

## CLIENT TRUST IN TRADE BRANDS – MARKETING IN THE CONTEXT OF SOCIAL NETWORKS

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### **Abstract:**

Social networks are increasingly exploited for marketing purposes. The innovativeness and specifics of this communication tool have opened up excellent opportunities for trade brands to have exposure to a wide group of consumers. These potentials were swiftly discerned by marketers so that the presence of the brand in Social Media is no longer an unusual measure, but conversely it has become a mandatory activity. The official profile for the brand as well as stimulation of the Internet community around it not only allows for reaching the net users with a direct message, but also enables creation of the required brand image without leaving it to chance.

The objective of this study is to demonstrate the trust of the clients in brands generated by their creation in social networks. The paper gives insights into an analysis and interpretation of the author's own research accomplished and detailed findings of the issues examined, i.e. issues relating to the activity of trade brands in the sphere of Social Media. Ultimately the surveys were expected to indicate whether there is correlation between the initiatives launched by the brand in social networks and accomplishment of the marketing objectives previously set, as well as to display the response of ordinary clients to this specific form of marketing.

*Keywords: client trust, social networks, innovativeness of contemporary market communication, social media*

## 1. INTRODUCTION

A tremendously dynamic expansion of the market triggers increased competition among enterprises and results in an acute struggle among competitors. Companies are forced to continuously fight for clients, and thus to search for new forms of promotion of their own brands. One of such effective and low-cost forms are social networking portals. How quickly companies reach the younger group of recipients (though not only) and create an adequate image of their own brands and then win clients' trust is often critical. Social media are being increasingly utilized for marketing purposes. Innovation and specification of the communication tools for trade brands have created ideal conditions to maximise exposure to a broad spectrum of consumers. Possession by a brand of the official profile and animation around them the online community, not only allows the company to deliver the message directly to users, but also facilitates building of the desired brand image, not just leaving it to chance. In the context of these facts there emerges a very important issue which is the creation of a particular image of the enterprise and especially its trade brand in social networking sites where the customer market is not segmented according to their age, geographical origin or profession, but only by their access to the Internet. (Wereda, Zaclona, 2011, p. 265).

The purpose of this article is to define and provide an insight into the process of building client trust in trade brands in the business environment based on the example of a buyers market using social networking sites (social networks/portals), at the level of theoretical and practical issues - in the form of own research.

## 2. MARKETING CONTEXT OF PORTALS

A notion of Social Media Marketing earned a permanent place gained a permanent footing in the literature on the subject and thus ceased to be perceived as 'market non-standards' (Ratusznik, 2011, p.11). This is due to remarkable opportunities for creating opinion and image of the brand on social networking websites which occur as a titbit in the marketer's view (Dwornik, 2011, p.9). The statistics speak for themselves – companies spend more and more on the social networking activities, and thereby Social Media has a significant share in 'advertising cake'. Increasingly, it is voiced that social media should be recognized as an obligatory element of marketing mix within an organization (Ratusznik, 2011, p.11).

Hence, there is no doubt that great 'boom' on social networks continues to thrive and the trend to advertise the brand or to possess a communication channel on these platforms became a business standard having the same weight as possessing a company website. This phenomenon was initiated by Facebook which opened the market to the tools such as company profile and anonymous internet community around it or profiled or personalized advertisements. Consequentially equivalents of that service were springing up as mushrooms after rain such as: nk.pl, grono.pl or blip.pl (Ratusznik, 2011, p.12) which based on its archetype offer alternative advertisement for companies. What is principally behind that trend? Certainly there are a continually growing number of persons with the profiles on social networking sites, dynamics of their interaction and time spent on that portal (Moroz, 2010, p. 2). Target groups for advertisements discarded a model of passive listening of messages and started to usurp the right to voice and participate in discussion. Social Media thus enabled storytelling about brands and company to as many persons as possible at the same time (Cieślak, 2011, p. 8-10).

Even though Facebook dominated the topics on the social networks, companies should place an emphasis on communication with their clients using other social networking sites (Godlewski, 2010, p. 23). However, when focusing on the presence of the brand in niche portals, it is necessary to take into consideration their specifics. As reiterating tested scenarios from Facebook will not always be effective when confronted with a new service (Godlewski, 2010, p. 23). Why? Each platform makes a specific spectrum of possibilities available to marketers. The collaboration with Social Media does not come down to building a community in all cases. Such a narrow view on social media may produce an ill-conceived marketing strategy. So it is worthwhile perceiving social networks as a specific 'toolbox' which provides all that is needed by creators of the brand image, that is: research opportunities in the fields of analysing brands, consumers, products, communication, opportunities for brand exposure, involvement in the dialogue with the brand or generating definite sale effects (Report Social Media, 2010, p. 68).

There are four phases of planning the presence of the brand in the social networking portal. A method characterizing these phases in detail is the POST method set up by C. Li and J. Bernoff. Its components include: people, objectives, strategy and technology (Li, Bernoff, 2009, p. 104). The authors emphasise the fact that proper definition and assessment of each element helps to formulate an adequate operation plan. They demonstrate basic questions to be answered by a marketer when planning a strategy for a trade brand:

- People: what are potential clients ready for? (at that phase of planning it is recommended to use the social-technographic profile of users, to learn how potential message recipients express their activity in Internet, while it is vital to determine a predicted level of involvement among clients based on the data on current involvement) (Li, Bernoff, 2009, p. 104);
- Objectives: how to set objectives (e.g. boosted sales, increased level of brand awareness, its recognition, winning new clients, strengthened loyalty, etc.);
- Strategy: what relationship to build with clients? (To determine the position of the brand in the relationship with clients, what valuable is in the brand for the society, whether clients should help to reach to new persons, whether they should become involved in the brand life, how to communicate the brand to them and how to measure the success) (Cieślak, 2011, p.17);
- Technology: which applications should be used?

There is no ready formula for creating a brand strategy using Social Media likely to be duplicated and thus making the process easy. Each brand is different, hence each needs its own original idea for winning its followers. However, there are hints, being an effect of monitoring of hundreds of companies which execute the trend strategies likely to be harnessed when establishing its own one. Such a hint is, among others, setting fundamental objectives which should be accomplished by strategists in the process of creating the brand in Social Media, mostly focusing on the critical ones from the own viewpoint. Namely, these are the activities such as: listening, communicating, inspiring, supporting and engaging (Li, Bernoff, 2009, p. 105-106). They may be easily linked to elementary functions of the organization as illustrated in table 1.

**Table 1:** Operational functions of the organization and their trend alternatives

Function of the organization	Objective of the use of potentials of Social Media	Trend specifics
Research	Listening	Current monitoring of the users' dialogue as an alternative for questionnaire survey and focus group interview
Marketing	Communicating	Participation in talks and stimulation of two-way conversation
Sales	Inspiring	Enabling the most enthusiastic clients to sell products to each other
Support	Supporting	Opening up opportunities for mutual support among clients
Development	Involvement	Encouraging clients to assist in building the solutions, to improve the quality of the product/service

Source: own study based on Li, Bernoff, 2009, p. 107.

Before the brand strategy is launched within the community world, its creators have to be certain that it reflects the target recipients' expectations. What is more, to retain internet users as the brand fans, it has to deliver such benefits so that they themselves become its stout ambassadors, it has to yield something beyond what they promote, it has to take them by surprise. So where should knowledge on the consumer expectations to the brand derived from? This is simple: it suffices to listen.

Respected companies tend to listen to their clients very carefully and they often allocate huge funds for that. The point is that they fail to label it listening, yet they call it market research (Li, Bernoff, 2009, p. 120). Social media revolutionize listening methods and due to their immense potential of marketing tools they provide the brand image creators with improved methods of listening consumers. The first, yet still underrated, manner of listening the voice of brand recipients is accomplishment of market surveys on the social networking platforms. At the same time social networking portals enjoy unlimited opportunities for conducting surveys, both online as well as with the use of other techniques.

Due to multimillions of users, social networking portals have access to a large representative group of Internet users. Furthermore, each person is profiled – person's demographic data, number of friends,

geo-localization are familiar and this information is socially verified (e.g. in Poland NK.pl uses, for its surveys, 12.5 million of accounts held by real people (Internet Standard, Report Social Media 2010, p. 68). Great value is attached to the fact that surveys may be addressed to narrow and unique target groups, e.g. enthusiasts of mountain bikes or mother with children because such groups are set up spontaneously on a continuous basis on the platforms. In addition, when it comes to realize the quantity of available information on clients, their life, opinions, habits which with the use of filtering and analysing tools will be used as a source of ideas, nobody will deny the effectiveness of surveys on social networking portals (Ibidem).

The second strategy of listening which is directly related to social media is the brand monitoring. Basically, it boils down to observing Internet activity of potential clients (Li, Bernoff, 2009, p. 124). This is nothing more than penetration of their thoughts which cannot be provided by the market research because they revolve around a definite problem. The brand monitoring ensures access to unrestrained conversation, to sharing knowledge and conclusions, all that around the brand to which the topic relates. This not the end of its virtues, as it should be stressed that it may become a source of radical ideas originating from users who appear to be recognized as 'instigators' and 'critics' (Li, Bernoff, 2009, p. 134). Their dialogues and free, unrestrained exchange of views generate and develop innovations for a specific brand producing an effect of so-called Crowdsourcing (Internet Standard, Report Social Media 2010, p. 69).

Despite the fact that listening brings such a wide variety of significant practical aspects, this is yet one of the most underrated and ignored business competencies. This is a kind of paradox because in times of prevalence of social media, listening became extremely easy, and still numerous marketers reveals inability to tap into this wealth (Li, Bernoff, 2009, p. 139). So to prove the validity of listening to a growing trend, it is worthwhile demonstrating the arguments in favour of this activity:

1. Listening enables to learn how the brand is perceived.
2. Listening enables to understand the dynamics of social echo.
3. Listening leads to savings in research and enhances effectiveness of analyses.
4. Listening determines effectiveness of crisis management in the field of PR (early warning, timely response).
5. When listening new marketing ideas may be heard (Ibidem).

In Social Media the largest engagement may be triggered through building the brand profile in the portal selected. This should be the first element of the promotion on the social networking profile. This is nothing more than a mechanism of releasing the sites. Due to them it is possible to make exposure to the virtual community of clients and to win friends among them. This is accomplished at a low cost, and the only valuable expenditure are people responsible for current update of the webpage (Suma, 2010, p. 181). A brand page (a fan page) is a key commercial tool on Facebook developed for all those who display their brand, i.e. companies, organizations, associations, teams, public persons, etc. So the company sets up a fan page for its trade brand and the persons who like it may show their identification with the brand to a wider group of users or friends (Kosedowski, 2010, p. 6). It is a fan page that provides entire access to remaining tools for creating the brand image, i.e. contests, games, invitation to events, expansion of the statistics system. Through its means brands initiate a dialogue with consumers, thus ensuring the contact with those who will voluntarily devote their attention to them (Ibidem).

Unquestionably, promotion of the brand in the social networking portal, after its complete editing on the profile, should begin from collecting fans. A brand creator may be originated from inviting own friends, they, in turn, may invite others. After winning first fans, it is time for interactions. To build them, the brand has to tell its story – in a precise and interesting way – then embellish it with photos, video, redirect to the brand website, to the brand newsletter (Annovazzi, 2011). The brand has to expose itself to its full extent and provide a basis for talks. Its creators may select from an extensive array of methods for communication with social networking sites users, they include, among others:

1. Viral marketing – initiation of the situation where users propagate information about the brand or about what is directly related to it, e.g. intriguing video, photos (Woźnicki, 2011).
2. Guerrilla marketing – taking by surprise with contents placed on a brand profile, non-conventional message, innovative concept of presenting the brand, generating hype around it (Woźnicki, 2011).
3. Buzz marketing – making use of the credibility of other media which induces hype around the brand, e.g. showing off with information on the brand in the press (Annovazzi, 2011).

4. Word of mouth marketing – sharing with friends or fans information on the brand, related experience, to this aim engaged brand clients are used. In other words it is called WOMM (Word of Mouth Marketing) (Li, Bernoff, 2009, p.189-190).
5. Customer generated media (CGM) – arousing positive hype on the portal promoting the brand, e.g. exchange of comments by the substitute users (Woznicki, 2011).

Being in permanent communication with the users 24/7 a week there comes a time to strengthen ties between the brand and its potential recipients, this is a time for inspiration and involvement. Then the brand makes efforts to retain its existing fans and at the same time keeps in mind to win new ones. In effect, a bond between two parties is built and clients' trust to the brand and company is established.

### 3. CLIENT TRUST – SHORT OVERVIEW

In recent times it is an unquestionable fact that the client is at the centre of any activities undertaken by all companies. Many of them, despite perfect service of the client and favourable loyalty programmes are focused on forging long-term bonds with the buyer through building trust between two parties. However, trust in organizations is perceived in different contexts.

Establishing trust in an organisation is seen as a crucial process in current economic circumstances. D. Harrison, L.L. Cummings and N.L. Chervany argue that trust is driven by 5 dynamics which may be presented as follows:

- calculative based trust – trust based on a plain calculation of costs and gains offered by a given relationship. Trust is premised on a rational assumption of profitability delivered by a specific relationship. Predominance of this dimension signifies a sound motivation system, organisational identity, involvement of individuals in affairs of an organisation;
- personality based trust – based on a personality structure of a man. It focuses on innate and acquired personality features of the organisation's members. Strong personal tendency to trust is manifested in a capacity for empathy, sensitivity, emotional self-restraint, and responsibility.
- institution based trust – based on formal regulations. A sense of safety hinges on formal rules which then enhance a transparent and stable situation in an organisation;
- cognition based trust – a process of perceiving other persons. It has clear references to cognitive traits of individuals and trust is regarded as monitoring of mutual behaviours, responses, or conduct manners;
- knowledge based trust – the strongest category of trust which needs a long initiating period. Development is founded on experiences gained and accumulated. Creation of trust is analogous to the learning process in an organisation.

All dimensions of trust outlined above contribute to its single multi-faced building process (Paliszkievicz, 2010, pp. 45-50).

When building trust we may distinguish a few principles that help making appropriate decisions at this phase, these are as follows:

- trust is built over extended time but it may be destroyed instantaneously.
- It is impossible to build trust by treating it as a means to an end. It must be genuine.
- Trust building has to couple with respecting values.
- Trust requires involvement of both parties.
- Inter-organisational trust entails reciprocal relations.
- Inter-organisational trust opens up numerous opportunities for partners.
- Trust is variable over time.
- Trust culture should be established on the basis of shared values, goals, honest communication and consensus culture.
- In communication processes an emphasis should be placed on congruence and suppressing the lie strategy at all cost.
- In the process of inter-organisational trust building uncertainty is significantly reduced.
- When building trust, it is crucial to maintain consistency and openness (Grudzewski, Hejduk, Sankowska, 2011).

In general, a customer is the most important asset of any successful organisation. Without a customer a company cannot exist. Thanks to a customer a company can sell goods and services it offers. At the end of the business process it is a customer who pays for the offer and thanks to this a company



may continue to earn. Once, this offer meets a customer expectation there is a great chance the company will survive on the modern market. Therefore it is extremely important to make sure the offer is “tailor-made” for a customer to satisfy their specific needs. This unique offer is a tool for building a competitive market advantage (Heskett, 2002, pp. 356-357). That is why, the most important besides loyalty, is to create trust based environment in which the client and the company are the winning parties.

#### **4. TRADE BRANDS IN SOCIAL NETWORKS (PORTALS) AND CLIENT TRUST– RESULTS OF OWN RESEARCH**

Own research whose findings were illustrated in a further sections was conducted in Poland within 01.05-31.05.2012 on the group of 150 persons who use social networking portals. It applied a known tool which is a survey questionnaire. The emphasis was largely place on significant issues from the perspective of the brand operating in the area of the Social Media. An overriding objective was to verify whether the presence of the brand in the social networking portal helps its owners to accomplish definite marketing and sales goals.

The following detailed objectives were determined to help answer these questions, namely:

1. Obtaining general information on the use of social networking sites;
2. Determining the manner of perception of official brand profiles by the community users;
3. Assessing the effectiveness of creating trust to the brand in Social Media;
4. Defining of chances and threats to the brand in the social networking portal.

64% of women and 36% of men participated in the survey. The group surveyed can be hardly called a representative group, more as a pilot group and therefore it should be underlined that such arrangement is not necessarily the reflection of general activity of users on social networking sites. A more distinctive feature is the age of respondents which appears to confirm the prevailing opinion that Internet communities largely attract young persons. A dominating group of persons surveyed is represented by the users at 19-25 years who constitute 78% of all those surveyed, 16% include persons at 26-35 years, and the remaining 6% include individuals of the similar age. There were no persons above 45 years in the group which may prove the dwindled activity of persons in their mid-years on social networking portals.

Close analysis of the respondents' age structure reveals that this is trendy to be active in the net among twenty and thirty-year-olds. This effect is bolstered by the fact that generations of younger persons have daily contact with internet, and furthermore they are open to innovations made available by the virtual reality. In addition, younger generations have more free time as the use of social networking services are time-consuming.

The findings from the survey corroborate the dominance of two social networking portals which are undoubtedly the most popular in Poland, i.e. domestic portal Nasza Klasa (NK.pl) and Facebook. They took over the market of Social media and have an established position. Almost 42% of answers indicated a foreign platform Facebook, then 37% pointed Nasza Klasa. Further positions were taken by Polish equivalents, i.e. Fotka – almost 7%, Grono – almost 6% of answers as well as foreign ones, popular social sites, i.e. Myspace and Twitter where variations were slight because the difference accounts for merely 1%. A site GoldenLine received a marginal, 1 percentage share of answers, and there was no answer proving any activity on the portal Moja Generacja. In the additional answer a portal Prefeo, included in the list, was pointed out.

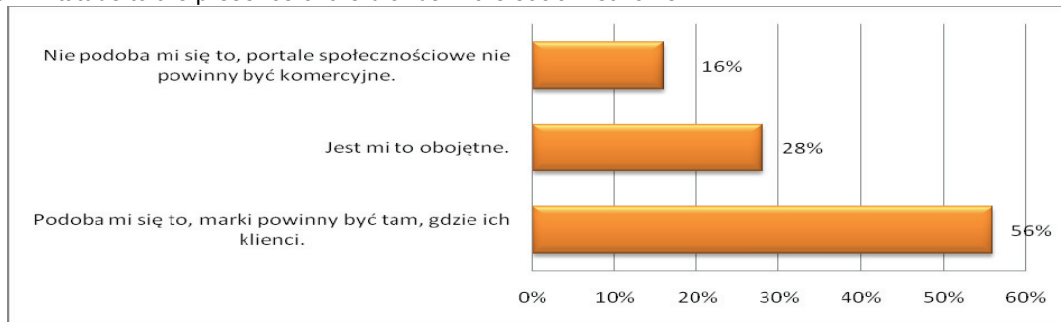
The further analysis shows that users are frequently logged in the social networking sites for few hours, though they actively use them in some moments. This is hard to say how this question was interpreted by the respondents, nevertheless from the viewpoint of the brand this is beneficial information.

A general picture illustrating the use of the social networking sites is as follows: the users willingly spent their free time for participating in Social Media. According to the statistics, internet users are registered on average on two portals mostly visited every day. The opinions about the social media frenzy are not groundless. They sucked in millions of Poles and they often substitute real contacts. This is a chance for trade brands as such a traffic on a website opens up huge potentials, It may be translated into increased range of campaign conducted, extended time of the brand exposure,

enhanced awareness of the brand, or putting it simply it may strengthen the final effects of the brand activities within the community.

Having asked the respondents directly about their attitude to the presence of the brand on social networks, every other respondent stated that they liked the initiative of the brand as they should be present where their clients are. 28% of the surveyed said that it makes no difference which leads to the conclusions that this a group requiring special efforts from the brand image creators. There is a chance to win their favour as they have no established opinions. While 16% argued that social networks should not allow for commercial activities because this is not the function they were set up for (Figure 1).

**Figure 1:** Attitude to the presence of the brands in the social networks



Source: based on own research.

Translation of answers:

I do not like that, social networking portals should not be commercial).

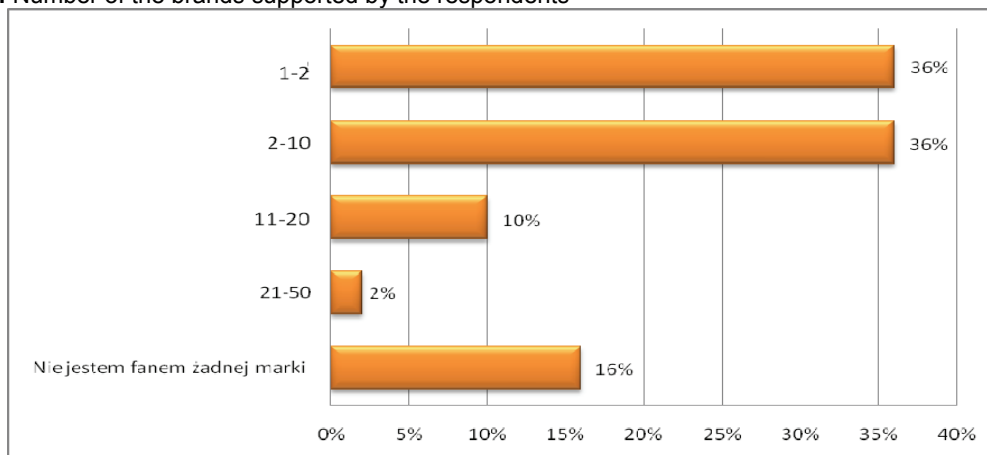
I am indifferent to it.

I like it, the brands should be present where their client are.

The objectives to be achieved by the brand representative in the sphere of virtual communities is largely winning the largest possible number of fans who in the moment of joining the group give consent to receiving related information. How do the respondents react? Four from among five of those surveyed confirmed the establishment of the relationship with the brand in the past, 16% showed sceptic attitude and stated they were never fans of any brand. As illustrated, a majority of users approach carefully the official fan page. It may be an effect of the bias towards persistent advertisements which are avoided by many persons, and unfortunately official brand pages in social networks are associated with pushy commercials.

To make date precise the respondents were asked about the number of the brands they support within the community. Number values were classified in rising sections to simplify the analysis of the results. The answers were shown in Figure 2.

**Figure 2:** Number of the brands supported by the respondents



Source: based on own research.

Translation of answers:

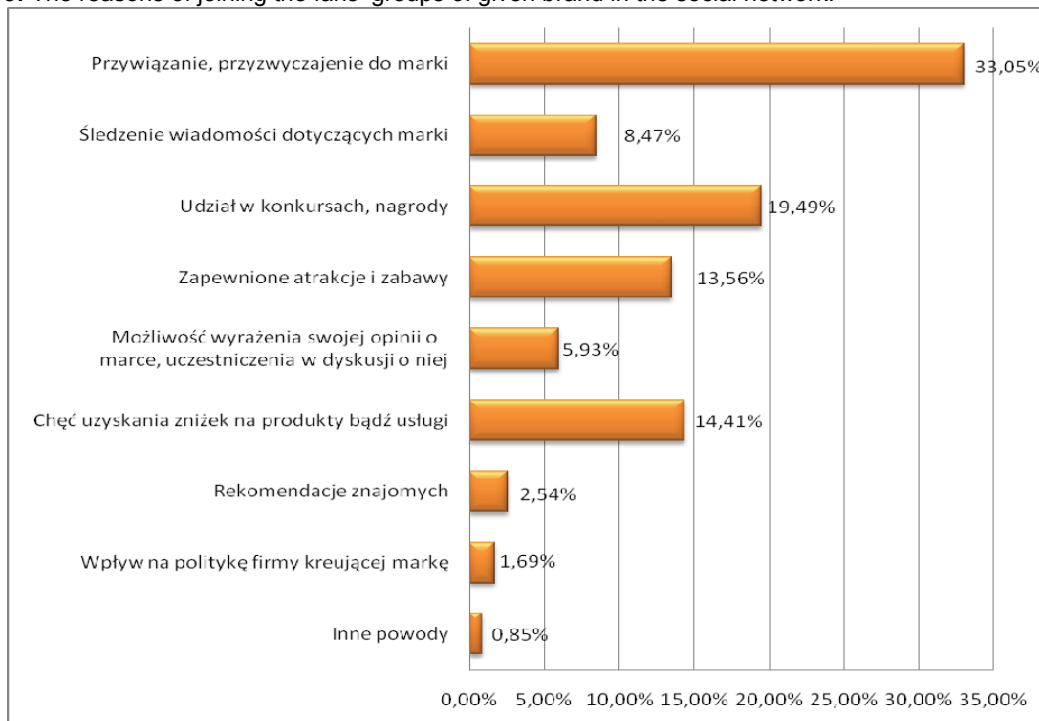
I am not a fan of any brand).

According to the figure, 36% of the surveyed are fans of one or two brands, the same number follow between 3 and 10 brand-name profiles, 20% of the surveyed have contacted 11-20 brands, whereas 2% of the respondents are interested in considerably more, reaching as many as 50 brands having official fan pages. The last option was ticked by 16% of the respondents, which means that they are not fans of any brand. For this reason, they were asked to omit the following 7 questions relating to the experience of having some relationship with the brand in social media and consequently has reduced the total of opinions received to 42 respondents.

The users of social showcases can be divided into two groups: more and less loyal fans of particular brands. Four out of five respondents (83%) declare that they follow profiles of several brands competing with each other, which means that only 17 % of the respondents constitute a loyal group of fans of one selected brand within any given branch.

Knowing who among the respondents are fans of the brand in social communities, it is worth finding out the reasons behind this phenomenon. The surveyed were asked about the reasons inducing them to join the groups of fans of a given brand. Due to the fact that there can be several reasons, the respondents were allowed to tick up to 3 answers out of given list (Figure 3).

**Figure 3:** The reasons of joining the fans' groups of given brand in the social network.



Source: based on own research.

Translation of answers:

Being attached and used to the brand; 33,05 %

Following the news concerned with the brand; 8,47%

Taking part in draws, prizes; 19,49%

Attractions and entertainment provided; 13,56%

Chance to express own opinion on the brand, taking part in the discussions about it; 5,93%

Opportunity to receive discounts on products and services; 14,41%

Friends' recommendations; 2,54%

Influencing the policy of the company promoting the brand; 1,69%

Other reasons; 0,85%.

One third of all answers point at being attached to and users of the brand, which means that more than 90% of the surveyed have given this answer. Draws and prizes turn out to be the second strongest motivation, and amount to 20% of answers. The next reason, in the criteria of importance, is concerned with a desire of receiving discounts and reductions on the products and services, which is confirmed by 14% of given responds, and just a little fewer of them indicate the fact of providing entertainment and attraction (13,56 %). 9% of votes have been given on the possibility of following up current news about the brand, and less than 6% on the ability to express their own opinions on it.



Only a few users follow a fan page recommended by their friend (2,5% of the answers), and also not many of the surveyed want to influence the policy of the company promoting the brand - less than 2% of votes. The list of answers was broadened to include the individual sources of motivation, such as an interesting presentation of the brand's fan page, as was indicated by 1 person.

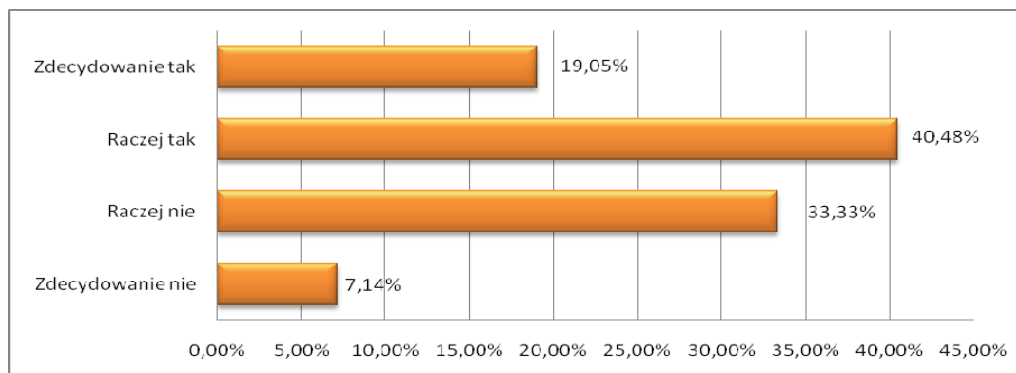
Comparing the gathered data, it is worth drawing out the final conclusions concerned with the perception of brand activities in social networks. It is obvious that the considerable majority of users' have a positive attitude towards this kind of online activity. More than one third of those surveyed look for the information about products and services in the social networks, expecting to find the brands there. Four out of five users are members of fan groups, and more than 60% of them follow between 1 and 10 fan pages. Being attached to the brand is the most appreciated reason for joining the brand followers' group as well as the draws and prizes that it provides.

A third of undertaken thematic blocks is concerned with the evaluation of the effectiveness of brand activities in the social network. An effort has been made to answer the questions directly related to the experience of the users when it comes down to their relationship with the brand, the results of their communication have been analyzed and types of brand strategies applied have been examined. This group of issues includes 9 further questions.

A brand representative is presumably the most interested in the results of activities conducted in the social media. Therefore, a question has been included, inquiring whether the fact that the brand's profile is being watched by many people relates to the sales volume of its products and services. It transpires that three out of five respondents confirm that the decision about "liking" the brand or adding its official profile to their list of friends, has an impact on the frequency of buying its products and services.

The result presented is the sum of votes falling on the option of "Rather yes" - 40,5 % and "definitely yes" - 19% of all answers. The group of people with opposite opinions is also quite numerous. More than 30% of the surveyed will not be buying the products of brands whose profiles they watch more often, and 7% answered the question negatively, with full conviction. The pattern of answers is presented in Figure 4.

**Figure 4:** Do brand activities on social networks correspond to the increased frequency of shopping done by its fans?



Source: based on own research.

Translation of answers:

Definitely yes; 19,05%

Rather yes; 40,48%

Rather no; 33,33%

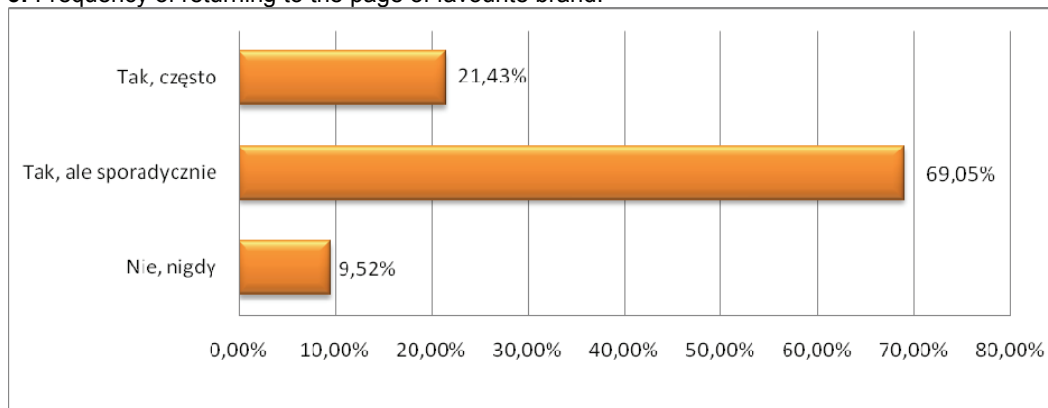
7,14% - Definatly no, 7,14%.

Conversely, how is the dependence on being a fan of particular brand and recommending it to one's friends being shaped? Is the decision about "liking" or adding the official profile of the brand to the list of friends equivalent to recommending it to other users of the network? The answers to this question were half positive and half negative. Although half of the surveyed recognized the dependency as true, the majority of answers however, fell on the option "Rather yes", which leaves a small area of uncertainty. The unambiguous confirmation was given by slightly more than 2% of the respondents. Almost 40% of the surveyed are therefore not recommending the "liked" brand, and 10% of them definitely does not do this.

Social Media is the network that enables two way communication between the brand and its fans. In fact, the most successful companies in the marketing of Social Media try to get in contact and talk to the group of users, which they brought close to them. It is not an easy task, as is shown by the answers for next questions with regard to getting in contact with the brand by the users. As many as 71% of the surveyed, who are the fans of at least one brand, have not attempted to contact the brand representative on their official profile in the social network. This type of contact with the brand was initiated by as few as 29% of the respondents. The easy conclusion which comes to mind then – That it is the brand that needs to encourage the users to instigate the relationship, or take the proverbial first step. The texts appearing on the brand’s website are not always interesting enough to tempt the users to launch a discussion or place their comments. The content of a fan page is enormously important as well as the choice of subjects undertaken and the way of communication, which the creators of the brand’s profile in the social network need to take into consideration.

Establishing a relationship with fans is one of the most important tasks that people responsible for existence of the brand in social media need to take on. If a fan returns to the brand’s website, it means that it is efficient and effectively managed. An attempt has been made to examine this matter by asking the surveyed how often they make a return visit the official profile of the brand (Figure 5).

**Figure 5:** Frequency of returning to the page of favourite brand.



Source: based on own research.

Translation of answers:

Yes, frequently; 21,43%

Yes, but occasionally; 69,05%

9,52% - No, never; 9,52%.

In analyzing the results, a well-defined tendency of occasional returning to the brand’s page was noted, which was indicated by 69% of the respondents. 20% of the participants in the survey return to the fan page of a popular brand often, and the remaining, almost 10%, of respondents admit to being inactive fans, who do not visit the brand-name profile again.

## 5. CONCLUSIONS

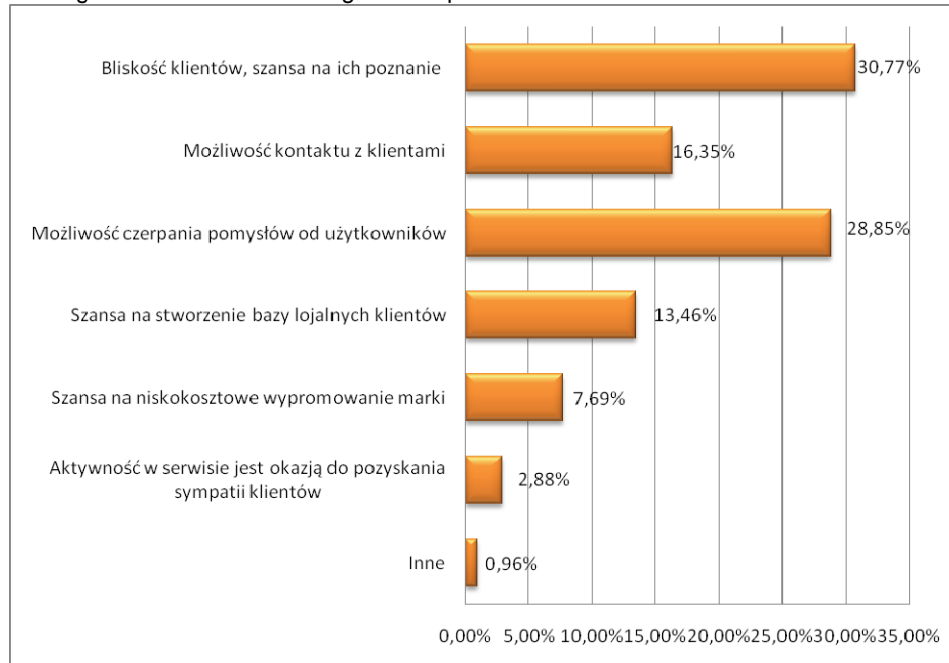
The conclusion that can be used as a tip for the future activities concerned with a brand in the social networking, is as follows: only few brands show their originality in ideas and produce an interesting fan page.

Many creators of the brand-name profiles do not realize how important and influential the look and contents of the brand’s page are, when a fan takes a decision about visiting it again. Undoubtedly, it is a necessary condition when encouraging the users of the community to return visits, therefore it is worth looking after the contents that are presented.

With regard to advantages that the brand can achieve in the sphere of available options in the social media, the respondents pointed out their close relationship with their customers as well as the chance to get them know better as being the most important, which constitutes more than 30% of all answers. The second important advantage recognized, was concerned with the possibility of deriving ideas from the users, almost 29% of votes were given on this one. On the next position there is the possibility to gain contact with the customers – 16,5%, as well as to create a database of the loyal ones -13,5%.

The advantages placed further down, with bigger differences in given votes, are concerned with low cost brand promotion – almost 8% of answers as well as the activity as a chance to gain popularity among the customers – nearly 3%. The lowest position was occupied by the answers to questions aimed at encouraging customers to come up with their own ideas related to advantages for the brand – not even 1%, where settling down in the customers' awareness was presented as an additional chance for the brand.

**Figure 6:** Advantages for the brand resulting from its presence in the social network.



Source: based on own research.

Translation of answers:

Being close to customers, opportunity to get them know better; 30,77%

Opportunity of getting in contact with the customers; 16,35%

Opportunity to derive the ideas from the users; 28,85%

Possibility to create a database of loyal customers; 13,46%

Opportunity of low cost brand promotion; 7,69%

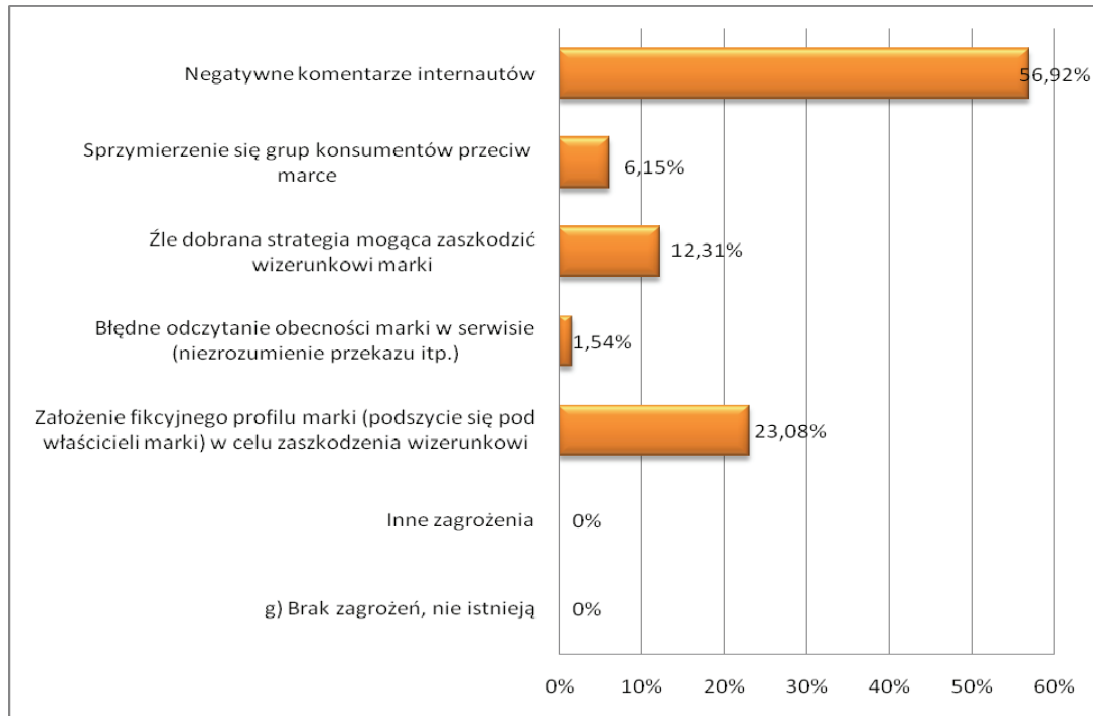
Activities in social networks as the opportunity to gain the popularity amongst the customers; 2,88%

Others; 0,96%.

Comparing the number of given indications, defining the advantages was not a problem to those surveyed, which cannot be said about the threats. For the question concerned with the negative incidents that the brand can encounter in the world of virtual communities, there was 50% fewer answers than in the previous case. There were 65 votes in total that were used to classify the threats.

And so, in the opinion of the respondents, negative comments from the online users are the largest threat to the brand, which was confirmed by 57% share of this answer in relation to all chosen. The second position, with 23% share of votes, was taken by the danger of establishing a fictitious profile of the brand/pretending to be its owners in order to cause damage to its image. Incorrectly chosen strategy of the brand, which could be also harmful for the brand's image, was being pointed out quite often as well – by more than 12%. The fourth position was occupied by the answer indicating the negative influence of consumers allied against the brand. No-one ticked the last two variants of answers, such as other threats and the option saying that there were no dangers at all.

**Figure 7:** Threats that the brand can encounter in the social network.



Source: based on own research.

Translation of answers:

Serie1; Negatywne komentarze internautów; 56,92% - Negative comments from the online users; 56,92%

Alliance of consumer groups against the brand; 6,15%

Incorrectly chosen strategy which could be harmful to the brand's image; 12,31%

Misreading the brand's presence in the network (misunderstanding the message); 1,54%

Establishment of fictitious profile of the brand (pretending to be someone else in order to cause some damage to the image); 23,08%

Other threats; 0%

The lack of threats, they do not exist; 0%.

The above mentioned results allow for assuming that the respondents do not possess much knowledge on the subject of threats, beyond that based on experience. As, from the moment of the brand appearing in the social network, there arises a considerable risk, which can take various forms. In the survey, there were not mentioned dangers such as a temporary trend for social networks, bad PR made by the competitors, authors being unprepared/being badly prepared or appearance of so-called artificial fans (>>avatars<<), pretending to be someone else in order to cause some damage to the brand.

Summing up, the society networks constitute a challenge for the brand. In the respondents' opinion, there are more advantages than dangers resulting from the presence in social communities. There is no golden mean when it comes down to running the activity in the network. You can only learn from others' mistakes and try to create emergency strategies for acting in critical situations. Nevertheless, the respondents stress the fact that getting attached to brands and putting trust in the companies as the result of cooperation and profits, and the social networks can be used as the source of maintaining ties between the parties.

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