# The attitude of Polish seniors to advertising as a source of market information

#### Magdalena Dołhasz<sup>1</sup>

Cracow University of Economics, Department of Marketing

#### Abstract

The demographic structure of the Polish society is changing. In accordance with the trend observed in the world, the number of elderly people is increasing, which implies new actions in the area of social and economic life. Enterprises more and more often notice this segment, creating special offers in the marketing mix for the elderly preceded by the necessity to study the market behaviour of seniors, including the use of sources of consumer information.

This article aims to initially identify the importance of advertising as a source of product information for seniors in Poland. It uses the data from secondary sources – the literature of the subject and the results of published studies as well as the results of pilot studies conducted by the author among seniors in Poland. They confirm that seniors use both modern and traditional sources of information (including advertising). Their attitude to advertising – like among all Poles – is negative. However, they declare that advertising is an important source of information about products.

Paper type: research article

Keywords: advertising, segment of seniors, sources of information

<sup>1</sup> dolhaszm@uek.krakow.pl

## Introduction

Demographic changes connected to the ageing of societies are becoming increasingly important all over the world (see: Denton & Spencer, 1997; Ondrakova, 2014). There has been an ever-increasing participation of the elderly – over 55 years of age – in the consumer structure. They are a group of customers called: "seniors," "segment of seniors," "silver citizens," "persons at retirement age" or simply segment of 55+ or 60+ but more often 60, 65+ people (Awdziej, 2014, p. 18; Szukalski, 2008, p. 20; Kurkiewicz, 2010, p. 125).

Researchers (Bombol & Słaby, 2011; Frąckiewicz, 2012; Świtała, 2011) and research institutes and companies in Poland increasingly recognize the "new" segment and analyse its behaviour. The latter more and more often create special offers for the elderly. Hence, it is necessary to explore and analyse detailed market behaviours of seniors, which, among other things, means identifying ways of obtaining market information for seniors.

The article attempts to identify the importance of advertising as one of the most popular marketing-mix information sources about the consumer market offer, among older people (55+) compared to other sources of consumer information. It aims to seek answers to the question about the attitude of seniors to various types of advertising.

In order to implement the aim, literature query and empirical research had to be conducted. The article quotes the selected results of pilot studies carried out among urban seniors in Poland (a deliberately selected group of 75 residents aged 55–69 years from a large city, since this group is the most active consumer in the segment of seniors with the appropriate level of income).

### 1. Senior citizens as a market segment

Demographic processes taking place in Poland will result in a significant decrease in the number of people at working age in the future. Their proportion in the population will fall from 64% in 2007 to 50.4% in 2050, which will translate into a significant increase in the demographic load factor – a measure showing the relationship between the number of people at working age and retirement age (exactly: the number of people at retirement age per 100 workers) and an increase in the group of people no longer at working age. High load factor (from 56 people in 2011 to 98 in 2050) is definitely disadvantageous from an economic point of view. It implies that reforms should be carried out.

These changes, unless accompanied by a significant increase in employment (especially people over 50 years of age), can quickly lead to reduction in the number of working people and the dynamic growth in the number of people making use of

different types of benefits from the aid system and social security etc. (Departament Analiz Ekonomicznych i Prognoz Ministerstwa Pracy i Polityki Społecznej, 2008, p. 10), but it will also be a large segment of specific consumers. In Poland, people from a group of 55+ and 65+ will be a noticeable and attractive group of customers for enterprises. As a consequence, they will be seen as an important segment of marketing activities. Nowadays one can see the growth of market activities for this group even though it was often overlooked or even unappreciated by marketers, due to its low efficiency (pensioners are seen as poor people with low income). This process has its roots, among other things, in three demographic trends:

- decline in the fertility rate of society,
- lengthening the average life expectancy of people,
- reduction in the number of people at working age.

It seems that the size of the senior segment both in the world and in Poland will be steadily increasing (Table 1). GUS (2016b) predicts an increase in the percentage of people 60+ in Poland in years 2020–2035 by 4.6 percentage point, 65+ by approx. 5 percentage points.

 Table 1 Population forecast by GUS [Central Statistical Office] for years 2020–2035 in Poland by age groups (%)

Age group	2015	2020	2025	2030	2035
60-64	7.1	7.0	5.8	5.7	6.8
60+	22.7	25.4	26.8	28.0	30.0
65+	15.6	18.4	21.0	22.3	23.2
85+	1.8	2.0	2.1	2.1	3.1

Source: based on: GUS, 2016b.

Other forecasts relating to the demographic structure of Poland are in line with the expectations of GUS [Central Statistical Office]. A team of researchers from the Department of Statistics at the University of Economics in Kraków under the guidance of Kurkiewicz (2010, pp. 286–287) predicts that after 2015 the coefficient of old age will be 23.3%, and subsequently in 2020 – 26.4%, and in 2030 – 29.8%. The ageing of the society will be characterized by, inter alia, a high percentage of older people engaged in a single household, their loneliness and isolation, and the feminization of the process of ageing.

The above-described phenomenon all over the world contributes to extending the duration of employment of people in older age groups – the group of economically active people is growing. According to the OECD (n.d.) in Poland, the employment rate in the age group 55–64 was 43.2% at the end of 2014 (52.5% for the EU). This rate is 35.9% lower compared to the age group 25–54 (79.1%) (OECD, n.d.), but there has seen a steady increase of this rate. In 2015 the rate was about 1 percentage point higher (44.3%) and in the 1<sup>st</sup> quarter of 2016 – 47.3% (GUS, 2016a). It is forecasted to increase in the following years to 48.0% in 2017 (Departament Analiz Ekonomicznych i Prognoz Ministerstwa Pracy i Polityki Społecznej, 2008). It is estimated that by 2035 the number of people aged 65 and more in Poland (currently 65 years is considered old age) may get close to a quarter of the total population. It is, therefore, necessary to develop strategies in the socio-economic area aimed at the so-called "silver segment."

At present, EU countries (and also Poland) increasingly develop coherent actions aimed at improving the life of this segment. Examples include, among others, the development of:

- "senior policy" purposeful actions of the public administration at all levels and other organizations and institutions which undertake tasks and initiatives creating conditions for dignified and healthy ageing,
- health promotion a process in which individuals and social groups can increase control over their health and improve it. Going beyond individual behaviours, this process combines with the activities related to the environmental and social sphere" (Ministerstwo Pracy i Polityki Społecznej, 2013, p. 8),
- "Voluntary work deliberate, free, conscious work for the benefit of others or the whole society, beyond family relations and friendships" (Wolontariat, n.d.),
- "Silver economy/senior economy the economic system aimed at making use of the potential of older people and taking into account their needs" (Ministerstwo Pracy i Polityki Społecznej, 2013, p. 8).

It seems that especially the last of these activities – silver economy – makes it necessary to develop marketing activities targeted specifically at customers 55+ and 65+.

Silver economy by Samoliński – Chairman of the Senior Policy in Poland – is a new gigantic market in Poland aimed at older people whose number is growing and, therefore, the response of companies should be to develop products and services for this group (*"Srebrna gospodarka" – czas na nowy gigantyczny rynek w Polsce*, 2015). According to the expert quoted, in Poland many industries may benefit from the development of the silver economy. This activity is determined as the third pillar of the national economy in the coming years because the elderly take part in every area of life – culture, sports, tourism, science, education, leisure. Gwiazdowski – economist and chairman of the National Institute of the Senior Economy – also draws attention to the various types of care services for older people which are and will be needed (*"Srebrna gospodarka" – czas na nowy gigantyczny rynek w Polsce*, 2015). Samoliński stresses that it is important to build innovation that promotes seniors and ensures that they are not excluded from society. Modern technological equipment is this innovativeness. Special, communication-friendly tools, including marketing communications have to be built for them. The key in marketing communications are traditional instruments, i.e. personal sales, promotion sales, public relations, and the most popular advertising.

## 2. Attitudes of Poles towards advertising

The advertising market in Poland, according to various research institutions (such as SMG or ZenithOpltima) until 2005 had been growing rapidly, but last 10 years is a period in which stabilization has been observed – there are only minor fluctuations (Table 2).

Year	PLN net (mln)	Dynamics	
2007	4643,4	19.3%	
2008	5375,3	15.8%	
2009	4859,7	-9.6%	
2010	5123,1	5.4%	
2011	5339,5	4.2%	
2012	5276,7	-2.3%	
2013	5006,0	-4.0%	
2014	5174,0	3.4%	
2015	5374,2	4.0%	
2016 (1 quater)	1721,0	3.2%	

 Table 2 Development of the advertising market in Poland in 2007–2016 (according to the net value of the advertising market in 2007–2016)

Source: based on Niższy wzrost rynku reklamowego w br. Mocno w górę reklama mobilna i wideo, w dół prasowa i display, 2016.

In March 2016 ZenithOptimedia predicted that the advertising market in Poland would grow in 2016 by 3.5%, and globally – by 4.6%. Currently, the company estimates that this market will only increase by 3.2% to 6,944 billion PLN net and around the world – by 4.1% to 537 billion dollars (ZenithOptimedia, 2016).

It similarly estimates the value of the advertising market in Poland SMG, according to which in the first quarter of 2016 the advertising market grew by 3.2% and its value is estimated at 1,721 million PLN. The achieved growth rate is lower than the one recorded in the same period of 2015 (3.9%).

What will be of the greatest importance in Poland, according to the analysis by ZenithOptimedia, will be spending on TV ads – which will increase in 2016 by 2.1%. Growth will also occur on the Internet (12%), radio (4.8%) and cinemas (1.3%). Intensive growth will apply to video and mobile advertising. In dailies ad expenditure will decrease by as much as 16.3%, and in magazines – by 13.8%.

ZenithOptimedia notes that more and more publishers with different effect are trying to sell the package offer: advertising in paper editions, digital versions and on websites (*Niższy wzrost rynku reklamowego w br. Mocno w górę reklama mobilna i wideo, w dół prasowa i display*, 2016).

The attitude of Poles to advertising has also changed, in 2016 it differs significantly from the initial boom in the 1990s, when advertising was associated with the transformation and modern market principles, and as a marketing activity it was very positively received by all buyers, but now, unfortunately, buyers manifest a negative attitude towards it.

The results confirm that, analogous to other countries, Polish consumers fail to respond to current promotion instruments, including advertising (Dołhasz, 2015). The attitude of the Polish customer towards traditional forms and means of advertising has changed and will change in the future.

It should be noted that this increase in reluctance to advertising coincides with the professionalization of the advertising market in Poland and, at the same time, very aggressive growth of advertising and other marketing communications tools. A larger role now is played by advertising that appears outside the traditional media: newspapers, radio and television and other promotion instruments are becoming more and more important, for example, advertising on social networking sites using among other things, buzz marketing (Dołhasz, 2014; Tkaczyk, 2014; Budzanowska-Drzewiecka, 2015, 2016). In a situation of growing irritation, advertising success will be achieved by companies that will use new tools of marketing communications (including advertising) and, at the same time, precisely reach the target audience, a specific buyer.

The starting point for the change in thinking about advertising solely in terms of information and persuasion is the segmentation of consumers based on their attitudes toward advertising proposed by CBOS. In this way, 39% of consumers consider advertising as a valuable source of information about products, but 42% have a different opinion about this (they are distrustful of informational-persuasive functions of advertising), 20% of consumers say that advertising is an excellent source of entertainment. 19% have no opinion on the role of advertising in their market behaviours (*Rozrywkowa reklama z marką*, 2007).

Few of the studies on attitudes towards advertising focus on senior citizens as a segment of the market. When analysing the attitudes of seniors in this regard, it is worth quoting the results of Agencja Praktycy.com (2015), which conducted a study to analyse advertising activities carried out by companies in selected market sectors aimed at older people. They allowed to determine what values in the advertising message are the most desired by seniors, as well as how marketers of companies meet the expectations of this demanding target group. It turns out, among other things, that when advertising new technologies, what should advertisers use the most is the theme connected with family (51% of respondents), while advertising of cosmetics should be accompanied by a famous person (58%) and in the promotion of pharmaceuticals it is good to refer to safety and health care (32%) (Agencja Praktycy.com, 2015). The cited studies show that seniors expect the traditional advertising message to be based on values to which they are attached, i.e. family, health, safety.

# 3. Methodology of pilot empirical studies

The study, in accordance with the nature of pilot studies, was supposed to analyze the research problem – the use of different sources of information by seniors in purchasing decisions (including advertising) and to identify organizational difficulties in conducting this type of research among specific respondents – elderly people. The second purpose was to check the relevance of the questions contained in the pilot, their proper understanding by respondents and the duration of the study as well as attitudes of respondents to the issues and forms of research. It was supposed to be the initial stage of research before the main research. According to the theory of the research methodology, the pilot is carried out before the basic scientific research when the examined phenomenon, the mechanisms characteristic of a given community, area, or the subject of the study are little known and require clarification (Nowak, 2007, pp. 59–61). This study is normally conducted on a small scale (30–100 respondents).

The primary function of the pilot is to acquire initial but incomplete knowledge of the surveyed population to get guidelines for further questions as well as improve the effectiveness of the main research. The pilot study is also aimed at validating research methods and tools used in the environment and the reasonableness of the selection of specific research methods (Nowak, 2007, pp. 59–61). Pilot studies in social sciences is most often used in surveys aimed at:

- verification of the research problem, that is, checking whether the problem occurs in a specific social environment,
- checking the research tool, i.e. usefulness of the questions in a questionnaire or cafeteria when it comes to their understanding by responders, accuracy of answers, or in terms of the number of questions that respondents did not answer.

Identifying organizational problems for the proper research process – specifying the method of reaching respondents, verification of responders taking part in the study, specifying the duration of the study (Rószkiewicz, 2012, p. 8).

The study used the auditorium survey based on the author's own questionnaire. It consisted of 16 questions with variants of choice: including 3 questions about responder's particulars. The sample was chosen deliberately – respondents had to be at least 60 years old and be retired.

Own study was conducted among students of Universities of the Third Age, the two universities in Kraków: The Cracow University of Economics and the Pedagogical University in Kraków.<sup>2</sup> After speaking with the Managers of the selected Universities of the Third Age, it was assumed that those people have a higher education, are in at least good financial situation and have access to the Internet. Responder's particulars did not contain these questions, which was supposed to shorten the duration of the study and allowed the audience to focus on key questions in the main part of the questionnaire, but it also limited the research sample. Questionnaires were distributed during classes. The pilot was attended by 75 people, after verification 62 responders were accepted. The characteristics of the study group are shown in Table 3.

Variable	Variable value	Number of responders	Percent
Gender	female	54	87
	male	8	13
Age	55-64 years	26	42
-	65–69 years	27	44
	70 and more	9	14
Profession before	economist	13	21
retirement	engineer	8	13
	accountant	5	8
	teacher	10	16
	other white collar	11	18
	worker	15	24
	other professions		
Place of residence	Kraków	55	88
	other	7	12

Table 3 Distribution of characteristics of respondents, N = 62

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>2</sup> The quoted data come from own research – pilot *Instruments of marketing communications as a source of information about products* that are designed and carried out by the author of this article as part of research in the Department of Marketing of the Cracow University of Economics, in June/July 2015.

The average age of the examined senior was 65.48 years, while the youngest was 51 years old and the oldest 80. A typical respondent was a woman aged 65–69 years, living in Kraków and working as an economist before retirement.

## Advertising as a source of information about products for seniors – results of pilot studies

Respondents evaluated sources of information about products. The literature presents various classifications of sources of information about products, for example: external and internal, personal and impersonal, personnel, marketing, public, etc. (Ozimek & Tomaszewska, 2011) (Figure 1).

Among impersonal, media, and marketing sources of information the promotional activities of companies are the most popular. Respondents in the pilot most often indicated promotional newsletters – 1/3 (30 people) of respondents, and then leaflets and catalogues – more than a quarter (27 people) of respondents. It should be noted that the latest information medium, that is, the Internet is also an important source of product information for seniors – it was on the third place – indicated by over 1/5 of respondents. Advertising was on the 4<sup>th</sup> place – every tenth person regarded advertising as a reliable source of information about products.

It can lead one to the conclusion that traditional instruments of promotion among seniors are the primary source of information about products, including advertising.

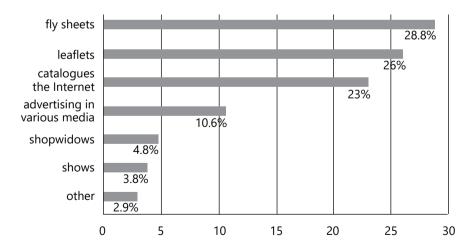


Figure 1. External sources of information used in the buying process by the surveyed seniors.

Traditional instruments of promotion in the segment of seniors are more often used than modern instruments, which seems reasonable and can result from habit patterns and smaller openness to new technologies among this segment.

It was decided to determine the attitude of seniors to advertising (Figure 2).

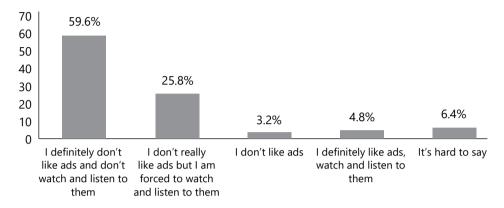


Figure 2. The attitude of seniors towards advertising.

The results showed that the majority of surveyed seniors – almost 86% (53 respondents) manifest a negative attitude towards ads, including 2/3 who definitely do not like advertising and avoid them, only 8% (5 responses) of respondents are in favour of advertising – definitely or almost definitely like watching and listening to ads. Thus, the vast majority of respondents are reluctant to advertising, which is consistent with the attitude of Poles towards advertising.

It is difficult to describe the attitude of Poles as positive. Since 2000, a negative trend has been observed. As it results from the research conducted, among others, by CBOS (2011) (the last survey refers to year 2011) (see more Pentor, 2010; IPSOS, 2000), the vast majority of Poles (86%) do not like ads, and only 13% have a positive attitude towards them. The largest group of respondents (48%) watches or listens to ads because they are forced to, despite the fact that they do not like it, and nearly two-fifths (38%) do not like advertisements, so they avoid watching and listening to them. One can notice a marked increase in the percentage of people who do not like ads and avoid them, and, at the same time, the group of people who like advertising has been significantly reduced.

Seniors prefer printed advertising (leaflets) – 32.2% (32) of responses and those in the place of sale – 23.7% (28) of responses and on the third place there is outdoor and television advertising – both received the same number of indications – 11.9%(23). Only about 2% (2) indicated radio advertising as favourite. What proved to be a positive phenomenon was the information on online advertising, almost one in ten seniors considered it as favourite. To get more detail of the respondents' attitude to advertising, the researchers asked responders to reply to the statements describing attitudes towards advertising (Table 4).

Statement relating to advertising	Average
Advertising on television interferes with watching programs	4.3
One can manipulate customers through advertising	4.3
One can induce people to buy unnecessary things through advertising	4.1
A truly great product does not need advertising to be sold	3.8
Billboard advertising is the most visible	3.5
Advertising at points of sale is more visible than in newspapers and TV	3.5
Through advertising people learn about products	3.2
Product advertising is unprofessional and uninteresting	2.9
Every product needs to be advertised to be sold	2.7
Without advertising, life in Poland would be "sad and boring"	2.5
Thanks to advertising people have true information about the features of products	2.2

Table 4 Attitudes of surveyed seniors towards advertising

Rating scale: Scale of school grades from 1 - "definitely not" to 5 - "definitely yes."

Seniors surveyed confirm that advertising on television interferes with watching programs – rating of 4.3. A large number of commercials often interrupts movies, programs and such a situation is annoying. This attitude is consistent with the attitude of Poles surveyed by CBOS mentioned above. In the opinion of the elderly "advertising manipulates customers and encourages them to buy products they didn't plan to buy" (rating above 4). On the other hand, according to the respondents a good product does not need this type of promotion (rating of 3.8).

Another answer applies to types of advertising, for older consumers outdoor advertising and in places of sale is more visible than on television and in newspapers (rating of 3.5). Respondents strongly agree with the statements that "advertising definitely lies" – rating of 2.2, which confirmed that what a given ad says about the offer is not always true, which may be the cause of the drop of advertising to further –  $4^{th}$  place in the ranking of sources of information sought about the product. What is interesting is the assessment of the statement that "without advertising life in Poland would be "sad and boring." Respondents disagree with this statement. It seems that advertising clutter in the environment studied – cities, streets, media, etc. is too large and does not increase the attractiveness of the surrounding reality of seniors.

From the above presented selected parts of the pilot, one can notice a negative general attitude of seniors towards advertising. Nevertheless, advertising continues to be a source of product information for the representatives of this segment, in particular in the traditional printed form and usually in the place of sale. What is positive is that older consumers are interested in online advertising and the Internet.

#### Conclusions

In Poland the proportion of older people will be increasing, by 2035 the number of people aged 65 and over can get close to a quarter of the total population, and, therefore, it is necessary to develop measures targeted at the so-called "silver segment." It seems that it is particularly important to develop a long term strategy of the silver economy, within which marketing activities targeted specifically for customers 55+ and 65+ play a vital role. What is also important in the development of marketing activities is the identification of the sources of information about the marketing offer, including advertising.

The analysis of the results of pilot studies conducted among seniors living in large cities in the age group of 55–69 years (limited sample) shows that among the sources of information about products, advertising seems of be of key importance (4<sup>th</sup> place). Unfortunately, the attitude of seniors towards advertising is negative. The most popular type of advertising is advertising in the place of sale, print advertising (leaflets) and television advertising. Although the attitude of seniors to advertising is unfavourable, they still declare that it is an important source of market information.

To complement the conclusions of the pilot studies we should add that the research questionnaire was revised and supplemented with additional questions. The return rate of questionnaires would have been higher if it had not been possible to fill in a questionnaire at home and bring it to the next meeting. In this type of segment it seems that the auditorium questionnaire distributed and filled in in the presence of the interviewer and collected at the same time would be a factor increasing manoeuvrability. In addition, one should be aware of the limited nature of the sample of respondents, which limits the interpretation of the data, and, therefore, one should consider reaching other groups of seniors as well.

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#### Note about the Author

MAGDALENA DOŁHASZ, Ph.D. – works in the Department of Management at the University of Economics in Kraków, Director of Postgraduate Studies of "Marketing" and "European Management Studies" at the Cracow School of Business at the University of Economics in Kraków. She has conducted lectures and exercises on: Advertising Management, Marketing, Marketing Communications, Marketing Management. Scientific interests: Issues related to marketing and marketing management process – the application of marketing analysis and market research. What is key in the interests of the author are issues relating to marketing communication and their context and specificity of promotion instruments, their planning, forms and techniques used in various markets, in particular in the segment of "Seniors +."