purchasing behaviours on the market of e-services there occurs a phenomenon of convergence of e-consumers` behaviours (which is a symptomatic phenomenon for post-modernist consumption). E-consumers from different countries show similarities in purchasing/using e-services, therefore we may treat them as a homogenous segment of consumers.

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КОРИСТУВАЦЬКИЙ КОНТЕНТ – ПЕРЕВАГА ЧИ ЗАГРОЗА З ПОГЛЯДУ ПОБУДОВИ ІМІДЖУ БРЕНДУ

Зростаюча популярність соціальних послуг і мобільного Інтернету вплинула на інформаційний обмін – люди мають можливість обмінюватися контентом у реальному часі з необмеженою кількістю користувачів Інтернету. Це має свої наслідки у маркетингових комунікаціях. Споживачі діляться своїми думками стосовно продуктів, брендів і послуг, завантажують інформацію щодо новинок, викладають картинки і фільми за короткий час. Описані теоретичні аспекти користувацького контенту і прикладів його позитивного та негативного впливів на маркетингові комунікації.

Ключові слова: користувацький контент, створений користувачами контент, КК, інтернет-маркетинг.

USER-GENERATED CONTENT – AN OPPORTUNITY OR A THREAT IN TERMS OF BUILDING BRAND IMAGE

Growing popularity of social services and mobile internet influenced information exchange – people have a possibility of sharing content in a real time with unlimited number of internet users. It has its consequences for marketing communication. The consumers share their opinions concerning products, brands and services, upload information about novelties, spread pictures and movies within short time. The theoretical aspects of user-generated content and examples of its positive and negative influence on marketing communication will be discribed in this article.

Key words: user-generated content, user-created content, UGC, e-marketing.

Problem formulation. From the beginning of internet era and its growing popularity round the world, scientists and marketers were consistent that it brings huge possibilities for companies to develop

their businesses, in terms of brand image, relations with customers and e-commerce (as it created an additional marketplace). However, these issues are not the only aspects of internet development that should be considered by entrepreneurs.

The last decade brought enormous changes in terms of communication and information exchange. The main boost for transformation of society and its patterns of internet usage is fast technological development. Consumers have now possibility to share via internet their knowledge, attitudes and experiences concerning services, brands, products and places in a real time with a wide group of their friends, colleagues, acquaintances or family members. The whole trend of loading the content on the internet is called user-generated content or user-created content. In last few years it has become widely discussed topic in terms of variable fields such as sociology, journalism, politics or marketing. The power of the society to influence politicians' or companies' decisions is growing thanks to quicker and wider exchange of information. It also creates huge possibilities for companies in terms of marketing, however, can constitute a huge threat in case a company commits a mistake in its core commercial activity.

Analysis of current research output and publications. User-generated content may be considered as a relatively new term, especially according to the Polish market. The authors of the latest articles concerning the topic are trying to locate user-generated content in the web 2.0 marketing theory and refer it to the other popular trends and terms. Christoph Burmann defines user-generated branding as the strategic and operative management of brand related user-generated content (UGC) to achieve brand goals. According to this definition, which focuses on the company's point of view, implementation of UGC management gives marketers possibility of controlling UGC and consequent using of it in creating brand image [1]. It has to be admitted that Web 2.0 can be considered as a competitive environment, similar to a traditional market where gaining information, planning and building a long-term strategy is a key to success. On the other hand, Colin Campbell, Leyland F. Pitt, Michael Parent, Pierre R. Berthon, look at user-generated content in marketing from the consumers point of view and focus on consumer-generated advertising, understood as specific instances where consumers create brand-focused messages with the intention of informing, persuading, or reminding others. They underline that it can support the official marketing communication or it can be contrary to it. In these analysis the main emphasis is put on UGC effectiveness as an advertisement, in comparison to traditional communication channels.[2] José van Dijck presents another, more sociological approach to the user-generated content and analyses it from mass media perspective as an important trend in the developing society. He underlines that majority of internet users, although they have such a possibility they do not create the uploaded content. What does it mean to the companies? They should consider user-generated content as an additional communication channel with non-standard consumption patterns where definite target group may be reached [3].

As presented above, the literature on the topic of user-generated content is usually focused on certain point of view and perspective. In our analysis, we would like to focus on a wider approach to the topic and analyze its influence on business from several perspectives.

There is no official definition of user-generated content. However, OECD listed the following requirements for calling content found on the web with the term user-generated content (UGC):

- it is public, available on internet,
- it involved a certain level of creativity,
- it is amateur, not created within the professional practices [4].

According to these requirements there is plenty of online content that can be classified as user-generated content. Among the sources of it, the following services and platforms may be listed:

- social media (e.g. Facebook, Twitter, LinkedIn),
- blogs, fotoblogs, miniblogs,
- forums and review-pages,
- services with possibility of uploading films (e.g. YouTube, Vimeo),
- services with possibility of uploading pictures (e.g. Instagram, Demotywatory),
- wikis (e.g. Wikipedia) – dictionaries/encyclopedias written by many internet users.

In majority people who are uploading the content on internet do not have any financial motivations. Usually the only drivers for their actions are need of connecting with people, sharing their opinions to wider audience and self-expression [5].

Article objectives. In this paper we are going to analyze the current literature concerning user-generated content to present the most recent approach to the topic. Later on, we will present the general description of user-generated content, different sources of it and consider trends which may have influence on its development on the Polish market. Furthermore, we will focus on user-generated content influence on businesses and on analyzing recent cases of positive and negative impact of user-generated content on communication strategy. In the conclusions of the article we will try to list general rules of managing user-generated content and minimizing its negative impact on company's image.

Presentation of main materials. Among the trends that have had and will have huge influence on user-generated content in the near future on the Polish market, the following facts may be specified:

• Stable penetration of internet in Poland which at the end of 2012 amounted to 56,8% and at the same time high frequency of usage – nearly 92% of internet consumers use it at least couple of times per week.[6] At the same time, the quality and speed of internet connection is growing thanks to technological development. Moreover, due to higher average income rate people can afford faster internet which enables them to upload more data, including pictures and films and browse more content.

• Growing popularity and availability of smartphones which enable their users to share and receive information on all type of social services and forums in a real time. In 2012 15% of all people in Poland used smartphones[7], which equals about 6 millions of users with ongoing access to internet. However, among them 19% have never used it to connect to the internet. Still 59% of them connect to the internet at least couple of times a week. They are using smartphones mainly to read/send emails, browse social services, upload applications, navigate with GPS and read online versions of newspapers and magazines.[8] This means that majority of their internet usage patterns have moved from traditional personal computers or laptops to smartphones which have a potential of becoming the major device used for web browsing. What is more, it will influence the whole functioning of the society and business in the further future.

• Growing penetration and frequency of Facebook usage. The number of Polish Facebook accounts at the end of 2012 amounted to over 10 million which equals about 50% of internet users in Poland. Although, rise of account number versus prior year has been recorded (additional 2,5 million accounts), the growth is gradually slowing down. What is more, the number of Facebook real users is actually 30% higher and amounts to over 13 million people. These additional 3 million people use Facebook and browse its content, however, do not have their private accounts. Another important trend concerning Facebook are the patterns of its usage – people are using it more frequently (thanks to smartphones and tablets) and have many possibilities to be active within the service (comments, messages, likes, pictures, movies).[9] Finally, Facebook is becoming a huge platform of information exchange on variable issues. It is not any more only a service which enables its users to stay in touch with their friends, it is a platform where people can share their opinions on the topics that concern them and reach directly to the companies or public services with their demands, needs and feedback.

• Customers are becoming more and more informed, educated and aware of the value that brands and services should be delivering them. This applies also to marketing communication, its content and dialog with the customers which are very sensitive to any attempts of misleading them or not being treated seriously by companies. At the same time, people are more eager to share their opinions and assess the surrounding reality. They feel that the new media and internet are giving them the power to state their point of view.

The companies aware of upcoming changes will have the possibility to react fast, response to their clients' needs and avoid unconsidered decisions. If a company knows how to use the potential of internet users, user-generated content may be easily implemented into communication strategy.

There are three aspects of user-generated content that should be taken under consideration when building future communication strategy:

- market research based on the user-generated content – on the internet there is plenty of data that can be used to adjust products and services to clients' needs and their usage patterns in different categories. The information found on the internet can be inspirational for farther development of a brand or may be treated as feedback for past actions of the company;
- intentional engaging of clients by the companies to upload content;
- spontaneous upload of content by the internet users.

In this article we are going to focus on two latter aspects of user-generated content. First case requires that the initiative emerges from the company side. Usually, user-generated content is then a result of a contest organized for the clients. The company has the control over the uploaded content as it determines the rules of a contest, defines acceptable projects, official webpage, forms of communication, winning levels, etc. The user-generated content in such cases is usually connected with another very popular trend in marketing – crowd-sourcing which assumes collecting ideas, creations and projects concerning brand, product or service from customers as a part of the contest. Crowd-sourcing is a narrower concept than user-generated content as it only concerns parts of marketing mix (e.g. packages, product concept, creation of advertisement) and the generated content is usually implemented later on by a brand manager into marketing strategy [10].

The idea of user-generated content has been implemented within last few years by couple of the companies on the Polish market with a huge success. Worth-mentioning are the following:

- Procter & Gamble announced a contest for a project of Puma Create perfume bottle (2006),
- Redd's introduced campaign 'Design your Redd's can' (2007),
- Western Bank WBK started its internet platform 'Bank of ideas' (from 2008 till now) where clients can suggest solutions which would simplify its services,
- Frito Lay organized a contest under the name „Think up a new taste" (2010), in which four new tastes of Lay's chips were chosen and launched to the market [11].
- Netia's organized a contest for creating television advertisement with a financial reward (2012). The contestants uploaded almost 350 films with their version of two original spots produced by Netia. The uploaded spots were watched by over 2 million people on the official website (www.netiakonkurs.pl) and on the dedicated channel on YouTube. Additionally, the laureates' advertisements were emitted on television as new spots of Netia [12].

These examples turned out to be very successful and met with positive reception and engagement of the consumers. On the other hand, if consumers sense insincerity in the company's actions or do not identify with the proposed topic of the contest and do not consider it interesting, crowd-sourcing may have totally opposite results. The most often mentioned case in which implementation of user-generated content turned out to be unsuccessful is Chevrolet's campaign in the United States. The company announced a contest for an advertisement of a new model of Chevy Tahoe. The online platform enabled users to put together their version of a film (with available music and pictures) with slogans invented by them. The contestants, however, did not treat the idea seriously and created only ironic and critical version of the advertisements. The criticism concerned not only Chevrolet brand, but also other sports cars and among many others – president's Bush ecological policy. The campaign generated huge online buzz effect, however, with a negative content, not favorable to the brand [13]. This kind of cases in which companies are trying to use crowd-sourcing in their campaigns and it turns out to have totally opposite results to the planned actions, have already their separate name in marketing – crowd-slapping. This term shows the power of internet users to influence marketing reality. Furthermore, it presents the awareness of customers and their resistance to any hypocritical marketing actions [14].

As mentioned before, user-generated content may be also spontaneously added by internet users. If it has positive tone, it is even more valuable for building company's image as it has unconstrained character and shows client's authentic, emotional attachment to the brand. However, such cases happen rather rarely on a wider scale and concern only brands which base their relations with customers on emotions, exist on

the market for many years and, as a consequence, had an opportunity to build a long-term relationship with its customers. Red Bull, Adidas and Coca-Cola are very good examples of such brands [15].

On the other hand, there are many cases that show how spontaneous user-created content may have negative impact on the business functioning. The risk for businesses can be easily presented with the latest example of Cyfra+ and Platform n on the Polish market. The two mentioned television platforms have merged into nc+ and joined their offers in March 2013. The new channel packages, its prices and available decoders were presented at the press conference on 21st of March. Afterwards, all the previous customers of Cyfra+ or platform n started their complaints on the internet using forums, official nc+ fan page on Facebook and newly created fan page 'Anty nc+'. The clients have been complaining mainly about high prices of packages, difficulties with reaching the call center and inflexible offer of packages.[16] During first four days after the presentation of new offer, there have been over 12 thousands comments on the official Facebook fan page of nc+ [17]. The reaction of nc+ was limited only to an official comment on the website and Facebook page with confirmation that they are working on solving all the problems with new offer and they are encouraging to contact them via call center, however, they asked to be patient as they were not expecting such a huge interest with the new offer. At the same time, the additional website www.ncpluspytania.pl was created on which all the questions concerning new offer were answered [18]. However, all the questions asked on the official fan page on Facebook were left without any answers [19]. Additionally, nc+ blocked possibility of adding new comments on the main wall of the Facebook page and deleted some of the opinions and comments posted by the customers. Although the possibility of adding new posts was blocked, the clients have been posting their opinions wherever they had a possibility – as the comments of official posts or pictures. The official reaction of nc+ was a statement in which they admitted that they are waiting for the temper of the discussion to lower. At the same time, the number of fans of Anty nc+ has been growing dynamically. During first three days of its functioning it gathered 3 thousands of fans, on fourth day it doubled to 6 thousands and after one week it already had 15 thousands of fans. The number of negative comments on the page grew proportionally – from 800 on the second day to 2500 on the fourth day of functioning. Besides the complaints, the users of the fan page were also advising each other how to easily dissolve their contracts with the platform nc+ [20]. The reaction of nc+ came after one week, on the 29th of March. The chief executive officer Julien Verley wrote an official letter to the anonymous creator of Anty nc+ fan page in which he asked him to meet and discuss the opinions concerning nc+ offer that were posted on the Facebook page. Julien Verley underlined that the creator of the page as the person engaged in the problem can be a spokesman for the whole group of unsatisfied clients [21]. At the same time Beata Mońka, the vice president of nc+, was released from her position as she was responsible for the offer implementation after the merge of Cyfra+ and platform n. The official statement said that Beata Mońka and the board were not consistent in terms of the strategy of the company [22]. Both cases were widely discussed in media which influenced the popularity of the Anty nc+ fan page. Two days after revealing the above mentioned news the number of Anty nc+ fans doubled and amounted to 30 thousands.[23] After two more days the founder of the fan page revealed his identity and answered to the CEO's letter. He wrote that he did not feel legally qualified to represent all the people who liked his fan page. However, in the official letter he highlighted the main problems that occurred after the implementation of the new offer of nc+ platform and what solutions he would suggest. Additionally, he added a CD on which he downloaded all the questions and complaints from the fan page that required an answer in the near future [24]. The Anty nc+ fan page remained active and after the publication of the answer gained another 50 thousands of fans which intensified the discussion on this matter in media.

The nc+ case shows how powerful opinion of unsatisfied clients is becoming, how rapidly it can spread and how effectively people may connect, share their opinions and create very influential groups. The Anty nc+ is not only a fan page where clients may leave their negative opinions and comments. The administrator posts actual news on the concerning issues and as a consequence, Anty nc+ became an alternative source of information for unsatisfied clients. On the other hand, the nc+ platform first reaction shows that the board of the company underestimated the power of user-generated content in social media and wanted to wait through until the first wave of negative opinions diminishes. However, after the first

week of Anty nc+ functioning they noticed that this issue cannot be ignored as it only drove the growing number of people joining the Anty nc+ fan page and created snowball effect. The official letter with a proposal of a meeting with its creator can be considered as a precedent on the Polish market. It shows that the companies are paying attention to the internet content concerning their brand as they are becoming aware of influence it may have on their image.

Conclusions and perspectives for future research. To sum up, we would like to list general rules which should be taken under consideration when managing user-generated content. The crowd-sourcing may be considered as an opportunity for a company to engage consumers and build positive relations with a brand. The brand managers should comply with the following rules to implement successful campaign based on user-generated content and minimize a chance of negative reception by consumers:

- taking under consideration the latest attitude of internet users towards a brand,
- providing contestants with exact and clear rules of a contest,
- setting a reward suitable for the efforts of contestants if their projects are going to be implemented later on into marketing communication,
- constant control over the contest and the choice of a winner, especially if the winning concept is said to be implemented into marketing communication (e.g. package, layouts),
- supporting crowd-sourcing contest in mass media campaign to gain interest and attract contestants.

On the other hand, user-generated content uploaded spontaneously by the consumers can constitute huge threat for a company as it can spread negative opinions and comments rapidly. Furthermore, brand managers cannot control, plan or foresee it. Certainly, not all of the negative content posted on the internet should be considered as a threat for a company – majority of it can be treated as a possibility of researching consumer's barriers or negative experience with a brand. It can be considered as feedback as long as it constitutes minority of general user-generated content concerning a brand and the issues raised by internet users do not intensify due to situation or company's action associated with the content. In such case, dealing with an issue may be considered as critical management. Then, only general rules may be stated as each case is different and may develop in multiple ways over which company has very limited control. In case of corporate mistake the management should admit it and promise to resolve a problem as quick as possible with all the possible recourses involved. The worst possible action is ignoring the power of consumers and attempts to conceal or modify the facts. Dealing with negative user-generated content is about listening, reacting to customers' needs, being responsive and flexible.

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