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Viral Marketing Instruments and Consumer Attitudes Towards Brand

INTRODUCTION

The development of internet marketing is influenced by several factors, such as technological possibilities, available tools and resources, as well as the social perception of these tools. Techniques employed in the processes of virtual communication and consumption are developing dynamically. The use of those techniques by consumers is determined by prevailing trends [Grzywińska-Rapca, 2012]. The key success factor for combining multiple effective communication tools is to connect online and offline channels. In an effort to distinguish themselves on the market, companies use new, attractive, and often surprising opportunities to create their brand image on the digital market [Grzywińska-Rapca, 2015]. As shown by studies concerning characteristics of information society in Poland conducted in 2014, people aged 16–74 use the network in order to send and receive emails (53%) and search for information about goods or services (50%). An increased interest has been noticed in reading online content and downloading files attached to newspapers or periodicals (47%). Among people aged 12–15, the main purposes of using the Internet were chat rooms, groups or forums, internet messengers, creating and reading blogs and social networking sites (85%) [*Społeczeństwo informacyjne w Polsce...* (<http>)]. As business potential in shaping different communication tools increases, so do viral marketing operations. Viral marketing can be compared to a snowball, which, if a virus is

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well-designed, can lead to an entire avalanche. While creating a viral advertisement, its author is not always aware that it can become a virus. In many cases, it is a pure accident. Social media play a significant role in spreading viral advertising, since they constitute excellent channels of sharing information with friends [Podlaski, 2011]. Social networking sites have enabled publishing messages in the form of short films. Social video is easier to absorb for the recipient than content transmitted in a traditional format. The most important aspect of this channel is quick reaction to appealing events, commenting on them, and marking them with a hashtag in order to maximise the number of people viewing the post [Żukowski, 2014]. For its survival, a marketing virus requires recipients who will provide it with a shelter and then forward it to others.

One of the advantages of viral marketing is that it reaches the recipients faster and cheaper than traditional methods [Maymi, 2012]. Social media market is constantly evolving – the number of its users increases on a monthly basis, while the portals themselves provide companies with tools easing the access to more and more customers by the means of advertising in an increasingly faster manner. The portals can facilitate accessing the customers, establishing relationships with them, and affecting their perception of the company or improving its image. Customers use social media more often than electronic and printed media. Although these are now still successful, the future belongs to social media. In many industries, buyers are likely to accept the use of portals, forums, or websites by the companies to promote their brands. However, they usually strongly disapprove of promotional operations by the means of MMS and SMS [Bajdak, 2014, s. 202–207].

Social media sites are bound to take advantage of geolocation services, bringing together people who are in close proximity to one another. Large portals provide a huge amount of information from a few hundred acquaintances, which makes it difficult to browse and select messages, and is not necessarily interesting to every user [Roguski, 2014]. Reaching the segment of involved customers or users of a particular brand, as well as their interactions with the company, are the most valuable achievements of internet marketing. A company which comments, watches, and monitors social media and analyses the data and phenomena which occur there is able to understand its customers and their needs much better. Consequently, it can create contents of effective communication and dialogue with product users [Dacri (<http>)].

A viral campaign is a process of creating a virus, placing it on the Internet, and eventually analysing the results. With appropriate involvement in the preparation and careful selection of the target audience, the chances for success of the campaign are significantly high [Kroc, 2013]. Attitudes of consumers are formed by their direct, indirect, and virtual experience. Indirect experience constitutes information acquired from other consumers, retailers, advertising, whereas a direct contact with the product leads to direct experience. Such expe-

rience is quite significant in the process of purchase related decision-making. Virtual experience is gained by the contact with the product via the Internet, e.g. by viewing a three-dimensional object, which is close to a direct experience [Maison, Stasiuk, 2013].

The aim of companies is to obtain and shape such attitudes, values, and lifestyles within the recipient community which would be suitable for the implementation of an appropriate product portfolio. In order to predict future customer behaviours, it is necessary to identify the present, current trends and directions for development. Understanding the development of society and consumer behaviour can help to identify target groups and reduce the risk in the market [Moczulski, 2012].

The main objective of this study was to examine the impact of viral marketing on the product brand image. The study tackled the issue of analysing the attitudes of respondents towards the Coca-Cola and Pepsi brands after watching their viral commercials. Subsequently, the study defined the effectiveness of the abovementioned commercials as to their endorsement within groups of friends in social media.

SCOPE OF THE RESEARCH

The study employed the interview method in the form of a questionnaire. The respondents answered questions regarding their use of social networking sites as communication tools and as a source of information about products. They also assessed the impact of viral marketing on their market behaviour. The questionnaire was forwarded in the form of a link as a private message and published on social networking sites, such as Facebook, Twitter, and Goldenline. The questionnaire included links to four viral commercials by two companies – two commercials by Coca-Cola and two by Pepsi. After watching the videos, the respondents were asked to state which emotions the commercials evoked in them and to which extent each of these commercials they would be willing to send to their friends. Selection of the sample was random. The only limitation was the Internet access and being over 16 years old. The analysis included information gathered from 551 people, 65% of which are women and 35% – men. The largest group of persons are aged 16–25. They constitute 60% of all respondents, while the smallest segment involves people aged 56 or more, constituting only 2%. Most respondents (53%) have secondary education, one-third are people with higher education, 10% are people with vocational education. Rural residents comprised 32% of respondents, while those living in cities with 100 to 500 thousand inhabitants comprised 30% of them. Residents of towns with up to 10.000 residents and 10.000–100.000 comprised 10% and 24% of the respondents, respectively.

ASSESSMENT OF SOCIAL NETWORKING SITES AMONG RESPONDENTS

The Internet provides a variety of information, including information related to the company and its products. The Internet user can benefit from a variety of sources while searching for information about the company – they can take advantage of web search, forums, blogs, social networking sites or official web sites. An Internet search engine is the most popular tool for finding information on companies. However, it does not deviate significantly from the other tools. According to the survey, the respondents also make frequent use of official company websites. Forums and blogs are slightly less popular. The respondents claimed to use social networking sites primarily once every two weeks. Such results may be due to the fact that while using a web search, it is possible to find any information. Even if the user does not know the company's website, the search engine will direct them to it. The popularity of official websites is not surprising, as all the information regarding the company is located in one place and respondents consider it to be reliable (Figure 1).

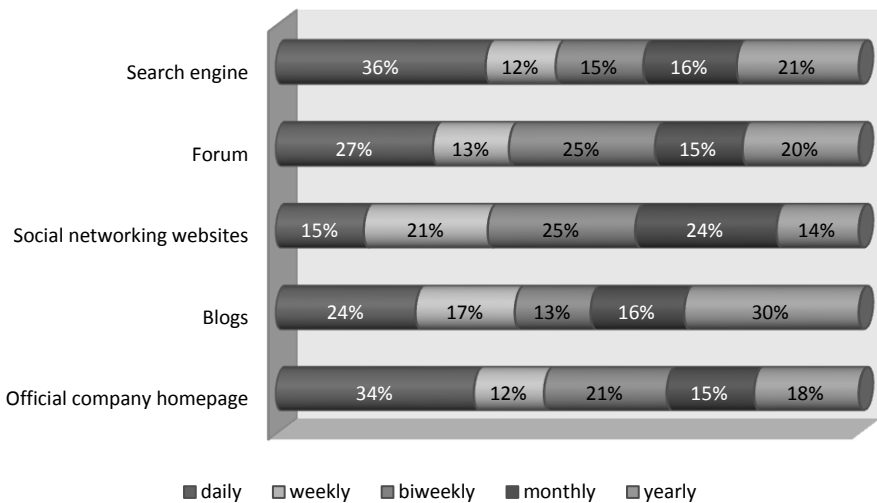


Figure 1. Popular web-based tools used in obtaining information on companies in the opinion of the respondents (expressed in %)

Source: own research.

Lower popularity of blogs and forums stems from the fact that they mostly show opinions of other users on the company and are not always true. Social networking portals include mainly information about discounts, price reductions or new merchandise. Therefore, they attract the lowest number of people seeking information about the company. When looking for information on the products,

most people prefer using the official website and internet search engines. To a lesser extent, they consult forums and blogs. As to the social networking sites, the opinions vary significantly, but most of the respondents claimed to browse them once every two weeks. Social networking sites are used to search for information on the activities of the companies to a small extent because the character of their posts is very general and involves much advertising and promotion, whereas detailed data are scarce.

The study assessed the social media profiles of such brands as Pepsi and Coca-Cola. Each of the respondents could select more than one answer. Among the possible responses, the respondents were able to select whether the website incites purchase of the products or not, promotes them in a suitable way or not, and attracts the recipient or perhaps is a disincentive to visitors (Figure 2).

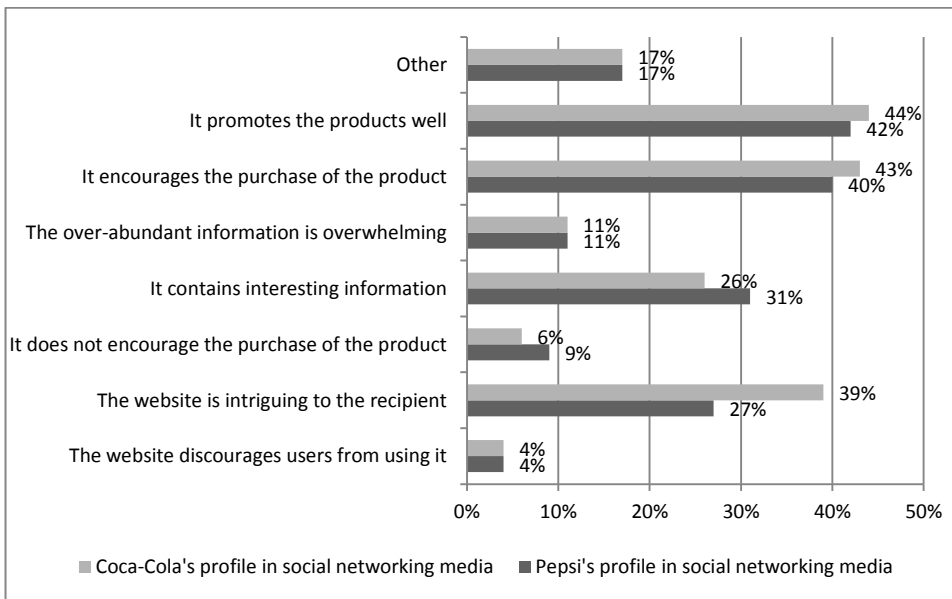


Figure 2. Respondents' perception of the Coca-Cola and Pepsi brand profiles in social networking media (expressed in %)

Source: own research.

Most of the respondents find the company websites of Coca-Cola and Pepsi agreeable. The majority of answers are positive, stating that each company promotes its products properly, encourages the acquisition of its products, and attracts recipients. What is important for the consumer is how companies post information on the portals. If messages are clear and interesting, they encourage the recipients to purchase the products and visit the company website more frequently in order to check current promotions or exciting events.

A particular way of perceiving messages posted on the community pages impacts the shaping of consumer attitudes and their perception of the brand. Another element affecting the relationship with the brand, which is often a decisive factor of market behaviours, is the consumer experience acquired by using a brand.

ANALYSIS OF THE EFFECTS OF VIRAL ADVERTISING ON CONSUMER ATTITUDE TOWARDS PEPSI AND COCA-COLA BRANDS

Viral advertising is created with a view to evoke particular emotions in the recipient. Its objective is to entertain, frighten, astonish or agitate. The emotions triggered may vary. They depend on the product advertised, the target group at which the product is directed, and the objective which the company pursues. What is fixed and stable about a viral commercial, are the goals set by broadcasters – the emotions triggered must have a strong impact on the recipient.

Building the image of a brand can be implemented by integrating it with particular values, specific consumer behaviour, creating rituals, mood of the commercial which evokes positive emotions and attitudes. What is of key importance in these activities, is to identify the recipient's needs and to meet them in a way enabling the brand to be associated with the desired values. Repeating specific incentives in an advertising campaign, as well as building the mood by the means of music or graphic content, may result in transferring the emotions on the brand or the product [Boroń, 2014].

The analysis of the impact of viral advertising on the companies' image began with examining the image of the Internet as a form of promotion. The respondents were asked about their attitude to the effectiveness of Internet advertising and whether they thought that branding on the Internet may have a positive influence on the brand image. Advertising on the Internet is an effective tool to promote brands according to 73% of respondents, while 34% of them consider it a very effective form of promotion and 39% deem it rather effective. Only 4% of the respondents claimed it is a very inefficient form of branding. Most of the respondents are aware of the possibilities provided by Internet tools (such as mailing, forums, portals) and have no doubt as to the efficiency of these forms of promotion. There are tools for every entrepreneur to choose in accordance with their particular needs. These methods of promoting brands are not necessarily expensive and time-consuming. The respondents appreciate the efficiency of promoting brands on the Internet.

Coca-Cola's "Coke Hug Me Machine" commercial – no. 1 [[http:// shocking factsarchive.com](http://shockingfactsarchive.com)] – is an example of viral advertising which is supposed to trigger positive emotions in viewers and encourage them to forward and recommend

it to their friends. The plot of the video involves installing a drinks machine in a university corridor. It had the colours of the Coca-Cola brand and read “Hug Me”. Any person who approached it and hugged it received a Coca-Cola drink.

Commercial no. 2, “Social Media Guard” [<http://www.gutewerbung.net>] shows people carrying their electronic devices everywhere, constantly logged on social media, sharing photos, watching videos shared by others. Coca-Cola cuts people off their phones with a collar in the colours of the brand logo. The characters are starting to recognise the beauty of the real world, including the sunset, their families or friends. The commercial refers to sharing joy and enjoying moments spent with close people while drinking Coca-Cola brand drinks.

The impact of advertising on the recipients depends to a large extent on the emotions evoked in them. In this respect, it was examined which reactions the selected commercials evoked in the surveyed individuals. Five types of emotions were distinguished for the purpose of the study. Two of them are positive emotions, such as smile and satisfaction, while two others are negative, namely aversion and reluctance. An absence of emotions while watching the commercials was added as another option (Figure 3).

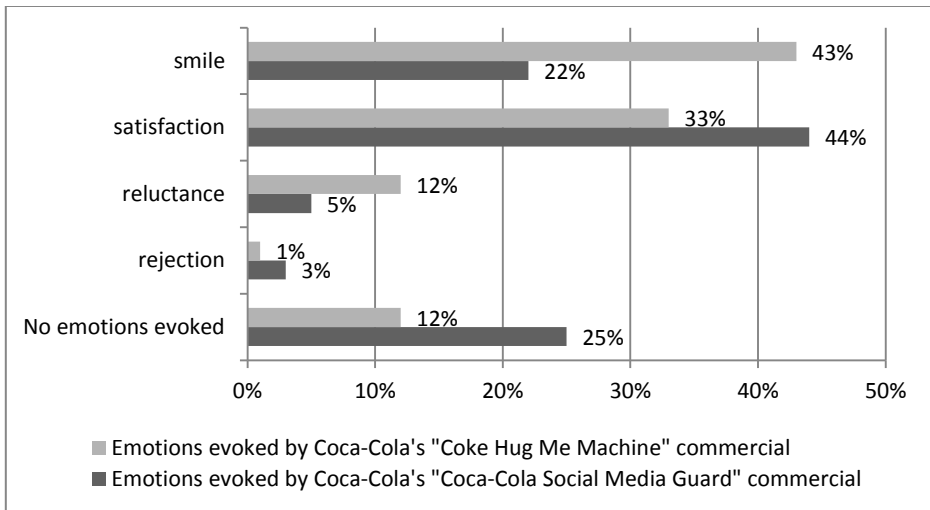


Figure 3. Respondents' answers concerning their emotions in reaction to Coca-Cola's “Coca-Cola Social Media Guard” and “Coke Hug Me Machine” commercials (expressed in %)

Source: own research.

Coca-Cola's “Coke Hug Me Machine” commercial triggered mostly positive emotions. While watching it, 43% of the respondents said the film made them smile, whereas 33% experienced satisfaction. These emotions could result

from seeing the machine cuddling people or identifying with the characters and being affected by the joy. Approximately 12% of the respondents experienced negative emotions, which might have been caused by the music. The analysed emotional charge provides information on the impact of a commercial showing people's dependence on social media on its recipients and whether the suggested way of managing this problem has been accepted by the recipients or not. After watching the "Coca-Cola Social Media Guard", most respondents claimed to have experienced positive emotions – 22% of the respondents smiled, whereas 44% of them were satisfied. Only 8% of the respondents felt negative emotions upon watching the commercial. They might have been offended by comparing people addicted to social media to animals due to the protective collars they had to wear. The presented commercials for the Coca-Cola brand were received positively and most respondents associated them with good emotions. While watching them, the recipients felt joy, which is to be associated with the brand, as do good emotions experienced in the company of family or friends.

The study also takes into account the views of respondents concerning viral commercials produced by Pepsi. The first commercial, "The Card Ninja" [<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8-JXtGuwBII>] aimed to surprise the viewers. It shows a person using Ninja cards to smash a jar and a light bulb and to knock off some cans. The commercial presents incredible events and compares them to the ingredients of Pepsi Max, which does not contain sugar.

The second commercial, "Test Driver" [www.maximumpc.com/article/news] shows a test drive. The seller is unknown, but the person testing the car is Jeff Gordon (an American NASCAR driver) in disguise. While leaving the car park, Jeff Gordon plays the role of a low skilled driver, clearly experiencing difficulties with driving out of the parking lot, but after a few successful manoeuvres, he begins to drive like a real race driver. The car seller is terrified and asks him to stop the car. At the end of the commercial, the driver introduces himself and explains that the happening was merely a joke. The entire event is captured on the camera located in a Pepsi can.

Pepsi's commercial entitled "The Card Ninja" did not have many positive reactions, as half of the respondents did not experience any emotions while watching it whatsoever. Only 13% of them smiled and only 16% felt satisfied. 19% of the respondents claimed to have felt negative emotions, 9% of them – aversion, and 10% – reluctance. Half of the recipients did not notice the commercial and thus did not experience any emotions related to it. Consequently, they did not send the commercial forward for their friends to watch.

The "Test Drive" commercial evoked many positive emotions. The majority of the recipients (32% of them) smiled, while 31% of them felt satisfaction. Negative emotions were a minority, as only 8% felt aversion to the commercial, and 7% did not wish to see it again (Figure 4).

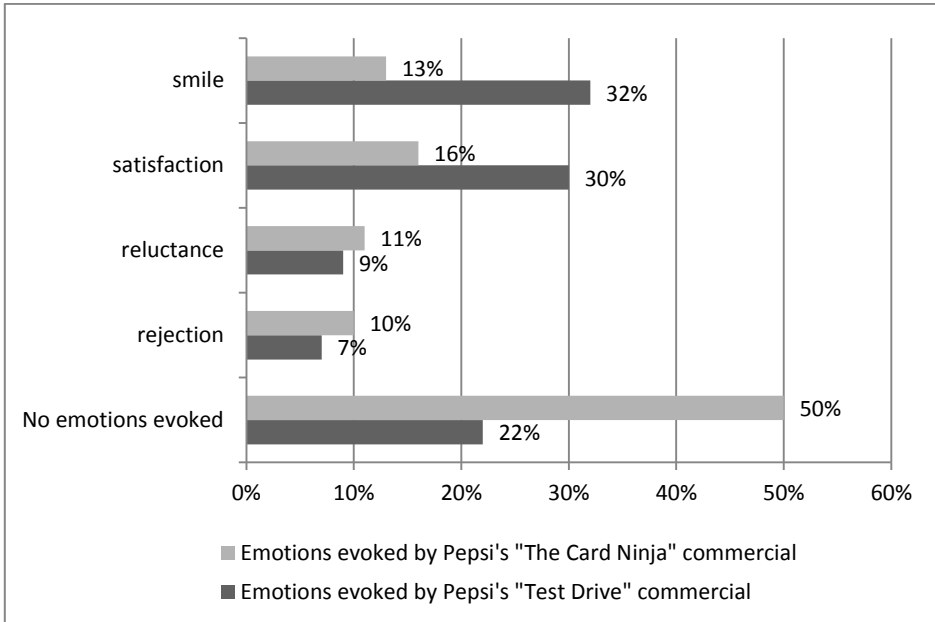


Figure 4. Respondents' emotions after watching Pepsi's "The Card Ninja" and "Test Drive" commercials (expressed in %)

Source: own research.

The commercial involves a lot of humour. What also could have proven interesting to the audience was the professional racing show presented in the video. Respondents declare they would share the commercial with their friends. Pepsi has certainly achieved its objective with this commercial, as the product has been associated with challenge and extreme experiences, and was accepted by the respondents. It can be therefore concluded that by generating positive emotions in respondents, the commercial also created a more positive attitude towards the brand, which was visible especially in the case of "Coke Hug Me Machine", "Social Media Guard" and "Test Drive" commercials.

The research comprised an analysis of the effects of the respondents' opinion on the commercial (positive, negative, no opinion) on their willingness to forward it to their friends. (H_0 – the opinion and willingness to forward the information concerning the commercial are independent from each other; H_1 – the opinion and willingness to forward the information concerning the commercial are dependent on each other). Statistics are calculated on the basis of all observations involving sensitive data. Table 1 presents the results of the statistical analysis for each commercial assessed by the study participants.

Table 1. Influence of the respondents' opinion concerning the commercial (positive, negative, no opinion) on their willingness to forward it to their friends

	Test Drive / Pepsi	Card Ninja / Pepsi	Coke Hug Me Machine / Coca Cola	Social Media Guard / Coca Cola
Pearson's χ -squared	21.012 ^a	93.988 ^a	82.384 ^a	113.748 ^a
	^a – 0.0% of the cells (0) has an expected count lower than 5. Minimum expected cell count is 41.60.	^a – 0.0% of the cells (0) has an expected count lower than 5. Minimum expected cell count is 34.59.	^a – 0.0% of the cells (0) has an expected count lower than 5. Minimum expected cell count is 18.02.	^a – 0.0% of the cells (0) has an expected count lower than 5. Minimum expected cell count is 22.72.
Cramér's V	.195	.413	.387	.455
Approximate significance	.000	.000	.000	.000

Source: own research.

On the basis of the data presented in Table 1, a relation between the variables for each commercial may be recognised. On the significance level of $p < .0001$, the H_0 hypothesis may be rejected. It can be thus concluded that there is a relation between the nature of the opinion (positive, negative, no opinion) and the willingness to share the commercial (or the lack of such willingness).

The values of Pearson's Chi-square test and Cramér's V coefficient, as defined in the study, prove the existence of said relation between the features analysed. This means that whether a person forwards the commercial to subsequent recipients is contingent on the type of opinion they developed themselves. It may be therefore reasoned that the positive reception of the commercial was a determining factor in further spread of the information within the study.

Cramér's V coefficient presents the power of the relation between attributes³. The value of Cramér's V coefficient is in the range between $<0; 1>$. The closer to 0, the weaker the relation between the attributes. The closer to +1, the stronger it is. Cramér's V coefficient values, just as the values of Pearson's Chi-square test, indicate the statistical significance of the analysed relations.

CONCLUSION

Development of the Internet and its popularity has made it an ideal place to promote companies' brands. It provides enterprises with easy-to-establish contacts and a rapid access to potential customers.

³ $V < 0.3$ – weak relationship

$V < 0.5$ – moderate relationship

$V > 0.5$ – strong relationship

What deserves particular attention among the Internet marketing tools are social media and viral marketing. Social media is a tool of communication between the company and both consumers and suppliers. It allows it to build relationships with customers as a source of information on the brand. Viral marketing affects the way consumers learn about the brand and strengthen it. It is also a tool allowing for specific emotions to arise in relation to the product before an advertising campaign is launched.

Social media can facilitate building brand relationships with consumers, for whom it is a source of information about special discounts and about the company itself. Viral marketing is used to promote products and services. It also affects the perception of the brand by customers. Some advertisements are received positively, while other have a rather negative reception. The information which is interesting and entertaining for the recipient can become popular and widespread as the recipients share their opinions with their friends and acquaintances.

The companies' social media profiles have been positively evaluated as interesting, captivating and encouraging the acquisition of their products. The Coca-Cola profile has gained more positive feedback than Pepsi's. The likely reason for that is a greater transparency of the Coca-Cola's page. Pepsi publishes more posts concerning one event, which may be rather overwhelming for the recipient.

Coca-Cola's viral advertising has elicited more positive emotions than viral advertising conducted by Pepsi. Coca-Cola commercials were more liked by the respondents. Emotions evoked by Pepsi commercials did not gain the respondents approval, particularly in the case of "the Card Ninja" commercial. If the respondents experience positive emotions while watching a particular commercial, they strongly declare the willingness to share it with their friends. In the event where a commercial does not trigger any emotions or triggers negative ones, the respondents are not interested in forwarding the information about the commercial.

The information submitted on social media profiles are capable of shaping the image of the product brand or the company itself. The reception and the influence of viral marketing is dependent on the customers' attitudes and experiences with the product. Users of the product and loyal buyers comprise a much more sensitive community that actively participates in spreading viral content. If the messages evoke positive emotions among consumers, they are more likely to be shared by them.

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Summary

Viral marketing influences the perception of a brand as well as the strengthening of its position. It is also a useful tool in evoking particular emotions towards a product before launching a promotional campaign. The aim of our research was to analyse and assess the influence of viral marketing on consumer attitudes towards Pepsi and Coca-Cola brands. Data was collected with the use of the interview method based on a questionnaire. Respondents answered questions about their attitudes to using social networking services as a medium of communication and a tool that forms market behaviours. The questionnaire was distributed either as an attachment to private email messages or a post on Facebook, Twitter and Goldenline and it included a link to Pepsi and Coca-Cola commercials. The respondents were asked to name the emotions evoked by these commercials and decide, if they would share these commercials with their friends. Information and commercials posted on social networking portals may shape the perception of a brand or company. The

reception and influence of the viral marketing depends on the attitudes of consumers and their experiences with the product. Users and loyal buyers of the product are a much more sensitive group and participate in spreading viruses. The willingness to share the post is higher if the commercials convey positive emotions. Social networking services help brands build relations with their customers, they are a source of information about sales or the brand itself. Viral marketing is mostly used for promoting products and services and because of that it can influence the way a company is perceived by consumers. Interesting and entertaining content becomes popular and well-known via the system of sharing posts with friends.

Keywords: viral advertising, brand, consumer attitudes, *social media*

Instrumenty marketingu wirusowego a postawy konsumentów wobec marki

Streszczenie

Marketing wirusowy wpływa na poznanie i umocnienie pozycji marki, jest też narzędziem, które umożliwia wywołanie określonych emocji w stosunku do produktu przed rozpoczęciem kampanii reklamowej. Celem podjętych badań była analiza i ocena wpływu reklamy wirusowej na postawy konsumentów wobec marki Pepsi i Coca-Cola. Badania realizowano metodą wywiadu przy wykorzystaniu kwestionariusza ankiety. Badani respondenci odpowiadali na pytania w zakresie postaw i wykorzystania portali społecznościowych jako źródło komunikacji i zachowań rynkowych. Kwestionariusz ankiety przekazywano w formie linku jako wiadomość prywatną oraz udostępniono na portalach społecznościowych: Facebook, Twitter i Goldenline. W kwestionariuszu ankiety umieszczono linki spotów reklam wirusowych firm Coca-Cola i Pepsi. Respondentów proszono o deklarację dotyczącą emocji, jakie wywołały spoty oraz w jakim stopniu będą oni skłonni przesłać każdą z tych reklam znajomym. Umieszczane na profilach informacje, spoty mogą kształtować wizerunek marki produktu czy firmy. Odbiór i wpływ działań z zakresu marketingu wirusowego jest uzależniony od postaw klientów i ich doświadczeń związanych z produktem. Użytkownicy produktu, lojalni nabywcy są zdecydowanie bardziej wrażliwą społecznością i aktywnie uczestniczą w akcjach rozpowszechniania wirusów. Zainteresowanie przesłaniem spotu jest większe w przypadku tych wiadomości, które wywołują pozytywne emocje wśród odbiorców. Media społecznościowe pomagają marce zbudować relacje z konsumentami, są źródłem informacji dla odbiorców o promocjach oraz dostarczają wiadomości na temat firmy. Marketing wirusowy wykorzystywany jest w promocji produktów i usług, wpływa na postrzeganie marki przez klientów. Informacje ciekawe, bawiące odbiorcę, stają się popularne i znane przez system dzielenia się opiniami z przyjaciółmi i znajomymi.

Słowa kluczowe: reklama wirusowa, marka, postawy konsumentów, *social media*

JEL: D12D140C53