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Abstract

The textile-clothing industry is still perceived as one of the most important sectors of the world economy, and it is also the case in Poland, where it determines the directions of development of regions related to it. The development of new media, however, has contributed to significant changes in the environment of modern enterprises belonging to that sector, which has led to the evolution of their marketing orientation. The multidimensionality and complexity of processes observed bring about the necessity to modify the implemented process of building a competitive advantage and to look for effective tools in this area. Hypermedia space requires the participation of various groups of stakeholders, both in the B2C and B2B market. A solution that proves useful in this field is definitely social media, which significantly implies the quality of implemented processes while generating a wide spectrum of opportunities to compete. The aim of the article is to identify the marketing potential of social media in the textile-clothing industry with particular reference to their role in the process of the market orientation of enterprises from this sector.

Key words: social media, marketing, light industry, textile-clothing industry.

Introduction

Contemporary marketing is the ability to meet the needs of all customers, remember their requirements, and maintain contact with them in a way that will prove that managers fulfill remember these requirements [1]. It is an increasingly complex philosophy of action in which an enterprise and ICT technology are one coherent whole. As a result, an enterprise can become an active participant of the evolution process, creating a surrounding market reality. Close relations with individual groups of stakeholders and customers in particular must, however, be based on the dualism of mutual interactions (technical and personal interactivity), which requires, on the one hand, rationality of actions undertaken, while on the other, understanding and reference to the emotional sphere and basics of human cognitive abilities. It changes the range of the marketing concept implemented, setting new directions and areas as well as forcing entrepreneurs to be flexible, open to new ideas, accept unconventional solutions, and to undertake rivalry [2].

Social media fit in perfectly with this space as they are another stage of evolution in technological, social and behavioural aspects. As a result, social age is a significant dimension of business activity while allowing to multiply own advantages and values of every participant of that process.

The textile-clothing industry is increasingly based on knowledge and advanced

technologies. Social media can then become an accelerator of changes in that market sector while influencing the marketing orientation of individual enterprises and their market position. New technologies are a common driver of light industry change, which can provide enormous scope for production, distribution and consumption [3].

The aim of the paper is to determine the role of social media in the process of marketing evolution in Polish textile-clothing industry enterprises. Part one describes the essence of social media and their marketing potential, with particular reference to their role in creating a market position. Subsequent parts present the results of the authors' own research.

Review of literature

The textile-clothing industry is one of the most important sectors of the Polish economy and its enterprises have had to go through a series of changes resulting from system transformation, requirements of the EU market, and trends observed in the global economy in order to become competitive. As a result, a great quantity of Polish enterprises from that sector have turned out to be not profitable enough and not sufficiently prepared for new market realities, has been, to a great extent, linked with limited export directions (eastern markets in particular), a monolithic production structure, obsolete and capital-consuming machinery resources as well as a relatively low level of innovation of implemented produc-

tion processes, mainly in the first stage of transformations. The fiscal policy of the state has focused on attracting importers, a lack of protection of domestic producers, the relatively liberal EU policy of the sector or, and last but not least, offshoring production to Asian countries as well as the frequent inflow of cheap products from the sector have significantly weakened the position of Polish enterprises, which has resulted in the closing of some of them. Both a lack of knowledge and competencies as well as sufficient financial and technical means to undertake actions aimed at the modernisation of own infrastructure and modification of market activity conducted (production, organisation, logistics, marketing, etc.) has become a key factor influencing the process of evolution in that market sector.

The textile-clothing industry in Poland currently has a relatively sound position in the European Union, ranking eighth in turnover, sixth in investment outlay, third in employment and second in the number of companies [i]. A significant change was observed in the structure of this sector, which currently comprises mostly private entities, small and medium-sized enterprises as well as microenterprises [4]. In February 2016 textile enterprises reported over 24% growth in the sales revenue value, whereas in the clothing sector the figure exceeded 12%. According to producers, the current level of production will not decrease as there is a possibility of only a slight growth in domestic orders [ii]. However, in spite of

stabilisation in the sector and improvement of indicators achieved related to the level of competitiveness, the average technical index of intensity of process flow in this industry is over five times lower than in advanced countries [5].

Changes observed in this market sector nowadays concern an increase in the quality level of products offered as well as their functionality as far as design, safety, comfort and the period of time they are perceived as attractive, are concerned. The textile-clothing market confidently enters areas that used to be reserved for high technology industries in the scope of industrial high-tech areas [6]. As a result, the textile and clothing industry is up-to-date, based on knowledge, and has a big potential for generating dynamic economic growth, hence deserving reasonable support [7]. All of these, however, entail a need to implement changes in the way of management, reallocate financial means, and improve the degree of resistance to business cycle fluctuations in the sector, which is reflected in their marketing orientation.

Modern marketing has evolved from the era of product focus (Marketing 1.0) through customer focus (Marketing 2.0) to that of value focus (Marketing 3.0), in which there is no consumer any longer – there is a man who has a brain, a heart and soul [8]. Therefore the marketing orientation of a textile-clothing enterprise should refer to a holistic approach in which a process of adjusting to, on the one hand, and creating, expectations of business partners and customers, on the other, must use various areas and marketing concepts. Hence it is an increasingly multidimensional and complex process in which marketing combines the key elements of neuromarketing, relationship marketing, experiential marketing, e-marketing or content marketing. Their mutual penetration allows to create a unique structure of the key success factors, translating into a market position of individual enterprises from the sector. The development of ICT technologies, their intensive implementation as well as market virtualization cause that one can observe a gradual moving away from traditional media towards the era of social media and video casts, both live and mobile [9].

Social media are one of the most dynamically growing areas of the contemporary market, including the textile-clothing

industry, the fashion sector in particular. They are increasingly defined as a group of Internet-based solutions and applications that rely on ideological and technological fundamentals of Web 2.0 and which enable to create and exchange contents generated by users [10]. Today everything is about social media. Some industry gurus claim that if you do not participate in Facebook, YouTube and Second Life you are not a part of the cyberspace [11]. Social media is a hybrid in that it springs from mixed technology and media origins that enable instantaneous, real-time communication, utilising multi-media formats and numerous delivery platforms with global reach capabilities [12]. Social media are tools that facilitate the socialisation of content, and encourage collaboration, interaction, communication through discussion, feedback, voting, comments and sharing of information from all interested parties [13]. As a result, they guarantee a wide spectrum of opportunities to create company/brand image, intensify sales, shape a desired customer profile and structure of their preferences, as well as to conduct market research and exploration of innovative solutions, because collaboration through social media is becoming the new driver of the strategic direction in design, production, service, marketing, delivery and continuous improvement [14]. However, in order to become an effective element of the marketing orientation of textile-clothing enterprises, they must be an indispensable part of strategies implemented by companies while ensuring added value for an enterprise [15]. Managers in the textile and clothing industry must learn to provide business partners with networking platforms using blogs and social media tools to engage them in a manner that is consistent with the organization's mission and performance goals [16].

■ Methodology

Studies concerning the range of using social media in marketing activities undertaken by textile-clothing sector enterprises are a subsequent step in deeper analyses of that sector, with particular reference to the Province of Łódź, which is currently regarded as the Polish fashion centre and associated with related unique design of textiles as well as advanced textile, clothing and usable technologies.

Introductory research currently being conducted is mainly explorative and is an element of studies which are to help to examine the potential of social media in a multidimensional way in the process of management in that group of enterprises in the future. What the authors consider to be of crucial importance in that area is the market orientation and opportunities to build a competitive advantage through a process of absorption of tools related to social media.

The findings of studies conducted in the period between December 2015 – January 2016 among 137 enterprises representing companies of Łódź light industry have become the inspiration for subsequent questions about social media potential in the market sector analysed. The research indicated that only every four of the enterprises analysed declared using social media, and the dominant companies in that group are enterprises functioning in the Business-to-Consumer market, in the clothing sector in particular. Moreover the degree and range of using social media in marketing actions were mostly confined to the social network Facebook. The enterprises analysed totally avoided using blogs or the YouTube channel, which have proven extremely successful as a platform for promotional and image activities in the practice of numerous enterprises included in this sector as well. Actions undertaken in the area of social media are not an integral part of strategies implemented by them, which definitely limits their role in the process of building a competitive advantage. Detailed findings were presented in the paper entitled „*Social Media Networking as an element of building a competitive advantage in light industry*”. Available studies and comparative analysis of activities of companies/brands of the textile-clothing sector, both on a European and international scale, indicate a much higher degree of using social media and the dynamics of their absorption in the process of marketing orientation and achieving a desired competitive advantage. Therefore it seems necessary to determine the reasons why Polish enterprises from the sector resign from being present in social media as well as to identify future trends in that area.

Analysis of using social media in the process of marketing orientation in textile-clothing enterprises requires to conduct both qualitative and quantitative research carried out among enterprises and their

customers. Their mutual relations determine the character and profile of activities undertaken in the market and hypermedia space in particular. Two dimensions of the research conducted in the case of the specificity and complexity of that market provide an opportunity to conduct more thorough exploration of dominant trends and their prerequisites.

Studies conducted were idiographic, which means that findings obtained concern only an examined group of entities and their local context. They are a continuation of introductory research conducted in the range analysed among enterprises connected with light industry from the Łódź region. Therefore they are mainly informative and will be the subject of further deeper studies and analyses.

■ Results and discussion

Qualitative studies were conducted by means of in-depth interviews and were directed at textile-clothing sector enterprises. The research tool was an interview questionnaire consisting of 12 questions, 5 of which were demographics questions. They referred to a period of time an enterprise has functioned on the market, the number of employees, market sector, origin of capital and scope of operations. The subject range comprised 7 companies representing a sector of small and medium-sized enterprises. The three companies analysed functioned only in B2B and two only in the B2C market, whereas the other two served both individual and institutional customers. Companies participating in the research dealt both with production as well as the retailing of textile-clothing items. The research conducted was based on an interpretative approach that consists in the perception and description of phenomena as a result of human interactions, which seems crucial in the case of looking for new prerequisites that condition the development of a given phenomenon.

Representatives of the companies examined pointed out that the most important reasons for not being interested in social media in implemented marketing actions was, first of all, a lack of needs in that area, which can result from both the specificity of a given market as well as from the customer profile and purchasing preferences. *'What my clients value most is quality. I have long-standing di-*

rect contact with them and I do not need either more advertising or Facebooks. People pay attention to quality and price, they need to touch a product...' What also matters for the companies analyzed is the lack of sufficient competencies or the low level of awareness of their employees and managerial staff as far as opportunities that social media generate are concerned.

- *'I do not belong to the Internet-literate generation. Yet we do have a website. We hired an external specialist, we only provide content. Other forms? Well, I really don't know...'*
- *'Social networks... So far, I see no point ...'*
- *'Actually, we have something like that but ...'*
- *'To be frank, we are not even on Facebook.'*

Every second enterprise examined, however, declared the possibility to implement social media in their marketing activities. Yet it can be assumed while taking into consideration current trends and managers' attitude that the range and level of this absorption can be greatly reduced. Among the most important factors that might encourage enterprises to be active in social media was definitely the growth of sales or maintaining its present volume, especially in the case of the systematic deterioration of market conditions observed. *'We should have applied all these different forms a long time ago. I know they drive sales. And we need it. Sales fall every couple of years and if it had not been for our regular customers, we would probably have had to close the business.'* Representatives of the companies did not notice social media potential in such areas as customer service, adjusting products to customers' real needs, minimising costs related to market penetration and promotional activities or possibilities to build a network of connections with different business partners. Hence the process of marketing evolution based on social media would require not only changes in the current IT infrastructure or a need to raise the competencies of workers responsible for this business area, but primarily the modification of the current way of competing in a market that is conditioned by a manager's way of thinking. There is a risk that in the case of older people representing of the Baby Boomer generation (1946-1964), age and knowledge as well as long-standing experience in the trade can be the biggest barrier in the process of

initiating changes that are now perceived as superfluous.

Social media are not only a manifestation of new technologies but they are primarily a result of a new way of business thinking and implementation of market activities. *'We have company accounts on Facebook and we strengthen our brand through employees' accounts. We also advertise various marketing activities there.'* Thus creating awareness and needs related to social media among enterprises from the market analysed will proceed gradually along with increasing computerisation of devices, including everyday use devices, processes and customers. The growing popularity of smart technologies, including smart clothes and wearables i.e. devices one can wear, might become in the future an attractive niche for the textile-clothing industry while generating demand not only among individual customers but also in other branches of industry. Therefore social media can become a crucial element of communication and building a network of connections between various groups of stakeholders.

Introductory research conducted among textile-clothing enterprises has become an inspiration to look for answers concerning the range of interests of potential customers in interaction with companies/brands from this sector by means of social media. First a survey was conducted among customers of the B2C market due to the bigger activity of this type of enterprise in hypermedia space. The study was directed at students of Łódź colleges as potential customers of companies/brands of the textile-clothing sector. The selection of the sample was specific and connected with the fact that students in Poland account for, next to managerial staff, the biggest group of Internet users (23%) [17]. The study was conducted by means of a direct questionnaire and its main objective was a preliminary evaluation of the level of interest in social media in the area of products and companies/brands connected with the market sector analysed. The research tool was a survey questionnaire composed of 21 questions, seven of which were metrics questions concerning gender, age, place of residence, subject and type of studies as well as the time respondents spend online every day.

The issues of crucial importance for the research were:

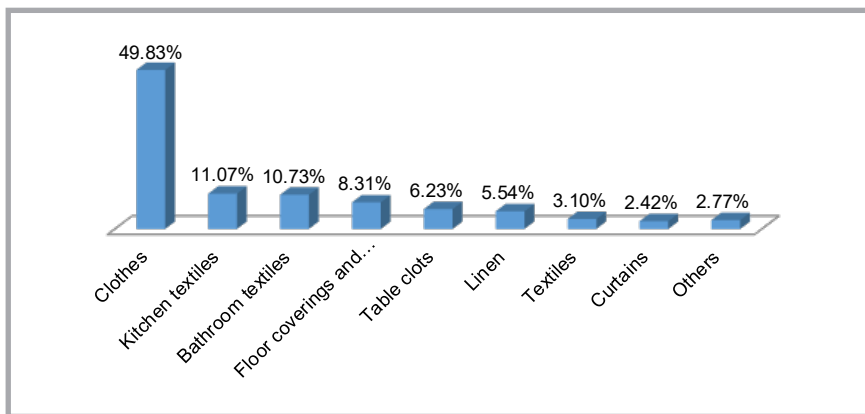


Figure 1. Respondents' interest in the presence of companies/brands of the textile-clothing sector in social media. **Source:** Own study.

- Identification of the trades of the sector analysed which are the main areas of customers' interests in social media;
- Determination of preferred social media tools and their influence on consumer behaviour in the group examined.

203 students took part in the study, 71% out of whom were women. That category of respondents is the main decision-maker in purchasing kitchens, bathroom textiles or textiles of decoration elements such as curtains or bed spreads, etc. Furthermore this group of customers shows a big interest in diverse channels of obtaining information about clothing items, including a wide range of social media tools. Over 82% of respondents were below 25, which means they belong to the Y generation, which is closely related to the development of interactive technologies and are competent social media users. People between 25 to 34 accounted for nearly 9%, just like the group at an age above 34. The prevailing group were people whose permanent place of residence were small towns – below 5 thousand inhabitants (41.88% of respondents) and big cities – above 30 thousand inhabitants (40.39%). Slightly above 89% of those surveyed were in full-time study, whereas every second respondent was an extramural student. 54% of respondents studied Management, whereas 41% had chosen Administration. The remaining 5% were students of Economics and Logistics. Every second respondent spent from 1 to 3 hours everyday on online activities and nearly 34% spent more than 3 hours. 7.4% of respondents were active for less than one hour and nearly 6% could not state unequivocally how much time they spend on social media.

95% of respondents use social media as they facilitate considerably keeping in touch with family and friends (36.6%) as well as offering easy access to information (34.7%). According to 14.5% of respondents, it is also an attractive way of spending free time.

¾ of respondents add profiles of companies/brands related to the textile-clothing industry to their circle of friends. An analysis of respondents with respect to their characteristics showed that women are more active in that group (73.8%). In the case of male users the figure was slightly lower (63.8%). The inclination to take up interaction with companies/brands of this sector was diminishing with age, with the biggest value was noted among respondents below 25 (76%). Taking into account the place of permanent residence, the biggest inclination in that area was observed among people from towns with between 5 thousand to 15 thousand inhabitants (81.2%). In other cases the figure was quite similar and amounted to about 70%. More intensive activity in the area analysed was observed among students of full-time courses (74.4%) rather than extramural students (66%). Longer time spent online increased their interest in actions undertaken by companies/brands of the textile-clothing sector in social media.

Every third respondent declared that they add from one to three profiles of companies/brands from that sector to their circle of friends. A similar tendency could also be observed among respondents who had from four to six such profiles among their friends. However, a quarter of respondents admitted that this number does not exceed 10 profiles of companies/brands connected with that market sector.

Nearly half of respondents add profiles of clothing companies/brands, and slightly above 11% do so in the case of kitchen textiles (tea towels, mats, aprons, etc.), whereas 10.7% are interested in profiles of companies connected with bathroom textiles (towels, mats, dressing gowns, etc.). For 8% of respondents, such a form of contact is important in the case of companies/brands connected with the manufacture of carpets and floor coverings. The smallest number of respondents declared an interest in curtains and textiles (see **Figure 1**).

The main reason why respondents were keen on adding profiles of companies/brands related to the textile-clothing industry to their circle of friends was an opportunity to obtain detailed information about products thanks to attractive texts and multimedia presentations (pictures, films), which was pointed out by up to 41.3% of those surveyed. What mattered for 12.6% of respondents were additional offers directed only at so-called fans of a given company/brand, and for 11.6% a key issue was brand loyalty. What was the least important factor was an opportunity to express own opinions and a positive brand image.

Respondents look for companies/brands connected with the market analysed mostly on Facebook (29.5%) and YouTube channels (28.9%), which definitely seem to be a perfect tool for inspiring customers with new trends, in the clothing sector in particular, and creating their purchasing preferences. It is also in line with trends observed in the global fashion market. Every tenth respondent also looked for information by means of Instagram, a photography network, discussion forums and blogs run by private people and celebrities. It can be assumed that in the marketing activities of companies/brands of the textile-clothing sector which are implemented in social media space, a crucial role will be ascribed to word-of-mouth marketing and recommendations from other users, including trendsetters (bloggers, actors, singers, etc.). What is more, above 2/3 of respondents confirmed that they trust opinions placed in social media about companies/brands of that sector. The predominant group were women below 25, who spend between one to three hours online. A very small group of respondents looked for information about companies/brands of the textile-clothing sector in such social networks as Twitter or Pinterest (3.69%).

Blogs run by companies/brands also attracted very limited interest as they were pointed out by only 3.2% respondents.

Slightly above 70% of those surveyed believe that the fact that they are fans of a given company/brand in social media has an impact on the increase in the number of products, frequency of purchases of textile-clothing products and their value. Moreover the same number of respondents check the fan page of a given company/brand before making a purchase in order to obtain additional information and/or additional discounts. Thus it can be assumed that from the point of view of the purchasing process, a key element will be the quality of content presented and their diversity as well as their expert dimension. What is not insignificant is also marketing stimuli related to the level of prices and/or form, time and cost of delivery. Nearly 63% do not pay attention to the number of fans of a given company/brand as a criterion confirming its values and strengths. What is more, it is also not a criterion that conditions a purchase in the case of products from the textile-clothing sector.

Over 84% of respondents are convinced that social media allow to build long-standing relations between a company/brand and their customers while generating both, image and sales benefits. Contrary to the enterprises examined, they perceive a potential for that medium in the process of customer service and obtaining information indispensable to create innovations e.g. concerning products.

The findings indicate a significant interest in social media in the process of interaction with companies/brands declared by customers. What also seems interesting is that it does not only concern clothes, as customers also look for other products related to this market. The study, conducted however, concerned only relations in the B2C market sector as it is more integrated with social media that are omnipresent in its various dimensions.

While observing global trends, it can be assumed that in the near future the level and range of social media usage in marketing actions of enterprises in the textile-clothing market will increase significantly. A customer can become a crucial factor intensifying the level of an enterprise's activity, in the Business-to-Consumer market sector in particular.

It can bring about a growth in the scale of implementation and aggregation of methods as well as tools related to social media in enterprises that are already active in this market area as well as a growth in the number of companies which undertake such an activity.

■ Conclusions

Social media generate a significant part of hypermedia traffic, thanks to which they play an increasingly important role in the process of management in the textile-clothing industry as well. Their proper implementation helps to increase revenue, build customer loyalty and strengthen company/brand awareness [18]. It also increases the development potential of enterprises in that sector, influencing their market advantage.

Unfortunately many executives in this industry still eschew or ignore this form of media because they do not understand what it is and how to engage with it [19]. The lack of need in that area, which is declared by them, as well as a conviction that their activities are worth intensifying mostly in deteriorating market conditions, may become a significant barrier in the process of absorption of social media in the coming years. The lack of openness to new concepts, reluctance to adopt new solutions, ignoring what a customer expects at the level of a contact with a company/brand or, at the very least, a lack of knowledge concerning the evaluation of the level of effectiveness of activities conducted, hinder optimal usage of opportunities that are currently generated by social media. They are a way of thinking and perceiving surrounding reality. However, people decide on their usefulness and possibilities of application to the process of building a market advantage [20].

It may seem that processes related to the absorption of social media in management that are analysed in this market can indicate important cause-effect dependencies with the size of an enterprise, character of business activity and market sector. Enterprises that show definitely bigger awareness in this area belong to the B2C market, particularly to the clothing sector connected with the fashion market, which to a large extent results from the target market profile and expectations of individual customers. They generally look for information

that will increase their sense of safety in the purchasing process and offer conditions allowing to optimize their choices and, at the same time, to achieve the financial benefits expected e.g. by special price offers or additional discounts. They also appreciate the role of social media in the process of customer service, in creating their positive experience and engaging them in the process of creating marketing innovations.

The studies conducted were generally introductory and they present issues analysed only in a fragmentary way. Therefore it will be continued and will present a separate subject of study and analysis.

Social media are fundamentally changing the way we collaborate, consume, and create. They represent one of the most transformative impacts of information technology on business, both within and outside firm boundaries [21]. Understanding their specificity will enable enterprises of the textile-clothing sector to participate actively in the process of evolution of their marketing orientation and take advantage of their potential.



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