

# POTENTIAL OF SOCIAL MEDIA AND MOBILE MARKETING IN MARKETING COMMUNICATION MANAGEMENT IN HEALTH CARE INSTITUTIONS

*Bogdan Gregor\*, Beata Gotwald\*\**

## Abstract

**Background.** The reality of contemporary marketing is complex and evolves very fast, which stimulates managers for usage of new and modern ways to communicate with customers and build relations with them. The article covers issues related to the usage of new marketing tools (with special attention paid to social media and mobile marketing) in managing health care institutions in the Lodzkie voivodship.

**Research aims.** The goal is to show whether, and to what extent, are the tools of new marketing applied in the marketing communication of health care institutions. The basis for the assumptions was a research which covered all health care institutions in the Lodzkie region.

**Method.** The research was conducted in all health care institutions in the Lodzkie Voivodship in December 2012. To collect the data authors used CATI with all the institutions (1338), but research results presented in this study cover 237 institutions which used e-marketing in communication with the market in-depth interviews with.

**Key findings.** Health care institutions are not well prepared to use new marketing instruments for communication with customers.

**Keywords:** Marketing in health care, Marketing communication, Social media, Mobile marketing, Health care institutions management

## INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND

The current situation forces all institutions and organizations to adjust to the needs of customers, which are presented in modern trends and tendencies. Management is required not only in the optimization of the processes, but also on the basis of modern product and marketing management. The evolution of this situation is stimulated by increasing usage of the Internet in marketing (ITU, n.d.). What is even more important, as the European Commission's Report suggests, the amount of Internet users in Poland over the last 6 years has almost doubled, and the amount of those with broadband connection – tripled (from 36% in 2006 to 70% in 2012 and from 22% to 67%, respectively). On average, the Internet in the European Union is mainly used for access to reading newspapers, but in Poland – social media is more popular than reading news or Internet banking. (Komisja Europejska, 2013). Those trends have to be noticed and

---

\* Prof. dr hab. Bogdan Gregor, University of Lodz.

\*\* Mgr Beata Gotwald, University of Lodz.

applied in all branches of economic activity, especially where competition is very high, like in medical services (Pauly, 2004). Nevertheless, it is hard to maintain a high quality of services and at the same time be competitive with prices and other factors (Porter & Teisberg, 2004). For that reason, marketing communication via the Internet is thought to be, apart from availability of services which seems to be obvious, one of key factors that influences consumers' choice for those services (Herric, 2007).

The main goal of this article is to discuss the tools and possibilities of Internet marketing communication in Health Care Institutions as a comparison between theory and practical marketing activity in Poland. The basis for this was a research conducted in all health care institutions in the Lodzkie Voivodship in December 2012. For editorial limits, the scope of issues will cover social media marketing (with usage of social networking sites and blogs) and mobile marketing.

### **Social Networking Sites in Marketing**

Social networks have gained greater popularity across the globe (Gregor & Stawiszyński, 2012). Their main advantage, from the perspective of an Internet user, is the greater chance for sharing content with friends and through this deepening relations with them and broadening their group of friends or acquaintances. From the perspective of marketers, there are even more advantages. First of all, social media gives them an unrepeatable chance to get to know customers and their preferences better. Furthermore, they may share some content and analyze its spread. What is most important is this lets a brand build relations with clients and with that get loyalty and respect (Gotwald, 2010). These features of social media also make it interesting for health care institutions.

As the Global Institute for Emerging Healthcare Practices (*Should Healthcare Organizations Use Social Media?*, n.d.) states, there are a few business goals which are advanced by usage of social networking sites (SNS). They can be perceived from a few perspectives. As for communications, it is not only marketing, brand and reputation management or building relations with customers, but also the recruitment aspect of an enterprise's activity. While we consider sharing information, it's also something more than just educating patients and making communication more efficient, because managing professional collaboration between both patients, as clients, and doctors, as service providers, is crucial for the effectiveness of clinical actions. In clinical outcomes, wellness, population and the monitoring of patients are as important as care management and coordination. Usage of social media, where the spread of information is really huge also very positively influences innovation proliferation and product development (Practices, 2013). For those reasons, intense usage of social media in

marketing activities has also become prominent in health care institutions, not only in developed but also in developing countries.

## METHOD

The research project aimed at analyzing usage of e-marketing in health care institutions was conducted in December 2012 in cooperation with the Department of Marketing at the Faculty of Management and Scientific Research Institute of the EMANUEL Foundation. All the health care institutions from the Lodzkie voivodship were included. In total there were 1338 institutions examined. The respondents were managers of the institutions delivering health care services. The research project had three stages and on each of them different methods for collecting data were used: (a) CATI with all the institutions (1338), (b) in-depth interviews with managers of institutions which used e-marketing in communication with the market (237) and (c) observations of e-marketing activities of the second ones.

## RESULTS

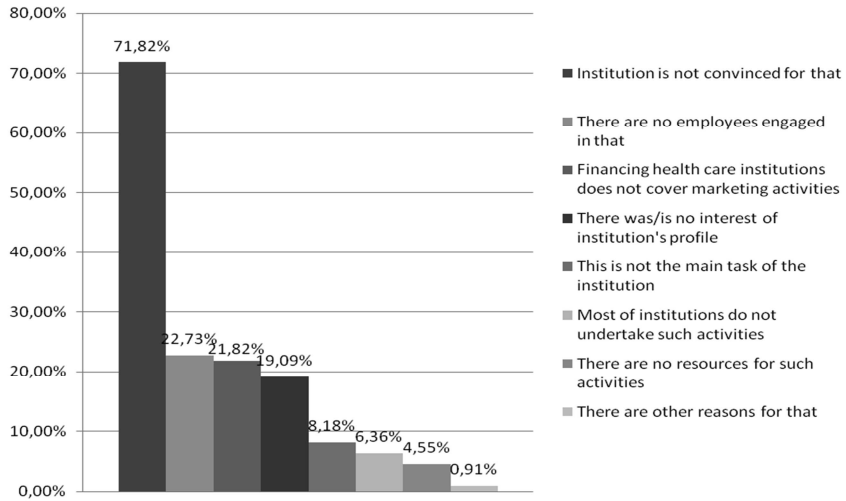
### Social Media in Marketing

Generally speaking social media usage still seems to be underused by health care institutions' managers in Lodzkie. Based on the results of the research it is clear that managers of health care institutions avoid the usage of social media (for the question  $N = 135$ , the rest of institutions did not agree to answer;  $N > 100\%$ , because interviewees could only point to a maximum of three of the most appropriate answers). Only 18,52% of examined institutions use social media. The remaining 81,48% avoids such activities for a few reasons which are presented on the chart below (Figure 1).

What might be surprising is that the main reason for avoiding marketing activity in social media is not for the lack of appropriate human capital (22,73%), problems of not covering costs of marketing activities by government (21,82%) or simply financial problems of an institution (4,55%). The other tasks which are crucial for an institution (8,18%) or similar attitude of the other institutions (6,36%) were also not the dominant reason.

The most important cause of not trying to undertake e-marketing activities in social media were either doubts (71,82%) of institutions managers or assumed lack of clients' interest (19,09%). What is even more intriguing is that the mentioned doubts had no real reason, equally as with the lack of clients' interest. They were nothing more than the opinions of managers (usually aged 45+) who found such an activity a waste of time. Suggestions of more than 1/5 of the examined managers revealed that they have no appropriate human capital nor resources for this marketing activity. This might prove a source of inspiration for legislators that marketing activities

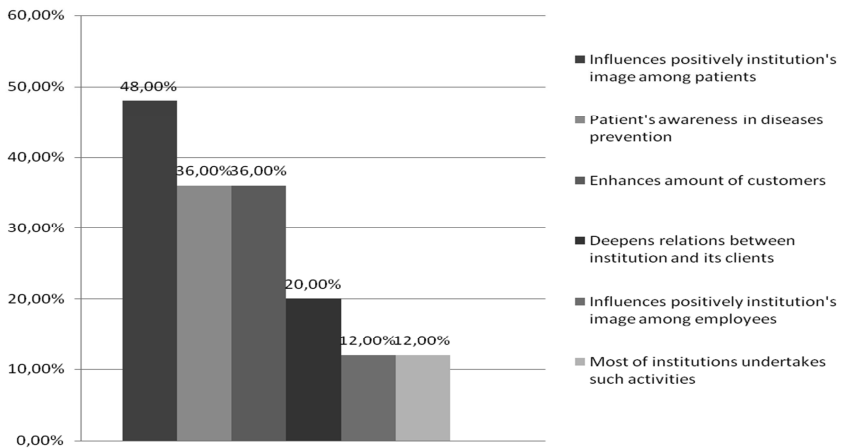
of health care institutions, especially those which have contracts with the National Health Fund, should be subsidised.



**Figure 1.** Reasons for Avoiding Marketing Activities on Social Networking Sites

Source: own research.

As far as the reasons for usage of Social Networking Sites, the concentration of answers is smaller and that might be caused by the fact that only 25 (10,54% of all) of the examined institutions answered the question which is visible on the chart below (Figure 2).



**Figure 2.** Reasons for Using Social Networking Sites in Marketing Activities

Source: own research.

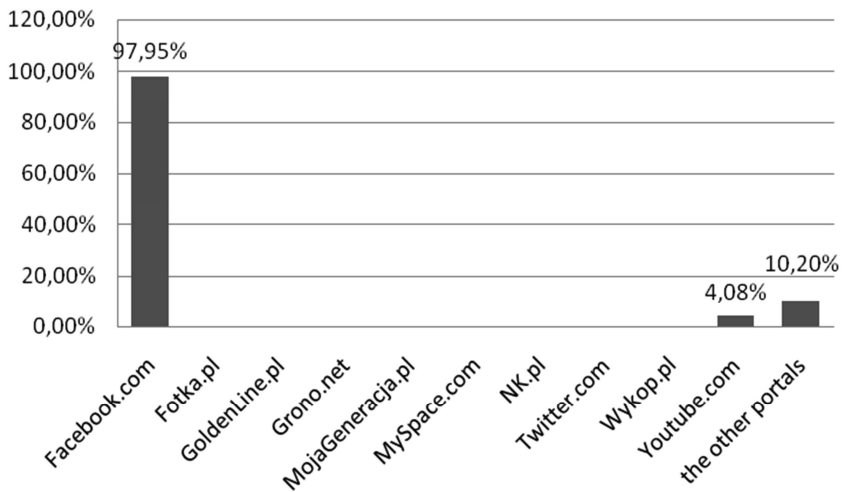
The other 110 (46,41% of all) admitted that they do not use SNS but explained themselves. The rest (102 institutions – 43,04% of all) refused to answer for reasons of not using SNS. This might have been caused by their fear of showing a lack of knowledge on the topic.

Almost half of the institutions that used SNS admitted that the reason for using them is for image building (48%) from the perspective of a client or employee (12%). The customer is always most important but for others (i.e. public authorities, trendsetters, opinion leaders, journalists etc.) the goal becomes influencing them so they become the health care institution's actual or potential customers. Usually respondents, while asked that question, also added that they are unique, because they use social media. Their awareness of competitors' activities and lack of usage of SNS was huge, because only 12% of the institutions declared that such actions are undertaken by the others. All of the institutions that did undertake activities on SNS were private entities. This is worth noticing, because it is the other reason why the structure of financing health services should be modified. Lack of competition between public health care institutions creates a paradoxical situation in which institutions delivering services compete for having the least clients possible. What might be crucial too, is the concentration on image building among patients and a lack of need for improving it for the others. Almost one third listed that they used SNS for improving patients' awareness and knowledge in disease prevention (36%) and enhancing the number of clients (36%). This can be seen as positive because it means that for health care institutions early disease prevention and the general health of society is as important as gaining new customers. Although, theoretically they are essentially polarised features (on the health care market), in reality they are not. Because a society that is more aware of disease prevention and cares more for its physiological wellness, needs more advanced support and notices little symptoms which would normally be ignored, and therefore seek early treatment. One in five respondents (20%) said that the reason is a need to deepen relations with clients, which seems to be obvious in the contemporary market reality.

When it comes to particular SNS used by the institutions, Facebook is unquestionably the leader, which is visible on the chart below (Figure 3) (for the question  $N = 49$ , the rest of institutions did not agree to answer;  $N > 100\%$ , because interviewees could only point to a maximum of three of the most appropriate answers).

Almost all of the examined institutions (97,95%) which used SNS, declared usage of it. What is really intriguing is that more institutions declared usage of Facebook (48) than all the institutions that admitted usage of Social Networking Sites (25). The reason for this might have been that the institutions were unaware that Facebook is an SNS. However, this can be excluded because in a previous question, the portal was mentioned as

an example of SNS, so the only reason may be a conflict between being afraid of using SNS and being convinced that usage of Facebook in contemporary marketing is a must (Vance, 2012). The other portal named in the study as one used by institutions was youtube.com, enlisted by 4,08% of institutions. Amazing possibilities of presenting video promotion material for free to an international audience is priceless, especially when medical tourism to Poland is becoming more and more popular (Herric, 2007). Also if we take into account that an image can speak louder than words, the use of Youtube amongst institutions is obvious.



**Figure 3.** Usage of Particular Social Networking Sites

Source: own research.

Surprisingly, Twitter was not named as an SNS used by health care institutions in Lodzkie, even though it is claimed to be a revolutionary tool in building interest and buzz among potential clients, especially when it comes to health care (Sharp, 2013). Nevertheless, google+ which is a relatively new SNS was used by one in ten institutions. This shows the great potential of Google as an emerging competitor of Facebook (Curran, Morrison & Mc Cauley, 2012).

Also interesting are the activities of employees on Social Media (for the question N = 7; the rest of institutions did not agree to answer; N > 100%, because interviewees could only point to a maximum of three of the most appropriate answers).

The researched institutions usually refused to answer questions on who is responsible for creating and managing content on SNS. The main reason for such an attitude was that of being afraid of competitors' imitat-

ing actions or simply there is no coordination of marketing activity on the Internet, especially in the field of social networking sites' usage. Physicians and medical workers are hardly ever engaged in creating content and animating discussions on SNS. Only 1 institution declared devoting a physician for that task. The reason for that is a general lack of specialists who need to be engaged 100% in their work and they simply have no free time for creating or managing content. This might be the reason for the poor quality of information on some sites (*Using Social Media to Improve Healthcare Quality*, 2011). There are usually marketing employees hired for SNS activities (71,43%). Most interestingly, it is the fact that no institution is using an external agency for activities in social media. The reason for that is usually the high costs of such services and the deep belief that employing an additional worker is more reasonable.

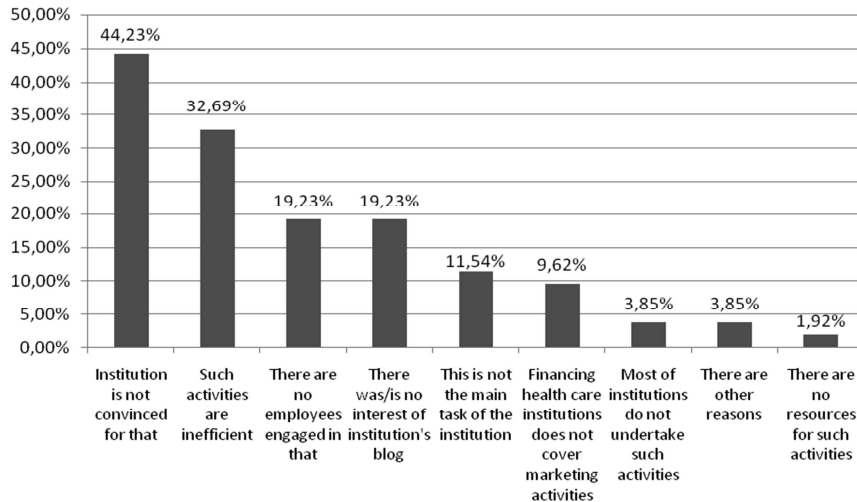
### Blogs in Marketing

Although usage of blogs has become more popular as a separate idea for business, their intense usage is also one of the tools for building deeper relations with customers and creating an image of professionalism. The other crucial feature of blogs is customer's education, which is especially important while talking about innovative medical treatments and ethically discussed topics, such as in-vitro fertilization (Kamel Boulos & Wheeler, 2007). Blogs are rarely written by people who suffer some specific type of disease i.e. cancer and although they often cover issues related to the institution in which they are healed, they rarely influence its image and for that reason will not be discussed (Kim & Chung, 2007). Despite the fact that blogs are a popular communication tool in developed countries, it is still gaining importance in Poland, which is visible from the example of Lodzkie.

The majority of researched institutions (95,28%) do not use blogs in their activities. There are many reasons for that, which are presented on the chart below (Figure 4) (for the question N = 52; the rest of institutions did not agree to answer; N > 100%, because interviewees could only point to a maximum of three of the most appropriate answers).

What may be crucial is the fact that again the institution's doubts are the main reason for not using that method of communication (44,23%). The ineffectiveness of blogs is declared only by one third of institutions (32,69%). So once again, uncertain convictions and opinions are a more important factor than facts (i.e. proven effectiveness). A lack of employee and client interest is an equally important cause for avoiding blogs (19,23% each). For one in ten managers, concentration on the crucial tasks of the institution and (for that) lack of time to have a blog (11,54%) and no additional resources on marketing (9,62%) are very important reasons. Observation of competitors who do not use a blog is much less important

(3,85%). A lack of resources (1,92%) is the least important factor so it might be thought that if there was such a need, institutions would have no problems with finding money to create and actualize a blog. On the other hand, the “other reason” named by 3,85% of respondents are due to the lack of human resources. The last point might be combined with the lack of employees engaged in the activity, giving a total of 23,08%.



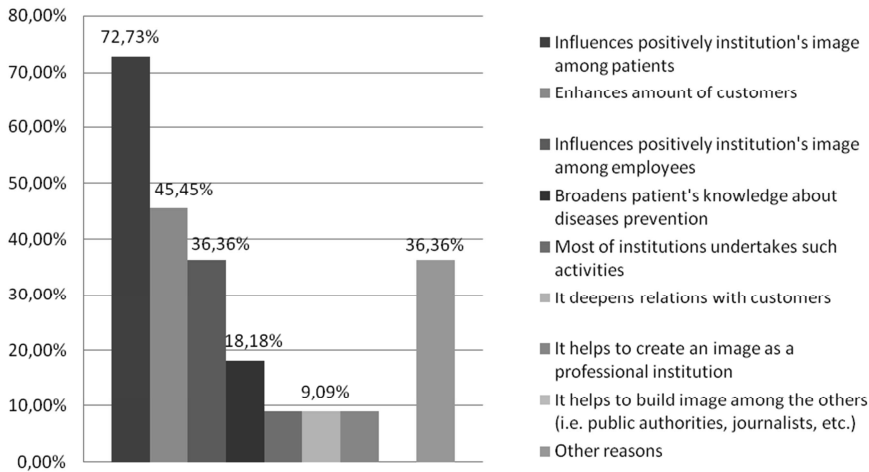
**Figure 4.** Reasons for Avoiding Usage of Blogs in Marketing Activity

Source: own research.

Among those institutions that use blogs in marketing communication (4,72%), the decision for it was caused by a few reasons, presented on a chart below (Figure 5) (for the question N = 14; the rest of institutions did not agree to answer; N > 100%, because interviewees could only point to a maximum of three of the most appropriate answers).

The need for creating a better image of an institution is the crucial factor (72,73%) for creating a blog, more important than gaining new customers (45,45%) or creating a favourable image among employees (36,36%). One in ten managers (9,09%) stated that the main reason for creating a blog is not merely the fact that most health care institutions undertake the activity, but also they build relations with customers and the image of a professional institution. Surprisingly, a blog was not perceived by managers as a tool for building image among others, or they found it (similarly as in the case of social networking sites) irrelevant. One third of researched managers stated that there are some other reasons for having a blog, but at the same time they did not name them. Such a situation may be caused by the fact that some managers work is based on marketing intuition





**Figure 5.** Reasons for Using Blogs in Marketing Activity

Source: own research.

Scope of topics covered by blogs was rather broad (for the question  $N = 6$ ; the rest of institutions did not agree to answer;  $N > 100\%$ , because interviewees could only point to a maximum of three of the most appropriate answers).

The goal of selling was the most important factor to be realized here, because nine in ten managers (90,01%) declared that the information discussed on blogs were most often promotions offered by the company. Surprisingly, news from the region was discussed with the same intensity as selling while medical news was not declared to be shown. Eight in ten (81,82%) managers admitted that the scope of topics also included information about services and personnel. The issue of disease prevention was more common (72,73%) than information about the institution and its activities (54,55%). This final point shows the positive aspects of blogging because this proves that the researched institutions pay greater attention to patients and their wellness than to the institution as such.

As for organizational matters, 10 in 11 blogs are conducted by special employees and only 1 blog is created by a physician or someone else. Although this is not surprising, as normally physicians lack the necessary time and need to concentrate mainly on patient care, however, this may also cause problems with the quality of information presented here, especially as far as professional information on disease prevention is concerned.

Mobile marketing is especially hard to describe in the Lodzkie voivodship, because although popularity of smartphones is growing and there are a lot of interesting applications created for the health care sector

worldwide (Merisavo, Vesanen, Arponen, Kajalo & Raulas, 2006), they are not used in marketing in Poland with such intensity. In Lodzkie none of the analysed institutions delivered such an application. Managers declared (100%) that they are not interested in such a type of communication, even though they are aware of its growing popularity while discussing marketing. Neither easy access to customers (Kotler, Whalowitz & Stevens, 2011) nor possibilities of their education were provided as an argument.

## DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

The topic of modern tools used in marketing communication in managing health care institutions is still worth discussing. There are not enough thorough studies on the topic, accessible in Poland, and possibly for that reason usage of social media and mobile marketing is still at a starting point. Unfortunately, there is no possibility to talk about usage of mobile marketing in this situation when easier tools like social media (presented as the example of social networking sites and blogs) are hardly ever used and even when they are, it is uncommon to find many good practices on the Lodzkie market. In most cases the cause for avoiding modern methods of marketing communication is the lack of knowledge or need in the institution, but what might be even worse, managers often declared a lack of well-trained staff who would be able to create it.

As far as usage of social media, most of the information presented on the institution's profile and blog only try to fulfil the purpose of selling (information about promotions, new offers etc.). There is some ready-made information on the weather or news in the region (automatically re-published from other websites). This might be a common mistake in management which is caused by a lack of knowledge in the field of customer relations management. Usage of mobile marketing would enhance the customers' engagement with the institution, nevertheless it needs time and energy to convince institutions' managers of its benefits. For the above mentioned reasons, it seems that only a deep reform of health care management systems and paying greater attention not only to the quality of services, but also to the quality of communication with customers, will result in an enhancement of the popularity for using modern marketing management tools.

## REFERENCES

- Curran, K., Morrison, S., & Mc Cauley, S. (2012). Google+ vs Facebook: The Comparison. *Telkonnika, 10(2)*.
- Gotwald, B. (2010). *Jak zarobić w Internecie? Portal społecznościowy i jego promocja*. Łódź: Leader-Great Publishers.
- Gregor, B., & Stawiszyński, M. (2012). Wykorzystanie mediów społecznościowych w przedsiębiorstwach. *Zeszyty naukowe Ekonomiczne Problemy Usług, 702(87)*.

- Herric, D.M. (2007). *Medical Tourism: Global Competition in Health Care*. NCPA Pomakes licy Report No. 304. National Center for Policy Analysis, Retrieved from <http://www.ncpa.org/pdfs/st304.pdf>
- ITU. (n.d.). Data retrieved from <http://www.itu.int/ict/statistics>.
- Kamel Boulos, M.N., & Wheeler, S. (2007). The emerging Web 2.0 social software: an enabling suite of sociable technologies in health and health care education. *Health Information & Libraries Journal*, 24.
- Kim, S., & Chung, D.S. (2007). Characteristics of cancer blog users. *Journal of the Medical Library Association*, 95(4).
- Kotler, P., Whalowitz, J., & Stevens, R.J. (2011). *Marketing strategiczny w opiece zdrowotnej*. Warszawa: Oficyna Wolters Kluwer business.
- Merisavo, M., Vesanen, J., Arponen, A., Kajalo S., & Raulas M. (2006). The effectiveness of targeted mobile advertising in selling mobile services: an empirical study. *International Journal of Mobile Communications*, 4(2).
- Pauly, M.V. (2004). Competition in medical services and the quality of care: concepts and history. *International Journal of Health Care Finance and Economics*, 4(2).
- Porter, M.E., & Teisberg, E.O. (2004). Redefining Competition in Healthcare. *Harvard Business Review*, June. Retrieved from <http://hbr.org/web/extras/insight-center/health-care/redefining-competition-in-health-care>.
- Sharp, J. (2011). *Social Media in Healthcare: What's Working, What's Not*. HIMSS 2011 Conference Social Media presentation, Orlando, Florida. Retrieved from <http://www.slideshare.net/JohnSharp/social-media-in-health-care-whats-working-whats-not>.
- Should Healthcare Organizations Use Social Media?* (n.d.). Global Institute for Emerging Healthcare Practices, Retrieved from [http://assets1.csc.com/health\\_services/downloads/CSC\\_Should\\_Healthcare\\_Organizations\\_Use\\_Social\\_Media.pdf](http://assets1.csc.com/health_services/downloads/CSC_Should_Healthcare_Organizations_Use_Social_Media.pdf).
- Using Social Media to Improve Healthcare Quality. A Guide to Current Practice and Future Promise.* (2011). Toronto: The Change Foundation.
- Vance, A. (2012). *Facebook: The Making of 1 Billion Users*. Retrieved from <http://www.businessweek.com/articles/2012-10-04/facebook-the-making-of-1-billion-users>.

## POTENCJAŁ MEDIÓW SPOŁECZNOŚCIOWYCH I MARKTINGU MOBILNEGO W ZARZĄDZANIU KOMUNIKACJĄ MARKETINGOWĄ W INSTYTUCJACH SŁUŻBY ZDROWIA

### Abstrakt

**Tło badań.** Współczesna rzeczywistość marketingowa wymusza na wszystkich podmiotach, również instytucjach opieki zdrowotnej, dostosowanie się do potrzeb i wymagań klientów, również w zakresie zarządzania relacjami z klientami.

**Cele badań.** Celem niniejszego artykułu jest ustalenie czy i w jakim stopniu instytucje służby zdrowia prowadzą działania marketingowe z użyciem wyżej wspomnianych technik.

**Metodyka.** Przedmiotem badań były opinie managerów instytucji służby zdrowia regionu łódzkiego, diagnozowane przy użyciu ankiety. Badaniem objęto wszystkie jednostki służby zdrowia regionu łódzkiego, to jest łącznie 1338, przy czym do ankiety, której wyniki zaprezentowano w opracowaniu włączono jedynie te, które podejmują lub podejmowały aktywność marketingową w Internecie, definiowaną jako prowadzenie strony internetowej, to jest 237 instytucji. Badanie przeprowadzono w grudniu 2012 roku.

**Kluczowe wnioski.** Współcześnie jednostki służby zdrowia nie są w pełni przygotowane do podejmowania aktywności marketingowej z użyciem nowego marketingu.

**Słowa kluczowe:** nowy marketing, marketing w służbie zdrowia, komunikacja marketingowa, media społecznościowe, marketing mobilny, zarządzanie jednostkami służby zdrowia

© 2013. This work is published under <https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-nd/4.0/> (the “License”). Notwithstanding the ProQuest Terms and Conditions, you may use this content in accordance with the terms of the License.