

## SOCIAL MEDIA – A MODERN COMMUNICATION TOOL OF GENERATION Y

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**Abstract:** *The generation of young people born after 1984 is referred to as Generation Y. They represent an important part of social media users. The specific traits characterizing Generation Y include, among others, being skilful users of the latest technological novelties and natural users of digital media and digital technologies. They are also considered to be audacious and open to new challenges. Social media has become an essential tool for them to communicate. This has inspired companies to change their perception of communications and is manifested in the intense commitment of organizations to maintain customer relations through social media. The aim of this article is to identify the social media which are most popular with Generation Y in Poland and describe how they are used. The research study was conducted in October 2014 on a group of 150 students.*

**Key words:** *social media, generation Y, communications, Internet*

**JEL Classification:** *O3*

### 1. INTRODUCTION

The Internet is a breakthrough phenomenon which has had a huge impact on social communication. It is an incredibly powerful tool to create competitive advantage for those who know how to use it. It is a unique civilization and technological facility and for many people, the major source of information and knowledge about the world. The Internet communication forms are constantly undergoing the process of transformation. Initially, communications tools were confined to e-mail; the next step was forums, then instant messaging and weblogs. Currently, the virtual communities are the fastest growing form of communication. They contain all earlier forms of communication. The Internet, with its universal reach, has become a place where people can have conversations regardless of long geographical distances separating them. The aim of this article is to identify which social media are most popular with the Generation Y representatives in Poland and investigate how they use them. In order to achieve it a survey study was conducted in October 2014 on a group of 150 university students.

### 2. SOCIAL MEDIA AS AN ATTRIBUTE OF MODERN COMMUNICATIONS

The rapid increase in the number of Internet users and development of new communication methods has changed the way media are consumed. To describe these changes the term Web 2.0 was coined. In a broader sense the term refers to the use of technologies and means of communication on the Internet as well as the specific construction of websites and portals.

The Web 2.0 covers a variety of services and social networking platforms allowing users to actively create new content. The most popular types of sites creating Web 2.0 are: weblogs, social networking sites, social media, social sharing, social knowledge bases, virtual worlds, content aggregation and syndication<sup>1</sup>.

Today, the term social media is one of the most popular and is still gaining interest. It refers to a set of technologies designed to facilitate communication and content transfer between people, their friends and social networks to which they belong<sup>2</sup>. Using these communication channels, users can maintain contact, publish and exchange content, such as their own views, opinions, photos, videos and a lot more. Nowadays it is difficult to imagine an average Internet user who does not have an account on at least one social networking site. Originally social media were supposed to facilitate communication between friends and maintain interaction between users with the help of technology such as Internet forums, blogs and instant messaging enabling free exchange of user generated content. Although, the dynamic growth of social networking sites quickly attracted businesses and marketers, the main users of social media are still the Millennials, i.e. Generation Y.

A study carried out by Odyseja PR agency in cooperation with the Mobile Institute and Mexad media house showed that the Millennials form a diverse group which can be divided into two subgroups: the younger Millennials - born in 1990-2000 and the older Millennials - born in 1980 - 1989. They all grew up offline but rapid technology development forced them to adapt to the new, web-dominated conditions. This adaptation has been continuing stimulated by further development of information technologies which are changing the way the older representatives of Generation Y communicate with others, work, spend their leisure time and do shopping. The younger Millennials account for about 5 million of the 11 million people who belong to Generation Y in Poland. Their purchasing power is only now emerging and represents a big potential for business. As the older Millennials have certain features of Generation X, the younger are partly similar to the subsequent Generation Z. For them, a smartphone - enabling continuous web browsing - has become an extension of their 'self'. They simultaneously communicate

<sup>1</sup> Kaznowski D. 2008. *Nowy Marketing*. Warszawa: Wydawnictwo VFP Communications sp. z o.o. p. 96. ISBN 978-83-906109-4-8.

<sup>2</sup> Treadaway C., Smith M. 2011. *Godzina dziennie z Facebook marketingiem*. Gliwice: Wydawnictwo Helion, p.46. ISBN 978-83-246287-3-5.

with friends, listen to music and use applications that make life easier or provide entertainment. The younger Millennials are neither shy nor modest – they attach great importance to their own image which they create using social networking sites<sup>3</sup>. The Millennials are the most influential and most demanding group of consumers. For them, there is no life without computers and the Internet. The business representatives who want to communicate with them must demonstrate knowledge and active attitude

### 3. MOST POPULAR SOCIAL MEDIA IN POLAND

Creating user communities, interacting and collaborating, exchanging opinions and views is being done over a plurality of communication channels, which include social networking sites, thousands of weblogs, microblogs, forums, social media like citizen journalism websites and many others. Social networking sites are used by over one billion people in the world. The awareness of services such as Facebook is close to 100%. Over 36% of users of social networking sites comment on products. More than 66% of users have at least 100 friends<sup>4</sup>. Facebook is the most popular social networking site in Poland. Besides there are such services as: YouTube, Pinterest, Google+ and Twitter. This statistics is consistent with the world trends where, according to Social Media Marketing Industry Report prepared in 2014 by the Social Media Examiner, again Facebook is ranked first.

The number of Polish social networking services users in November 2014, according to data from GlobalWebIndex2014, is presented in Table 1.

**Table 1** Number of social networking services users in Poland

Social networking service	Number of users
Facebook	16 850 428
YouTube	16 199 469
Google+	4 129 910
Twitter	2 528 881
Instagram	2 274 248
Pinterest	1 682 992

Source: [3]

A specific Internet service is a weblog created by a concrete author, publishing entries expressing their thoughts, views and opinions. The reverse chronological arrangement of posts and their personal value make the service different from other websites. Maintaining a blog is becoming increasingly popular because it is easy and intuitive to do. Starting a blog is free and does not lead to any consequences, (if it complies with generally accepted moral principles). It also gives the author the opportunity to mark their presence in the reality of the cyberspace. There are various categories of blogs:

- weblog - dominates in the blogosphere and its content mainly consists of text entries,
- video blog (vlog) the content of this blog consists of video-recorded author's talks, various types of short videos and video reports,
- author publishes exclusively photos and illustrations,

- mobile blog (moblog) - run from mobile devices, author publishes concise, meaningful posts,
- microblog – contains short entries, restricted by a number of characters<sup>5</sup>.

Blogs have become surprisingly popular and some, (especially written in English,) have attracted 1-2 million readers. The study conducted by Polskie Badania Internetu (PBI) shows that as many 11 million Polish Internet users use and visit blogging platforms and there are nearly 3 million blogs, (a lot of them are inactive or have no content). Compared to the results of research conducted in 2010 by International Data Group Poland SA, the popularity of blogging platforms has changed. The most popular blogging platform is Onet with 1.6 million weblogs. Wirtualna Polska with its Bloog.pl blogging platform ranked second and has registered 816 thousand blogs. The third position is taken by Interia and its platform Znajomi Blog – 344 thousand blogs. Fourth place went to the portal Gazeta.pl, whose platform Blox.pl has 211 thousand blogs<sup>6</sup>.

It is worth mentioning that a company weblog is not an alternative to a website, because it lacks options necessary for a company service. The two forms of activities should be interrelated and coherent, which means that the company should have its own website and a related weblog presenting content consistent with its brand image.

Forums and discussion groups belong to the oldest Internet communication tools. Forums are encoded in the structure of a website and can be found everywhere. Their enormous popularity encouraged all major portals, most vertical portals (vortals) and websites of popular journals, magazines, universities or companies to run them as part of their websites. There are different types of Internet forums: some are completely anonymous and do not require any registration, some are the semi-anonymous which require registration, but without the need to confirm any personal data and, finally, there are restrictive forums where the user must confirm their identity. Forums can also be categorised with regard to their leading theme or structural complexity.

Similarly, the role of citizen journalism sites is increasing. These are sites which provide the opportunity to practice journalism for non-professionals. In Poland, there are two sites of this sort: Wiadomosci24.pl and Interia360.pl. Besides them, there are other less significant intervention services<sup>7</sup>.

The distinguishing feature of social media is that they build a dialogue and involve their participants. Additionally, the popularity of social media is enhanced by the increasing Internet coverage. It is possible to identify a set of common characteristics of communication process in Web 2.0 phase<sup>8</sup>:

- content generated by Internet users

<sup>5</sup> Kaznowski D., *op. cit.*, p. 98.

<sup>6</sup> Garapich A. 2011. *Zasięg Blogosfery w Polsce*. Warszawa: PBI. p.10. [http://pbi.org.pl/aktualnosci/2011\\_01\\_Zasieg\\_blogosfery\\_prezentacja\\_PBI\\_a.pdf](http://pbi.org.pl/aktualnosci/2011_01_Zasieg_blogosfery_prezentacja_PBI_a.pdf) [Retrieved 27 April 2015]

<sup>7</sup> Kosiński M. 2013. *Social media i marketing społecznościowy [In:] Biblia e-biznesu*, B.Gancarz-Wójcicka (Ed.), Gliwice: Wydawnictwo Helion. pp. 267-268. ISBN 978-83-246-6699-7

<sup>8</sup> Fabjaniak – Czerniak K. 2012. *Internetowe media społecznościowe jako narzędzie public relations* [In:] Zarządzanie w sytuacjach kryzysowych, K. Kubiak (Ed.). Warszawa: Wydawnictwo Wyższej Szkoły Promocji, pp. 184-185. ISSN 1734-4468

<sup>3</sup> Przedstawiciele pokolenia Y – raport „OMG! Czyli jak mówić do polskich milenialsów” (infografika) [In:] <http://marketing-news.pl/message.php?art=43542> (Retrieved 10 May 2015).

<sup>4</sup> Sadowski M. 2013. *Rewolucja social media*. Gliwice: Wydawnictwo Helion. p.16. ISBN 978-83-246439-5-0.

- lack of control over the publication of information,
- bidirectional communication,
- strong commitment of content creators
- possibility to create information by any internet user.
- fast flow of information,
- long life of information.

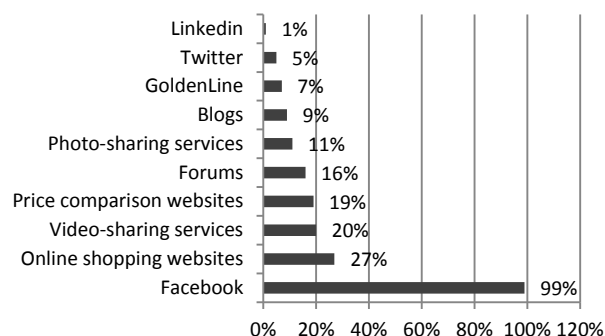
All in all, communication processes within a community deserve further investigation based on a broad approach. The increasing accessibility of online services creates the opportunity for people all over the world to generate information content.

#### 4. THE USE OF SOCIAL MEDIA BY GENERATION Y IN THE LIGHT OF OWN RESEARCH

Observing the rapid development of social media it can be assumed that they have a considerable impact on the quality and lifestyle of modern society. They have become an integral part of the effective functioning of an individual in the surrounding reality. It is through social media that we establish and maintain social contacts, communicate, seek information, advice and take purchase decisions. In the group of the 150 people participating in the study, only two (1%) did not declare the use of social media. The vast majority was part of the Internet social network. Therefore, it would be interesting to know which of the media were most recognizable and most commonly used by the respondents (Figure 1).

Social networking sites are Internet platforms facilitating establishing and maintaining contacts and exchanging information between people. They can be e.g. friends from school (Nk.pl), friends and acquaintances from various circles (e.g. Facebook, Google+), people listening to similar music (e.g. Last.fm, MySpace) or people seeking professional and business contacts (e.g. GoldenLine, LinkedIn)<sup>9</sup>. Unlike in Poland, in the US the social networking service Twitter is very popular. It attracts users who belong to particular social and professional circles especially politicians, journalists, representatives of the IT industry, e-commerce, and recently increasingly often - celebrities. But, in the cited study, only 5% of the respondents declared that they used this social networking platform. Most people equate social media with social networking sites but social media comprise a number of other services like weblogs, forums, content sharing sites or online shopping services. The content sharing sites were very popular with the respondents. They are websites enabling the user to share and view photos, images and videos. The provided content is fully generated by Internet users and the possibility to upload one's own video is a great incentive. The unquestionable number one in the group of content sharing sites is YouTube, which is visited by 2 million users around the world. YouTube is currently more popular than television serials. The monthly website traffic exceeds 9.4 million. The users aged 25 - 44 years represented 45% of the total number of users. The service offers professional thematic channels, movies and educational materials<sup>10</sup>. The increasing number of smartphones, which are

cameraphones with wireless Internet access, stimulate the popularity of services offering virtual photo galleries. In the studied group, 20% of the respondents use video-sharing services and 11% - photo-sharing services.



**Figure 1** Popularity of social media with respondents [%]  
 Source: own research

Young people are increasingly using the Internet for making purchase decisions. In the studied group 27% of the respondents use online shopping websites and 19% - the price comparison websites. As the name suggests, the latter allow comparison of product prices in different online and offline stores. Examples of price comparison sites in Poland are: Ceneo, Skapiec and Nokaut. They are appreciated by both the consumers and businesses. 16% of the respondents declared that they visit Internet forums. In Poland, they are part of most Internet portals such as onet.pl, interia.pl, wp.pl, gazeta.pl, but there are also independent websites dedicated to specific themes like health, beauty, cooking, cars etc. They bring together people sharing similar interests. Forums are mostly visited by people seeking advice, answers, solutions and opinions.

**Table 2** Users of social media by gender and place of residence [%]

	Total	Gender		Place of residence	
		Men	Women	City residents	Rural residents
Facebook	99%	95%	100%	98%	100%
Online shopping websites	27%	20%	29%	24%	31%
Video-sharing services	20%	24%	18%	18%	23%
Price comparison websites	19%	20%	18%	17%	21%
Forums	16%	27%	12%	13%	21%
Photo-sharing services	11%	10%	11%	8%	15%
Blogs	9%	7%	9%	6%	13%
GoldenLine	7%	7%	6%	5%	10%
Twitter	5%	10%	3%	3%	8%
LinkedIn	1%	0%	1%	0%	2%

Source: own research

The data presented in Table 1 show that students coming from rural areas are more active social media users. Furthermore, the respondents demonstrated interest in various types of social media, most probably resulting from the purpose they use the tools for. Therefore, they are a very good target audience for advertising campaigns in

<sup>9</sup> Miotk A. 2013. *Skuteczne social media*. Gliwice: Wydawnictwo Helion. p.26. ISBN 978-83-246-4932-7

<sup>10</sup> <http://interaktywnie.com/biznes/newsy/portale/youtube-uzaleznil-13-mln-polakow-zobacz-czego-jeszcze-o-nim-nie-wiesz-246991> (Retrieved 30 Sept. 2013)

