims to stand out and survive has to hold certain stories, emotions and values which attract a consumer's attention. Thanks to modern technological solutions, brands enter our life in an unprecedented way (Nowicki & Grzeszczuk, 2012, p.34). It also concerns settlement units more and more often.

In the vast majority of cases, cities participating in the research try to accomplish mainly image objectives by means of social media, connected with building a specific identity, especially among residents and tourists. Methods and tools used in social media are set to create new experiences as well as emotions and memories related to them. However, a diversified level of knowledge, preferences and abilities in this area, shown by the cities taking part in the research determines a level of complexity and intensity of solutions applied. What still remains an important factor is also the size of budget that a city possesses and their willingness, as well as possibilities of authorities, to spend money on this aim. It must be assumed that in the near future the level and scope of using social media in communication strategy of cities and regions will definitely increase. It will, however, need to control and measure effectiveness of individual channels, tools and implemented campaigns to a much greater extent than before.



Social marketing will not replace other forms of marketing activities. Social media are a tool and a real time way of thinking (Scott, 2012, p.47). What contributes to competitiveness then, is an ability to choose optimal media and related tools so that they are compatible with city stakeholders' expectations to the largest possible extent. Pace of reaction, ability to surprise and evoke new, intense emotions are the elements that influence effectiveness of applied marketing communication strategies. At the same time they will be a factor that has impact on a process of building a competitive advantage of modern cities and regions. There is no single formula for success – each city must create and manage their process of communication in the way that is best for their situation, but the chances of success will be greater if they are proactive and aware of the experiences of others (Daclin, 2010, p.18).

The research presented above did not explain all aspects and consequences concerning using social media in the process of city communication. Yet, it allowed to identify new factors and phenomena that were not included in the subjects of previous research. Complexity of criteria describing cities, such as a number of residents, status, level of recognizability and budget size definitely determine opinions and results in an analysed field. Moreover, the generalizing value of presented results is limited considering the relatively small research sample. As a result it proves necessary to continue further, deepened studies and analyses in the area. Social revolution enabled consumers all over the world to express their opinions in a way that has not been experienced before. It has also forced companies and self-government organizations to rethink how they could become more transparent and prone to provide answers. Perspectives of conducting research on communication of self-government units on the Internet can use both modern concepts of integrated marketing communication, social networking, as well as an approach from the perspective of various marketing paradigms.

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KOMUNIKACJA POLSKICH MIAST W MEDIACH SPOŁECZNOŚCIOWYCH

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Abstrakt

Tło badań. Dynamiczny rozwój mediów społecznościowych narzucił konieczność poszukiwania nowych metod oraz narzędzi w celu dotarcia do klientów. Dotyczy to także miast, które coraz częściej wprowadzają rozwiązania, które okazały się skuteczne w biznesie. Dzięki wykorzystaniu różnorodnych mediów społecznościowych mogą one skuteczniej komunikować się z poszczególnymi grupami interesariuszy oraz kreować swój wizerunek.

Cel badań. Celem artykułu jest określenie istoty oraz zakresu wykorzystania mediów społecznościowych w procesie komunikacji polskich miast.

Metodyka. Artykuł został opracowany na podstawie dostępnej literatury oraz badań własnych autorów. Badaniem objęto 120 największych miast w Polsce, a zostało ono przeprowadzone przy pomocy formularza online, który wynikał z celu oraz przedmiotu badań. Badanie zostało przeprowadzone w okresie między 30.05.2014 oraz 15.06.2014.

Kluczowe wnioski. Poszczególne narzędzia mediów społecznościowych oferują szerokie możliwości dla procesu komunikacji miast w Polsce. Jednak skuteczność działań przeprowadzonych z wykorzystaniem tych środków zależy nie tylko od pomysłu, ale również od wiedzy, kompetencji oraz zaangażowania osób odpowiedzialnych za ich wprowadzenie. Ponadto, budżet miasta jest niewątpliwie czynnikiem, który wyznaczy poziom oraz zakres wykorzystania mediów społecznościowych w strategii komunikacyjnej polskich miast.

Słowa kluczowe: Komunikacja, media społecznościowe, kreowanie marki miast

