SOCIAL MEDIA IN THE MARKETING OF EDUCATIONAL SERVICES

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Abstract

Purpose: The aim of the article is to present the results of the analysis of the University's educational services promotion strategy with the participation of social media in the process of acquiring and maintaining lasting relationships with stakeholders.

Methodology: The research concerned the quality of service to stakeholders of the Pope John Paul II State School of Higher Education in Biala Podlaska, (Poland, Lubelskie Voivodeship) and the level of their satisfaction with promotional activities undertaken by the analyzed entity, as well as the determinants of choosing the place of education in correlation with the possibilities of sustainable development. Empirical research was conducted in the third quarter of 2020 using an on-line questionnaire, based on the deliberate selection of respondents.

Findings: The analysis of the results focused on promotional activities that the examined entity should keep or develop on the pages of selected social networks. Acquiring new fans was indicated as the best-rated activities of the University, which directly translates into the visibility and range of the generated content. According to the respondents, the surveyed entity should publish content more often via social media in order to build lasting relationships with the immediate environment.

Implications: According to the respondents, the University should publish more content on the Internet. Respondents indicated that other students may be helpful in publishing posts. The survey showed that most of the respondents recommended the University to their friends thanks to the earlier reading of its offer on the Internet, on one of the social networks.

Originality: An original scientific article on the use of social media in the promotion of educational services, the first references to it appear in the literature on the subject at the beginning of the 21st century.

Keywords: internet, educational services, marketing services, social media

Paper type: Research paper

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1. Introduction

The phenomenon of the Internet consists in its multimedia – the possibility of sending texts, sounds, images etc. Moreover, these are fast transfers, and the ability to receive messages is independent of the physical location of the addressee (Dreyfus, 2013). The unique features of the Internet include complementarity with other techniques for searching, storing, transmitting and processing information, and the complexity of social effects. As a result, the Internet is a very efficient instrument for the development and functioning of a modern economy. The Internet network has introduced a new quality to the lives of many people in the world, giving them previously unknown opportunities. It offers a wide range of possibilities and very different forms of activity, makes real life much easier, but also gives the opportunity to create a different, virtual world. There is no distance, country borders, social, economic or cultural differences for the Internet. It allows for exceeding the limits, i.e. time or space, creates the possibility of individualizing the message addressed to an individual recipient. It is undergoing constant changes in terms of the very essence of its operation and the scope of its applications (Wellman and Haythornthwaite, 2008). Above all, it is important to have the right skills and knowledge to navigate efficiently in cyberspace, which results in achieving the goal by performing specific activities. Efficient operation of the Internet is determined by various factors, both environmental and individual (Porter, 2001).

Internet marketing is nothing but marketing through a global network. The Internet does not replace traditional methods of operation, nor does it establish new marketing rules by completely resigning from the previously used rules. However, it is a new marketing tool with both advantages and disadvantages. In this case, the method and time of communication are particularly attractive, the ease of obtaining information and its wide scope, expanding the recipient market with groups of customers previously unattainable, making cooperation with external partners more flexible, and as a result the opportunity to reduce the costs of business (Sawicki, 2016).

The company's marketing is closely related to the observation of the market and taking appropriate actions aimed at this market. The most important partners for the company are primarily customers, competitors and suppliers, government institutions, non-governmental institutions and the mass media. It is imperative to explore the economic, political, demographic, cultural, technological and geographic environment. Given the pace at which changes are taking place in these markets and the growing competition, it will become increasingly difficult to achieve the desired goal. In this situation, the network may turn out to be a very effective tool for many entrepreneurs, which will be used to manage relations with customers or suppliers. It is possible to reduce promotional and transaction costs and costs for marketing research (Berkley, 2003).

When analyzing the issues of marketing, one should start with explaining its basic definitions, taking into account the fact that it is a very broadly understood field of economics. One of the basic definitions of marketing says that "marketing is a social as well as management process, which, by creating, offering and exchanging products with value, affects specific people and social groups, giving them what they need and want" (Hastings and McDermott, 2006). In order to be able to talk about the phenomenon of marketing, certain processes of exchanging customer needs must take place along with the goals of enterprises, which take place on various planes, i.e. (Armbrüster and Barchewitz, 2004):

a) commercial transactions taking place in the seller-buyer relationship, understood as the exchange of services and goods for money.

b) benefit-for-wage transactions involving the employer and employee, therefore, they are services that generate profit for the enterprise in return for wages and fringe benefits.

The relations taking place on these planes are systematically analyzed, and the data on the current market phenomena and strategies are constantly monitored. On the basis of this data, several other definitions of marketing can be given, and each of them has its own justification. Among others, the one that says that marketing is "the process of finding and acquiring customers and tying them to the company" (Kukartsev et al., 2020). Another definition is that marketing means "meeting needs in a profitable way" (Brunswick, 2014). On the other hand, in the literature on the subject we can find, among others, the following statements:

a) marketing is "an identifier of demand, creates an offer of benefits and communicates value propositions, thus satisfying customer expectations and achieving a specific profit" (Wensley, 2016),

b) marketing is also "the art of offering at the right time and to the right target group services that will reach the right distribution channel, in the right amount at the right price" (Shelby, 2014),

c) marketing is called "a management process that is coordinated and focused on achieving specific goals, through planning, steering, implementation and control of activities focusing on sales, mainly on marketing research, productive, pricing, distribution and communication policies of a given company" (Moore and Pareek, 2006),

d) after all, marketing is "the ability to create, win and master markets" (Wilmshurst and Mackay, 2002).

One of the most common approaches to marketing is an instrumental or tool approach, otherwise known as a marketing mix, which is defined as follows: "marketing mix is a set of various marketing tools that are used by entrepreneurs so that they can achieve the intended marketing goal on the market designated by them actions" (Day and Wensley, 2002), while BR Londhe believes that "the marketing mix is a set of measures by which a company or other institutions

can simultaneously influence the target market" (Londhe, 2014). In order for the marketing program to be effective, its elements of the marketing mix should be selected in such a way that the marketing goals set by a given company can be achieved.

Each of the above-mentioned elements can be taken into account to a greater or lesser extent depending on the decision made, but anyway is an integral part of marketing activities. The possibilities of selecting the components of the marketing mix and their scope depend on the general situation on the market or the influence of the external environment. They are also determined by the level and structure of costs. Each of the determinants of the discussed marketing is not always analyzed in a given order, but the price can be determined when the estimated cost as well as the cost of production and promotion of a given product are known. The situation is similar in the case of the selection of promotional means, which in turn depend on the characteristics of the product, the target market and the distribution channel. In terms of the marketing mix, the product is all that the company is able to offer to the market and the features of a given product, i.e. quality, performance, packaging, brand, visual attractiveness, repair method and the scope of the warranty. A given company should have the product in such a way that it can be constantly improved, introduced to the market or withdrawn, if it does not bring a specific profit (Peter and Donnelly, 2010).

Therefore, an indispensable element of well-conducted marketing activities is customer service. It is defined in various ways, and in recent years, as a result of its increased importance in gaining an advantage over the competition, it has acquired much greater value. However, as part of marketing activities, it is an element of the distribution system responsible for delivering the product at the place, time and according to the requirements tailored to the buyer. Customer service can be considered in a much broader sense, i.e. as a series of activities needed to accept, prepare, execute and finance customer order service, taking into account the possibility of eliminating inappropriate activities, if any. Customer service is also comprehensive activities that involve all areas of the business cooperating with each other, consisting in invoicing the company's products in such a way as to satisfy the customer and which contributes to the achievement of the goal in a given company. Customer service also includes accepting orders, communicating with customers, delivering goods and services to the customer at an agreed time and place, and adapting to their expectations (Gummesson, 2007).

2. Research motivation

One of the main tasks in the company's marketing is to identify potential customers to whom the offer is to be addressed. Internet users are potential and existing customers on the web (Hole et al., 2018). Facebook is a service that connects

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people all over the world. We can treat the use of Facebook as a shared cultural experience for all users of the virtual world. Today, the website is a technological pioneer with a huge, unprecedented impact on all aspects of our modern life – both public and private. We can use Facebook via a web browser and smartphone application. Thanks to it, we can immediately register and use a large number of websites and applications. The website allows us to contact friends and family and to gain new friends from around the world through websites and thematic groups. Nowadays, everyone can publish their content on the website, if of course it meets the criteria of the regulations. An account can be set up after the age of 13. Facebook allows users to react to posts in the form of reactions (e.g. "I like it" most associated with Facebook), comments, stickers and gifs. Nowadays, most companies are registered as a giant among social networking sites. This is because Facebook makes it possible to attract potential customers through specially tailored ads. The website already has over 2.41 billion users around the world (Isaak and Hanna, 2018).

Instagram is a photographic social networking site focused on the publication of photos. Through applications, it allows users to edit and share photos and videos with the possibility of using filters characteristic for this website. Instagram was founded in 2010 and two years later it was bought by Facebook for about a billion dollars. The published content in most cases includes the so-called Hashtags that allow for categorization and easier access to a specific target. This website allowed to gain the fame of a large number of people and companies thanks to its global nature and ads available for purchase. Instagram already has over a billion users, with 25 million business accounts alone (Chan et al., 2020).

YouTube is a website established in 2005 and it allows you to display and publish content in the form of videos. It features music videos, recipes, travel videos, product presentations, memes and much more. YouTube is a website that is strongly associated with the possibility of earning money on published materials. A channel that exceeds 1,000 subscriptions is able to start earning money from advertising. Many videos previously posted on YouTube act as pop-up ads when watching content. We can see more and more companies adopting this type of marketing strategy. Monthly YouTube is visited by over 2 billion logged in users (Tufekci, 2018).

We can confidently call VKontakte a Russian alternative to Facebook. The social networking site was founded in 2006 by Pavel Durov, who lost his position of CEO in 2014. At the moment, Durov is located outside of Russia, and the service is under the control of the Russian authorities. VK allows us to share content such as photos, videos, music and posts. We can also communicate with friends and the rest of the website users. In 2017, the former President of Ukraine, Petro Poroshenko, signed a decree that prevented Ukrainian users from using the

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VKontakte service. The website reached a record number of 95 million active users per month in 2016 (Kozitsin, 2020).

Twitter is a social networking site founded in 2006. It allows users to "Tweet", that is, to share short text messages of up to 280 characters. Shared content may also consist of music, photos and videos and can be viewed when we enter or observe a specific user profile. Twitter accounts include actors, musicians, celebrities and many companies. Maintaining an account in a skillful way allows you to attract potential consumers. The website is used by 126 million people every day (Xue et al., 2020).

The potential of social networking sites is a must-have when it comes to online promotional campaigns. The enormous potential of social networking sites is to promote products, brands and people. constant contact with friends and separation and distinction. The variety of community social networking sites have now established some commonalities while building single-item points. User content is the lifeblood of the portal. Social networking services that support the development of users' social networks with others or social service providers or as part of the provision of replacement services.

3. Research methodology and purpose

Social media used by PSW as an element of the strategy of promoting educational services include, among others, Facebook, Instagram, Youtube, VKontakte or Twitter. The description and the status of the range of social networking sites used by the Universities are presented below. Fanpage PSW in Biała Podlaska is liked by 4,546 users and rated 4.7 / 5 based on the opinions of 29 users. The university's fanpage provides direct information about activities, events and courses for students. You can observe user interactions with the content provided by PSW in Biała Podlaska. On Facebook you can also find the group Students of PSW Biała Podlaska, which brings together students and supporters of the University from Biała Podlaska. At the moment, the group has 4,381 users, including students, employees, service providers and residents of the city of Biała Podlaska. In the group, you can notice increased activity of users who are members of the group, because the content is displayed only to people belonging to the group of group members. The current account status of the University on Instagram is 633 followers. On the university's Instagram you can see photos from events, trips and advertising materials that are designed to encourage high school graduates. On the other hand, the current status of the PSW channel in Biała Podlaska on YouTube is 254 subscriptions, and the total number of video views is 114 806. On the PSW channel you can find video reports from events at the university, Biblio-Nius magazine, or PSW News materials. The current account balance of the University on the Vk website is 43 registered people, you can find

there content in Russian informing about events, courses and marketing materials to encourage potential students from the east. On the Twitter social network, at the moment the PSW account in Biała Podlaska is being watched by 81 users. The website provides information about the university, courses and promotes student activities. As a result of the above-mentioned activities at the turn of the years, the University more and more notices the enormous potential hidden in social media, and begins to invest in it with greater favor.

The aim of the research is to present the opinions of students of the State Higher School of Pope John Paul II in Biała Podlaska regarding social media used in the promotion and recruitment process by universities. The subject of research are issues related to internet marketing. The main research problem of the thesis is the analysis of the opinions of PSW students on the use of selected social media by universities in the promotion and recruitment process. An attempt was made to find an answer to the following questions:

1) What activities, in the opinion of students, should the University develop in social media?
2) What activities, in the opinion of students, should the University stop in social media?
3) What factors in the strategy of promoting PSW educational services influence the opinions of students when making decisions about the choice of studies?

The research method used is a diagnostic survey, the technique is a questionnaire, and the tool is a questionnaire. The diagnostic survey method is a method of collecting knowledge about structural and functional attributes, as well as about the dynamics of social phenomena, views and opinions of selected communities, directions of development of specific phenomena. The research was conducted in the third quarter of 2020.

4. Results

The aim of the authors was to find an answer to the question: What activities, in the opinion of students, the University should develop and which should be discontinued in social media? They were also asked to provide an opinion on the types of factors influencing the decision to study choice. In order to obtain the information necessary to answer the above question, research was conducted among students and employees of the PSW in Biala Podlaska and residents of the city of Biala Podlaska.

The first question asked of the respondents concerned their use of social networks, the vast majority of respondents, as much as 90%, replied that they use this type of portals. Only 5% of respondents do not use social networks. The respondents were also asked whether they use mobile devices to browse social

networks. The vast majority, 90% of the respondents, answered yes. Only 10% of users of social networking sites do not use mobile devices for this purpose.

Then, respondents were asked to indicate the social networks they use. The largest number of respondents, i.e. 38%, use the largest social network in the world, Facebook. An equally large group of respondents pointed to the YouTube social network that offers interactions with the use of image and sound. On the other hand, 17% of the respondents are users of Instagram, a photo portal. Vkontakte, a messenger comparable to Facebook, is used by 8% of the surveyed population. Twitter users account for only 4% of respondents. The respondents use several social applications at the same time. In connection with the above, respondents were asked about the most frequently used social networking sites, 65% indicated that it is a Facebook site. Others chose Vkontakte (15%), YouTube (10%) and Instagram (10%).

The respondents were also asked to specify the amount of time they spend using social networking sites, the vast majority, 65%, indicated that it is from 1 to 4 hours a day. More than a half less, 25% of respondents spends 5 to 8 hours a day online. A much smaller percentage, 5% of respondents, indicated that they spend more than 9 hours a day using social networking sites. A decisive minority, 5% of the respondents, limit themselves to 30 minutes a day in social media. The data is presented in figure 1.

Another question addressed to the respondents was the question about the reasons for their use of social networking sites, 32% do it for obtaining information, 31% for contact with friends or entertainment – 23%. For self-expression, 10% of respondents do it. Searching for products and services is the reason why 4% of respondents use social networks. Most of the respondents, because 69% read sponsored posts while using social networks, 31% do not. The data is presented in figure 2.
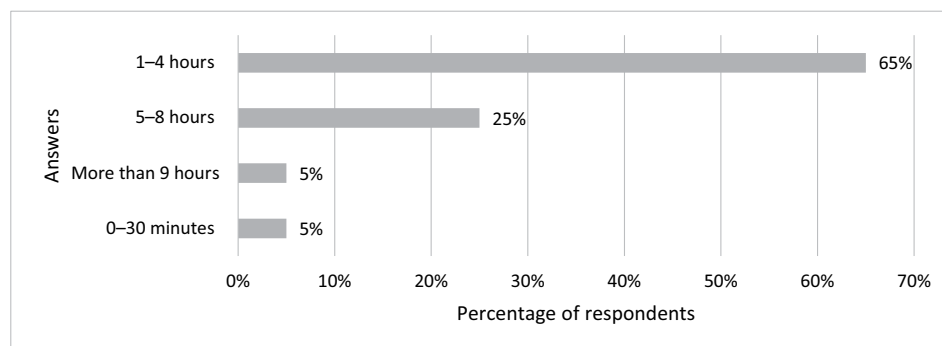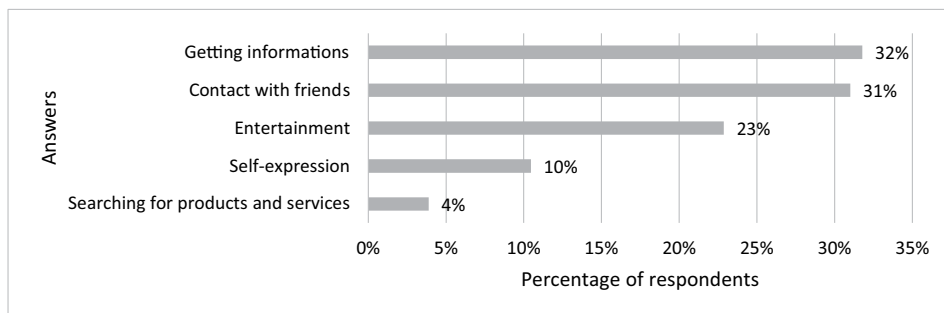

Figure 1. The amount of time spend using social networks

Source: own study based on research results.

Figure 2. Reasons for using social networking sites

Source: own study based on research results.

**Figure 2.** Reasons for using social networking sites

Then, the respondents were asked to provide information on how they found out about the University, more than half (56%) of the respondents indicated that it was Facebook. From Instagram, 22% of the surveyed population learned about the university, YouTube – 16%, and VKontakte – 6%. Respondents were also asked for their opinions on the visibility of the University's activity on social networks, 44% of respondents indicated that PSW in Biała Podlaska is the best compared to Facebook activity. And 31% answered that it is YouTube. The other two groups of 13% of respondents indicated, in turn, VKontakte and Instagram. Similarly, when assessing the activity on university social networks, 59% of respondents indicated that PSW is doing best on Facebook. Subsequently, YouTube received 26% of respondents, Instagram – 9%, and Vkontakte – 6%. Among the best-rated activities of the University on social networks, the respondents rated the acquisition of new students – 70%, they gave PSW a much lower rating for informing about news (20%), as well as reporting events – 10%. The data is presented in figure 3.

The issues of the impact of comments found on social networks under the University's posts were also raised, 82% of respondents indicated that they had a significant impact on the reception of the content provided. Only 18% answered

Figure 3. The best-rated activities of the University on social networks

Source: own study based on research results.

Figure 3. The best-rated activities of the University on social networks
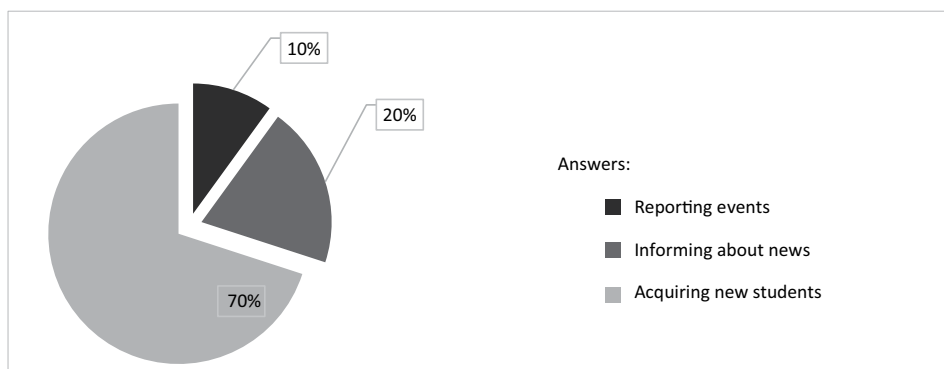
that such activities do not rarely affect them. To the question: Do you think PSW in Biała Podlaska should publish more content? The respondents agreed that yes (73%), the University should develop in this direction. And 27% of the respondents answered that no, it is not a good direction for PSW promotion. The next question concerned the aspects related to the access by students to publish content on behalf of PSW in Biała Podlaska, the vast majority, 77%, answered that it was a good idea. Against was 23% of the respondents. Comparing PSW promotional activities in relation to promotional activities of other universities, the respondents indicated that the University is doing "very well" – 29% or "good" – 18%. Neutral, bad or very bad is the answer of 23, 15 and 5% of the respondents, respectively. The data is presented in figure 4.
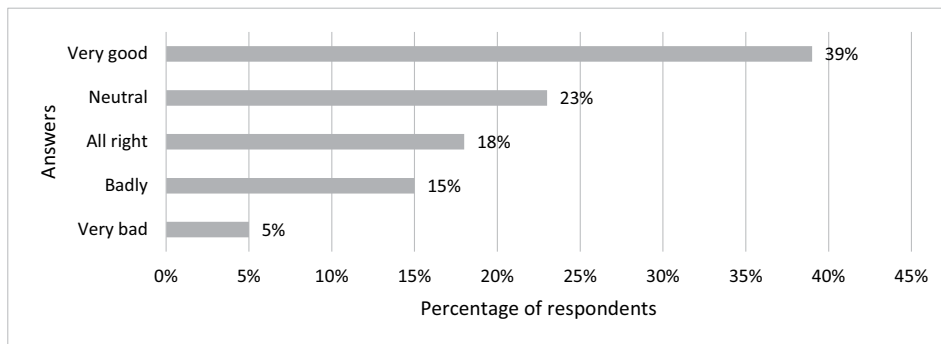
The impact of the content published by universities on potential students is high, 74% of the respondents indicated such an answer. For 26% of respondents, the impact of the content published by PSW is negligible. Respondents were also asked to indicate social networking sites where the respondents would like to see PSW activity in the future. Half of the respondents indicated Snapchat (50%), a fairly large group, 21% of respondents indicated that PSW should not create additional content. Others pointed to TikTok (13%), Like (8%) and VigoVideo (8%). In response to the next, last question of the questionnaire, regarding recommending a friend's PSW account in Biała Podlaska on one of the selected social networks, i.e. Facebook, VKontakte, YouTube, Twitter or Instagram. Most of the respondents (75%) said yes, they recommended the University's accounts on social networks to their friends.

The sample size was 100 respondents, students, employees and residents of the city of Biała Podlaska. Men were the vast majority of the surveyed group of respondents. Women participating in the study constitute nearly 1/3 of the population. When analyzing another feature describing the studied group, which is the age of the respondents, it should be indicated that the largest group are people aged up to 25 – 70% of the respondents. On the other hand, 20% of the respondents

are between 26 and 35 years old. Both in the age range from 36 to 45 and over 46 there was a similar number of people constituting 8 and 2% of the respondents, respectively. Among the respondents, the largest group is made up of people with secondary education – 77%, the others are people with 23% of respondents, they are people with higher education. Nearly 60% of the respondents live in the countryside. The remaining people participating in the study were people living in urban areas. Taking into account the socio-demographic feature of the professional status, it should be noted that the largest group among the surveyed people are those in work – 80%. And 20% of the respondents are unemployed. Among the economic factors, the level of achieved income should be mentioned. The conducted research analyzes the level of income taking into account the average monthly income per person in the household of the respondents through subjective assessment of the financial situation of the respondents. Almost 30% of the respondents assessed their financial situation as average, only 10% of the respondents assessed it as very good. The most numerous group, 60%, were the respondents who assessed their financial situation as good.

Criterion		Study population	Percentage of respondents
Male	man	80	80%
	woman	20	20%
Age	up to 25 years	70	70%
	26–35 years old	20	20%
	36–45 years old	8	8%
	46–55 years old	2	2%
Education	medium	77	77%
	higher	23	23%
Abode	city	40	40%
	village	60	60%
Professional status	working	80	80%
	unemployed	20	20%
Financial situation	good	60	60%
	average	30	30%
	very good	10	10%

Table 1.
Characteristics of the respondents

Source: own study based on research results.

The average respondent is a man aged up to 25, with secondary education, living in the countryside. He has the status of an employed person, with a good financial situation. The data are summarized in table 1.

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5. Conclusions

In the 21st century, it is hard to imagine a person who is not directly or indirectly involved in the functioning of social networking sites. With the development of the Internet and Internet technologies, social networking sites have become an inseparable element of modern society. One of the first social networking sites to achieve the success of rapidly increasing users was undeniably Myspace. Most people like to share their lives with other people on the Internet and also look for inspiration in it. Social networking sites have become an irreplaceable source of information in the field of cultural events, news from the world, or advertisements for the provision of services and products. Companies and service providers use it, using it more and more often on social networking sites to reach potential consumers. The most popular social networking sites in the world include: Facebook, Instagram, YouTube, Vkontakte and Twitter. The conducted research was aimed at presenting promotional activities in the area of educational services of the PSW in Biała Podlaska against the background of selected social media. Analyzed activities of the University in social media. It was indicated which activities, in the opinion of students, the University should develop and which should be discontinued during promotion on social networks. An important aspect of the work was to pay attention to the factors of the PSW educational services promotion strategy that influence the opinions of students when making decisions about the choice of studies. The obtained data allow to conclude that the University has an extensive promotion strategy regarding educational services promoted in social media. Social networks are mainly used by Facebook, VKontakte and YouTube. Instagram and Twitter are less popular. Which is directly related to the responses of respondents who mainly use Facebook and YouTube. The acquisition of new students was recognized as the best-rated activities of the University on social networks. The issues of the impact of comments encountered on social networks under the University's posts were discussed, the vast majority of respondents indicated that they had a significant impact on the reception of the content provided.

According to the respondents, PSW should publish more content on the Internet. The respondents indicated that other students could be helpful when publishing posts. Comparing PSW promotional activities with other universities' promotional activities, the respondents indicated that the University is doing well. The impact of the content published by PSW on potential students is high, which was confirmed by the vast majority of respondents. The surveyed group of people indicated that they would like to see the University's promotional activities in applications such as Snapchat or TikTok. The survey showed that most of the respondents recommended the universities to their friends thanks to the earlier reading of its offer on the Internet, on one of the social networks.

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