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BLOGS AMONG OTHER SOCIAL MEDIA – ANALYSIS OF BLOGS AND OTHER SOCIAL MEDIA IN MARKETING CONTEXT

Abstract

Social media are now present in almost every market. Their importance grows along with gaining an increasing number of users. The popularity of social media is huge. It must have business consequences, especially in the area of marketing. Interesting phenomenon in the area of social media are blogs.

The article shows a marketing dimension to the functioning of social media. The aim of the article was to present the social media, especially blogs, in the context of their marketing usability.

Keywords: social media, e-marketing, Internet users behavior, blog, social network

Introduction

Nowadays, we are witnessing major changes in social, economic and cultural environment. These changes have been compounded by the spread of the Internet. Thanks to the Internet, people now have the opportunity to find almost every information. People can communicate online with family, friends and others who share common interests with them. Geographical location or time zone ceased to be relevant. What counts are the people and their need for communication.

One of the most interesting aspects of the development and functioning of the Internet are social networking sites. Social media, like Facebook, Twitter, YouTube or Instagram have today become icons of communication. People share information with other users of social networks, although many of them have never met in person. The transmission of messages between people has never been so easy and

efficient. Ease of communication, results from the simplicity of the process of publishing information. The effectiveness stems from the possibility of transferring direct message to the recipients. This can be seen especially from the perspective of the use of blogs.

The article shows a marketing dimension to the functioning of social media. The aim of the article was to present the social media, especially blogs, in the context of their marketing usability.

Virtual communities and social networks

Social media are now present in almost every market. Their importance grows along with gaining an increasing number of users. The popularity of social media is huge. It must have business consequences, especially in the area of marketing.

Marketing communication tools have rapidly developed over last 20 years. The most significant changes occurred in the area of the way of reaching the consumers with the message. It is the result of development of media consumption in society. Changes in marketing arise from changes in the media market and consumer behavior. All these processes led to the development of new scientific concepts. There has appeared the concept of virtual communities within the consumption.

In 1993 the concept of virtual community appeared for the first time in scientific literature. The term was used by H. Rheingold in the article *The Virtual Community Homesteading on the Electronic Frontier*. The author defined virtual community as "social aggregations that emerge from the net, when enough people carry on public discussions long enough, with sufficient human feeling, to form webs of personal relationships in cyberspace" [Rheingold, 1993, p. 3].

An extension of the above-mentioned concept was created in 1999 by R.V. Kozinets the notion of virtual community of consumption. Virtual communities of consumption are a specific subgroups of virtual communities, that explicitly center upon consumption-related interests. They can be defined as "affiliative groups whose online interactions are based upon shared enthusiasm for, and knowledge of, a specific consumption activity or related group of activities" [Kozinets, 1999, pp. 252-264].

The concept of social media refers to the socially controlled media, which are used in the communication process on any scale, direction and purpose. The difference between social and mass media is the ability to simultaneously communicate "one-to-many" and "one-to-one". Social media are focused on dialogue, polemics, discussion. The publication of information is only the beginning of the communication process. Information can be freely changed, transmitted in different directions over the next participants in the process. Participants are changing from the recipients to the broadcasters of messages. This is the basis of modern marketing communication, and the whole process is based on the relationship between consumers [Dryl, 2015, p. 1183].

New technologies facilitate the development of creating links between the company and individual consumers. It also helps to create and develop group relations, thus enable the formation of community. The concept of community in Internet marketing is the subject of numerous scientific controversies, especially in Western literature. The community is a group of people linked by family ties, unions, place of residence. It is a predictive approach and current at the same time. However, in the marketing literature there is no consensus in determining when we are dealing with the community [Castells, Fernández-Ardèvol, Linchuan Qiu, 2006, pp. 143-144]. Suggested criteria shall include: a high level of interaction, mutual attention, a common ideology, long-term participation, economic interdependence and related relationships. So after nearly a decade, the concept of virtual community has evolved to a level of 2.0.

The development of the electronic media market led to changes in consumer behavior. The process was described by P. Markillie in 2005 in the article *Crowned at last* [Markillie, 2005]. The author pointed out, that there has become a new era of consumer, who is in constant contact with the media. Even then, the American consumer spent ten hours a day on the use of different media, mainly electronic ones. There has been announced the emergence of the consumer, constantly connected to the Internet, network media, a huge market of marketing communications, social and personal relations with other users. For businesses, the challenge was to quickly adjust to the new realities of marketing communication on the Internet. Consumers have changed the way of mutual communication, decision making, creating relationships with others, learning and shopping. At the time, there was correctly stated that the era of markets of producers and retailers was over, and the era of the market of consumer, who has the global market within a mouse click (or rather the finger touch of a smartphone) has begun.

Web 2.0 concept

Thus was born the concept of Web 2.0 or social media. According to numerous authors, with whom also agrees this article, Web 2.0 should be seen not as a revolution, but a return to the original features of the Internet [Mazurek, 2008, p. 97; Dryl, 2011, p. 62].

The concepts of Web 2.0 and social media are often used interchangeably in the literature. However, it is correct to equate the concept of Web 2.0 with internet applications, while the term of social media with social aspects of Web 2.0 use (participation, open access, exchange of views, the community, the group affiliation) [Constantinides, Fountain, 2008, pp. 321-244].

Web 2.0 is a set of online Web applications, open-access, interactive, co-written by users, which is developed on the basis of their experience, knowledge and market power. These applications allow users to create multi-social and econom-

ic relations. Groups of users resulting in this way, are called communities, because they have their own ideas, knowledge, concepts of targeted actions, and through access to web applications, they can share all of these. So it is a community, treated as a group of people who have something in common. This is often a permanent connection, such as Tri-City residents gathered around communities on Facebook or Twitter, interested in the problems of their Metropolis. Sometimes connections may be impermanent, such as those relating, for example cultural event, for which participants arrange, using social media.

Social media in marketing

Marketing is currently seeking answers, on how to start and remain in contact with the target market, using social relations. This is a new step in the evolution of the Internet as a marketing environment [Constantinides, Fountain, 2008, p. 233]. At the same time it is worth noting, that it is not another, rapidly vanishing fashion for activities attracting consumers. For over 10 years the concepts of Web 2.0 have develop and strengthened the market, and subsequent research results only confirm this phenomenon.

According to P. Kotler, social media can be divided into two broad categories [Kotler, Kartajaya, Setiawan, 2010, p. 20]:

- expressive social media, for example: blogs, Twitter, YouTube, Facebook, portals where photos, movies, can be shared etc.,
- cooperative social media, for example: Wikipedia.

Social networking sites are the web applications using social media to create interaction between participants (users). One can talk about such social networking sites as Facebook, YouTube, Twitter, Instagram and many others. Marketing use of social media is based on the following characteristics of services:

- placing consumers' opinions, reviews, comments on the products/services,
- assessment of the functionality of the purchased products/services,
- dialogue between users of products/services, often focused on understanding consumers' feelings, an indication of advantages and disadvantages of products/services,
- shaping consumers' rankings of category of products/services, which translates into recommendations for other members of the community,
- the creation of collective knowledge on specific areas of activity, centered around product/service and/or company,
- dialogue with recipients of marketing activities, getting to know the true feelings of consumers, especially those involved in development of the product/service.

Blog as a kind of social media

Internet users now have the unprecedented ability to share their thoughts and opinions on a wide variety of subjects through blogs, short for "weblogs" [Blood, 2000] which are essentially online journals [Sublet, Spring, Howard, 2011]. People define their communities more broadly nowadays. So far, communities included their family, friends, acquaintances and neighbors. Internet users stating their communities go far beyond the physical proximity. They point to the relationships formed online covering almost the entire world [Sublet, Spring, Howard, 2011]. Many blogs have large and dedicated readerships, and blog clusters have formed linking fellow bloggers in accordance with their common interests [Williams, Jacobs, 2004].

Most commonly blogs are web pages, which are the form of virtual diaries. The author of blog publishes his/her thoughts, opinions and observations, and its readers can comment the content on an ongoing basis.

The origin of blog is the subject of many discussions. According to Blood [2000] and Jacobs [2003], the phrase "web log" was used for the first time by Barger in 1997. Since then, started an avalanche use of blogs in Internet communication. In 1999, P. Merholtz divided the term weblog into two separate words, "the blog". The term "blogging" was also established. In the same year free tools for creating blogs were made available, most known was Blogger.com.

Nowadays blogs are used by millions of users, as a tool of Internet communication. Blogs have emerged from early email lists and instant messaging communities as a means of informing a dedicated reader base about items of interest to the authors, news, and personal information [Williams, Jacobs, 2004].

Blogs are available for a very broad audiences. Around the blogs, are forming the communities of readers, active audience and followers. For example, blogs dedicated to cars, include content, which is being received with understanding, by prospective and current owners of the brand of the car. They can treat the content of the blog, as a guide when buying a car. Any statements can have a very large impact on the market behavior of Internet users. Publication of one flattering statement about the brand of the car can cause tens or thousands of responses. This in turn triggers subsequent reactions. This avalanche interaction is the key to the popularity of blogs. The blog is a social medium with a very large impact on the users. This is often a chain reaction. Blog today is not just information space. Blog is the message published with particular frequency, having a certain character, dependent on the target audience, undertaken subject and sender of information. Blog should be published at certain intervals, so as to be able to interact with the audience. The particular period of publishing depends on the topic and audience reaction. In blog communication, the reaction of the group is very important. The message must cause a reaction. However, one of the most important elements of the blog is the sender. Recognition of the blogs' author, his

commitment and originality contributes to the popularity of blog. Currently, authors of popular blogs on fashion or cookery frequently occur in other media as experts from concerned areas. This affects the recipients of the blog, creating increasing virtual community.

Blog pundit J. Hiler has described the blog as the "latest disruptive technology, the killer app that has the capacity to engage people in collaborative activity, knowledge sharing, reflection and debate, where complex and expensive technology has failed" [Hiler, 2002]. The great beauty of blogs is their versatility. They cater for a wide diversity of interests and uses and there is no rule that states a blog has to be owned and operated by an individual [Williams, Jacobs, 2004].

Blogs include three main areas, such as [Mazurek, 2008, p. 18; Wright, 2006, p. 5]:
- information,
- relation,
- knowledge management.

Blogs an able passing information on activities of author of blog and receiving feedback. Blogs create symmetrical communication with customers. Relationships and bonds are formed more easily than through the website. This is done e.g. through exchange of experience. Blogging platform is the center of knowledge exchange between employees of the company, specialists and clients.

The most important features of a blog are directness, simplicity, independence, speed and trust. Blog enables direct contact of the sender and the recipient. The blog is very simple tool of communication, both private and business. It enables the dissemination of opinion on any matter, there are no restrictions when it comes to the blog posts. Blog enables also immediate response to the market situation, companies can quickly react and comment on the current event. Blogs inspire trust of consumers, because the messages posted on blog are personal – signed by a blogger.

Results of research on Polish Internet users

One of the most trusted surveys of Polish Internet are the analysis of CBOS. According to the latest data from the report "Internet users in 2014", following characteristics of Polish Internet users may be pointed [CBOS, 2014]:
- there are more than 50% Internet users in Poland;
- in 2014, use of the network at least once a week was declared by almost two-thirds of respondents (63%);
- three-quarters of Internet users use the wireless Internet, and almost all have Internet access at home;
- having an account on the social networking site, declares: 40% of all Poles in 2014 (compared with 20% in 2008), 62% of Polish Internet users;
- 16% of respondents, regularly publish own photos or videos;
- 39% of Poles use electronic banking;

- 37% of Poles read online press;
- 30% of Poles watch regularly TV, movies and other video materials.

The above mentioned features are the background for marketing activities. The characteristics of Polish Internet users, described in the report, provide a starting point for planning social media activities. To design the relationships in the market between the company and customers, one should know the aims of consumers of social media in Poland. The main aims of Polish social network users, are as follows [CBOS, 2014]:

- maintaining contact with friends, groups of friends (54%);
- renewing the contact with old friends (40%);
- listening to the music, watching movies/photos, reading (38%);
- publishing own photos, movies, music, texts (25%);
- talking on interesting topics, participating in discussion forums (26%);
- establishing new social contacts (20%);
- looking for work, presenting oneself to potential employers (16%);
- establishing professional and business contacts (15%).

The main aims of Polish users of social network are shown on Figure 1.
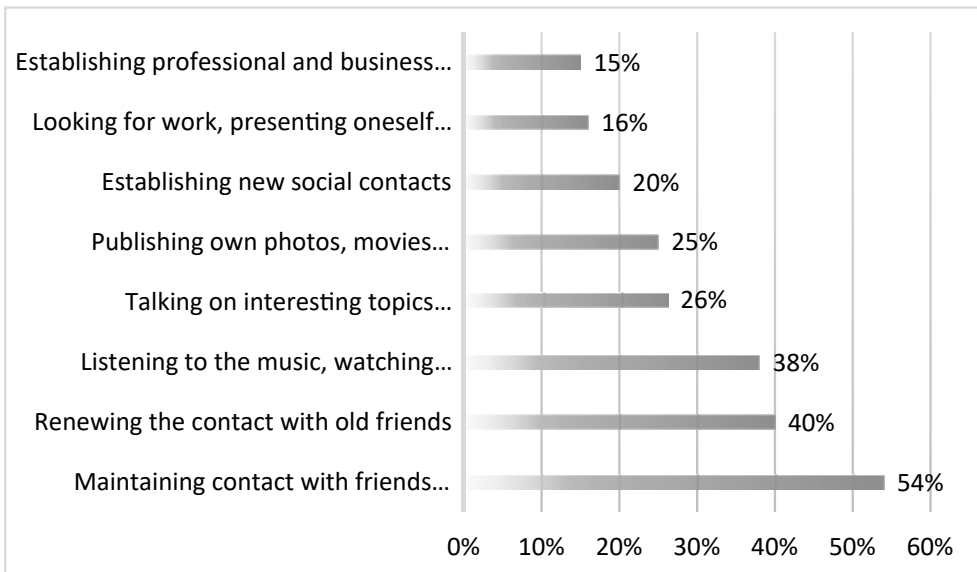

Figure 1. The main aims of Polish users of social networks
Source: Research Report CBOS, report no. 82/2014, Internet Users 2014.

The above table shows that Internet users point social functions of social networking sites. The first two functions were more often indicated by women than men. A significant part of Internet users, use social networking sites to receive dif-

ferent types of content. A smaller group (26%) are users, who publish their own materials. One-fourth of Internet users (25%), treats social networking sites as a discussion platform – a place to conduct conversations, write comments. These activities are the domain of younger respondents. One sixth of network users, use portals to look for work and to present themselves to potential employers. Almost an equal number of respondents declare establishing professional connections with social networking sites help.

Results of research on blogs

An important aspect of the study was the case of reading blogs and having own blog or website. The analysis covered a period of five years (2010-2014). The results are shown in Table 1.

Table 1. Reading blogs and having own blog or website

Have you read a blog in the last month?	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014
The percentage of respondents	20%	15%	17%	18%	19%
The percentage of Internet users	39%	28%	29%	30%	30%
Do you write a blog or own WWW site?					
The percentage of respondents	5%	n.d.	3%	3%	4%
The percentage of Internet users	8%	n.d.	5%	5%	6%

Source: Research Report CBOS, report no. 82/2014, Internet users 2014.

The scale of reading blogs is relatively stable. Blogs are read by nearly one fifth of Poles, and almost every third Internet user (30%). Younger Internet users and users with higher education are visiting blogs relatively often.

Similar to the last two years, percentage of Internet users (6%), declares running a blog or own website. A little more Internet users creating blogs, can be noted among the best educated (9%), and among the oldest (9%) and the youngest Internet users (8%). It should be noted, that the reading of blogs is relatively unpopular among Poles. It is worth to look more closely at the profile of Polish bloggers. The results are shown in Table 2. One can observe a slight advantage of women running blogs (55%). When it comes to this group of bloggers, its number is slowly falling (10% within 2013 and 2014).

When it comes to the age of bloggers, the most numerous group is the group in age of 25-34 years (35). Large group consists of bloggers in age of 18-24 years (24%).

Important conclusion is that, most bloggers are very young. According to cited results, almost 60% of bloggers are younger than 35 years.

Interesting may be the fact, that 15% of bloggers are residents of the village. In the biggest cities, counting more than half million residents, live only 25% of bloggers.

Table 2. Demographic structure of Polish bloggers

Gender	Percentage	Change 2014-2013 (%)
Women	55%	−10%
Men	45%	10%
Age	**Percentage**	**Change 2014-2013 (%)**
18-24	24%	−4%
25-34	35%	2%
35-44	22%	2%
45-54	11%	−1%
Above 55 years	8%	1%
Number of residence	**Percentage**	**Change 2014-2013 (%)**
Town > 0.5 million	25%	−6%
Town 200-500 thousands	19%	4%
Town 100-200 thousands	12%	1%
Town 50-100 thousands	14%	−5%
Town 20-50 thousands	13%	6%
Town < 10 thousands	2%	2%
Village	15%	−2%

Source: based on IRCenter Report: Social media in Poland 2014.

The most popular social networking sites among Polish Internet users are now Facebook, YouTube, Blogger, Twitter, Instagram, LinkedIn. The results of the analysis carried out in 2014 are shown in Table 3. It is worth noting that there has been a decline in the growth of the use of social networking sites.

The study shows that 52% of Polish Internet users use blogs. In this case, was recorded the largest decrease – 11%. Frequency of publishing on blogs is much lower than in the case of Facebook and YouTube. Only 8% of Internet users use blogs every day, 14% – several times a week. Slightly fewer Internet users, blogs once a week and once every two weeks (12%).

Table 3. The frequency of use of social networking sites among Polish Internet users

The percentage of Internet users who in 2014, at least once a month used the service:		Change 2013 vs. 2014	Frequency of using the service by Internet users			
			Use everyday	Use a few times a week	Use once a week	Use once every two weeks
YouTube	92%	−1%	33%[1]	33%	13%	9%
Facebook	85%	−2%	59%	14%	6%	3%
Blogger	**52%**	**−11%**	**8%**	**14%**	**12%**	**12%**
Twitter	28%	−6%	4%	5%	6%	12%
LinkedIn	25%	b.d.	3%	4%	6%	6%
Instagram	25%	−1%	3%	6%	4%	5%

Source: own study based on IRCenter Report: Social media in Poland 2014.

Interesting matter is how many social media sites, Polish Internet users use. Most of them use multiple services. 29% of Internet users use 2 services, 25% use 3 sites, 14% – 4 sites, and 12% – 6 sites. The results are shown in Table 4.

Table 4. Number of social media sites used by Polish Internet users

% Internet users active once a month or more	2013 (%)	2014 (%)
1 social media site	8	9
2 social media site	25	**29**
3 social media site	**30**	25
4 social media site	16	14
5 social media site	18	8
6 social media site	–	12
No activity	3	4

Source: own study based on IRCenter Report: Social media in Poland 2014.

Table 5 shows the social media which Internet users use simultaneously. 91% of Internet users using blog sites simultaneously uses Facebook, and almost all bloggers use YouTube. A much smaller percentage of bloggers uses social networking sites like Twitter, Instagram and LinkedIn.

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[1] 33% of internet users use YouTube everyday.

Table 5. Kinds of social media sites which are used simultaneously by Polish Internet users

	Use once a month or more this social services (%)					
	Facebook	YouTube	Twitter	Instagram	Blogo-sphere	LinkedIn
% users of Facebook	–	88	98	99	**91**	94
% users of YouTube	95	–	100	100	**98**	99
% users of Twitter	32	30	–		**41**	62
% users of Instagram	29	27	63	–	**39**	58
% users of Blogosphere	56	55	78	82	–	78
% users of LinkedIn	27	26	56	59	38	–

Source: IRCenter Report: Social media in Poland 2014.

More than a half of users of Facebook and Twitter also uses the site Blogo-sphere, which means they are active bloggers. However, the largest percentage of users of social networking sites among bloggers are the participants of Instagram (82%).

Conclusion

Blogs are available for a very broad but at the same time possible to be precise-ly defined audiences. Around the blogs, are forming the communities of readers, active audience and followers. They can't be ignored by business environment. Any statements published on blog can have a very large impact on the market behavior Internet users and other consumers. Publication of one flattering statement about the brand can cause tens or thousands of responses. This in turn triggers subse-quent reactions. This avalanche interaction is the key to the popularity of blogs. The blog is a social medium with a very large impact on the users. This is often a chain reaction. Blog today is not just information space.

The aim of the article was to present the social media, especially blogs, in the context of their marketing usability.

One-fourth of Internet users treats social networking sites as a discussion plat-form – a place to conduct conversations, write comments or to publish their own materials. These activities are the domain of younger respondents. Network users, use portals also to look for work and to present themselves to potential employ-ers. Respondents examined in the study declare establishing professional connec-tions with help of social networking sites.

The study cited in the article shows that more than a half of Polish Internet us-ers are also users of blogs. Frequency of publishing on blogs is much lower than in

the case of Facebook and YouTube. But worth mentioning matter is that 91% of internet users using blog sites simultaneously uses Facebook, and almost all bloggers use YouTube. This result shows that, marketing activities should be undertaken simultaneously in many different social media areas. This way, the effect of synergy can be achieved.

Blogs create symmetrical communication with customers. Relationships and bonds are formed more easily than through the website. This is done e.g. through exchange of experience. Blogging platform is the center of knowledge exchange between employees of the company, specialists and clients.

The most important features of a blog are directness, simplicity, independence, speed and trust. Blog enables direct contact of the sender and the recipient. The blog is very simple tool of communication, both private and business. It enables the dissemination of opinion on any matter, there are no restrictions when it comes to blog posts. Blog enables also immediate response to the market situation, companies can quickly react and comment on the current event. Blogs inspire trust of consumers, because the messages posted on blog are personal – signed by a blogger.

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