



Social media as a communication area in fitness services

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Abstract

Publications of Hoffman and Novak (Hoffman, Novak 1996: 66) indicated the impact of changes to Internet communication (many-to-many communication) and a dynamic development of the internet on consumer behaviour. The mere development of the Internet and information technologies, according to R.V. Kozinets, has determined the rise of virtual communities including consumer communities constituting “e-consumers groups whose interactions online are based on the exchange of information, enthusiasm and knowledge on consumption experiences” (Kozinets 1999: 254; Bickart, Schindler 2001). While building their brand through social media, fitness services should manage appropriately the contents of promotional and information messages – to increase recipients’ involvement, build a brand-centred community. This paper aims to characterize social media as communication channels, present the best practices in communicating fitness services through social media and indicate the best, in the Author’s opinion, ways of building interactions with users of fitness services.

Keywords: social media, fitness, Internet, content marketing, virtual community

JEL: L83, M37

Introduction

Publications of Hoffman and Novak (Hoffman, Novak 1996: 66) indicated the impact of changes to Internet communication (many-to-many communication) and a dynamic development of the internet on consumer behaviour. Hoffman and Novak claim that a consumer as a participant of an „interaction spiral” is an active unit in the interactive Internet environment and uses an opportunity of instant and broadly understood communication with other users of virtual space – and this is a cause of changes to behaviour of e-consumers. Development of the Internet and information technology, according to R.V. Kozinets, has determined the rise of virtual communities including consumer communities constituting “e-consumers groups whose interactions online are based on the exchange of information, enthusiasm and knowledge on consumption experiences” (Kozinets 1999: 254;

Bickart, Schindler 2001). While building their brand through social media, fitness services should manage appropriately the contents of promotional and information messages – to increase recipients’ involvement, build a brand-centred community. This paper aims to characterize social media as communication channels, present the best practices in communicating fitness services through social media and indicate the best, in the Author’s opinion, ways of building interactions with users of fitness services.

Social media and Web 2.0

Development of Web 2.0 and information and communication technologies makes us look more broadly at ways of getting information in the process of making shopping decisions by an e-consumer. The area of Web 2.0 is occupied by social media defined by T. Weinberg as communication channels enabling interactions among

internet users by means of information technologies. These are all media and online services where individuals, enterprises and organizations put information about their actions, offered products and services – which aims to “integrate” internet users through meaningful participation (Treadaway, Smith 2010: 55; Weinberg 2009: 18-23). According to Ch. Treatway and M. Smith social media denotes: „a collection of technologies used for initiating communication and conveying contents among people, their acquaintances and virtual communities that they belong to” (Treadaway, Smith 2010: 55). The media takes the form of social networking sites, blogging platforms etc. Social networking sites are strongly connected to the notion of community which constitutes the core of social media and decides about the structure of the area. Users share information and experiences (Seda 2008: 87) and the interaction and the way information is presented depends on various perspectives and building common beliefs in the community. T. Smektała defined community in social media as „a collective of internet users who actively use the platform for communication and exchanging information and communication related to common interest, beliefs or attitudes” (Smektała 2006: 148). The above definition emphasizes the means without which none of these actions would be possible as well as interactivity. On the other hand, it does not take into account technical specifications and a creative nature which is strictly connected to social networking sites (<http://www.europae.pl/biznes/artykuy/338-social-media-portale-spoecznociowe-web-20> (access: 02.10.2013)). It is worth paying attention to the fact that traditional media aims to account and tell a story, send information to the mass recipient but only in one direction. Social networking sites are accessible by all interested parties and are socially controlled. The mere media process is different (Internet Standard: <http://www.internetstandard.pl/news/365447/Internet.Standard.prezentuje.raport.Social.Media.2011.html> (access: 14.12.2014)). Social media is based on dissemination of information through interaction among users (Sterne 2010: 135), was created by means of easily accessible and scalable techniques, supports the need of interaction in the society using WWW embedded techniques for the purposes of transforming a monologue (one-to-many) into a dialogue (many-to-many). We observe democratization of knowledge and information as well as a transformation of people from those using the contents into those

producing it (<http://socialmediaguide.pl/index.php/slowniczek/> (access: 20.12.2014)).

Social media can be characterized as follows:

- it may be used on any scale;
- original information may be infinitely modified (Joshi 2007);
- an access to the content and its modification is infinite;
- all the elements resulting from the creation process (co-creation) are not deleted and are accessible all the time;
- contents is disseminated through social interaction;
- there is an unconstrained way of creating the content (Bell 2001: 47).

The above list reveals the information that social media is to strengthen and convey information – it allows publication of current events and transmits information contents, gets and broadens knowledge. To conclude, we need to say that social media plays an informational (sharing, getting and broadening knowledge) (Seda 2010: 176-177) and functional role (building a virtual community, building social bonds). In view of the subject of this elaboration, a significant importance is attached to the statement that social media plays an important role in the process of making shopping decisions by e-consumers. According to the Social Media Report 2013 about 90% of all transactions are affected by opinions from social networking sites; the same number of people trusts people recommending products on social networking sites. Through social media e-consumers get shopping information, interact with other consumer (users of products) and entrepreneurs. Creation and publication of contents in social media can be done by both e-consumers and entrepreneurs (<http://socialmedia.pl/tag/social-media-definicja/> (access: 02.12.2014)).

In the contemporary virtual space there are many areas creating social media. On the basis of the analysis of these areas, one may classify them into: Internet users’ interests, objectives of arising and sharing information by a virtual community (Evans 2010: 53). Social media classification with regard to its creation purposes is presented by table 1.

The above data shows that differentiation of social media with regard to interests of internet users may not be explicit. Some areas are complimentary, others attract the same groups of internet users – e.g. people dealing with conveying messages and commenting them in real time may be both in LiveStream as well as in YouTube.

Table 1. Social media classification with regard to its creation purposes

Name	Activity area
Discussion groups and tools of interpersonal and group communication	Communication and exchange of information among internet users
Social Networks	Areas attracting people interested in job topics and exchange of information about professional and specialist topics
Blogs and microblogs	Creating contents targeted at an anonymous or registered user with a possibility of commenting on information by users of the community
LiveStream	Conveying information and commenting it in real time
Livcasts	Multimedia live broadcasts e.g. TV online
Virtual Worlds	Creating virtual worlds where Internet users functions on the principles of "parallel life"
SocialGamers	Online games attracting Internet users- game players
MMO	Online games building communities of players
Publish	Social media used for publishing information
Share	Publishing, sharing, modifying contents, „knowledge sharing" system

Source: elaboration of one's own based on L. L. Evans, Social Media Marketing, QUE Publishing, New York 2010, p. 53 i n.

Table 2. Classification of social media application to fitness services

Activity form
Presentation of a offer
Incentive / loyalty programmes
Gamefication/ team games
Self-motivation
Mobile application

Source: elaboration of one's own

Application of social media in communication- fitness services

The fact that companies communicate through social media may bring mutual benefits-both for the company as well as the customer. Companies may present their offer whereas customers have access to ideas, new exercises and latest trends in training by a "click of the mouse". They may see the amount of calories burnt and communicate with their coaches on the on-going basis and instantly find answers to their questions.

The application of social media to fitness services may be classified according the communication goal (table 2).

Considering the presentation of the offer, the most active and popular brands in fitness in social media are as follows¹:

¹ According to activity in social media in 2014, the most successful on Twitter, Facebook and Instagram.

1. **CrossFit** (<https://www.facebook.com/cross-fit?fref=ts>(access 18.01.2015))

Brand's activities communicated through social media are based on presentation of new forms of working out, improving a physical condition and motivation to exercise (figure 1 and 2).

The brand gathers a community in Facebook of around 1904389 fans. Most importantly, active fans commenting events, sharing their knowledge, motivating each other. CrossFit gained public engagement by inspiring and building a community in social media:

on Twitter – though motivating quotations;

on Facebook – by commenting difficult and admirable exercises:

on Instagram – by motivating and numerous instruction videos.

2. **Nike Training Club** (https://www.facebook.com/games/nike_trainingclub/?fb-s=1101&fref=ts (access: 18.01.2015))

Nike Training Club – a popular application on a smart phone for women working and presenting their own work-outs (figure 3).

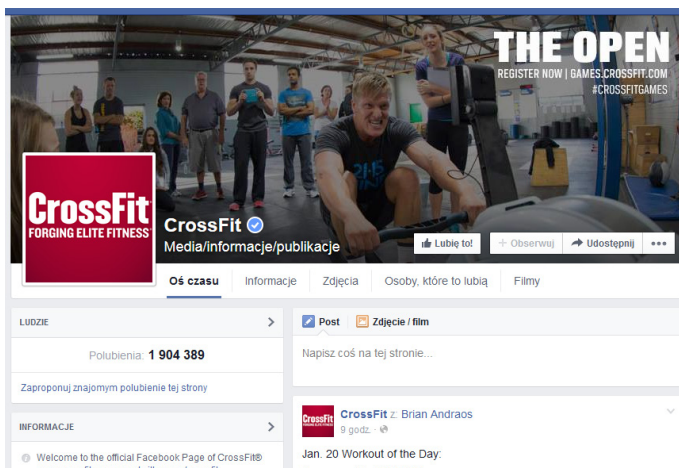


Figure 1. CrossFit in social media – Facebook.

Source: CrossFit : <https://www.facebook.com/crossfit?fref=ts> (access 18.01.2015);



Figure 2. CrossFit in social media – instuction post.

Source: CrossFit : <https://www.facebook.com/crossfit?fref=ts> (access 18.01.2015);

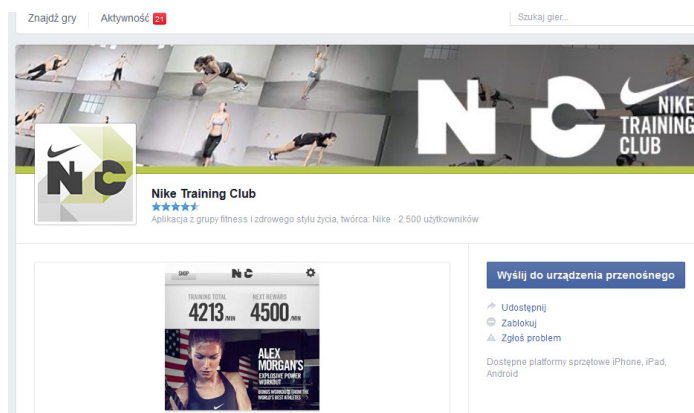


Figure 3. Nike Training Club – a page to download.

Source: Nike Training Club: https://www.facebook.com/games/nike_trainingclub/?fbs=1101&fref=ts (access 18.01.2015);

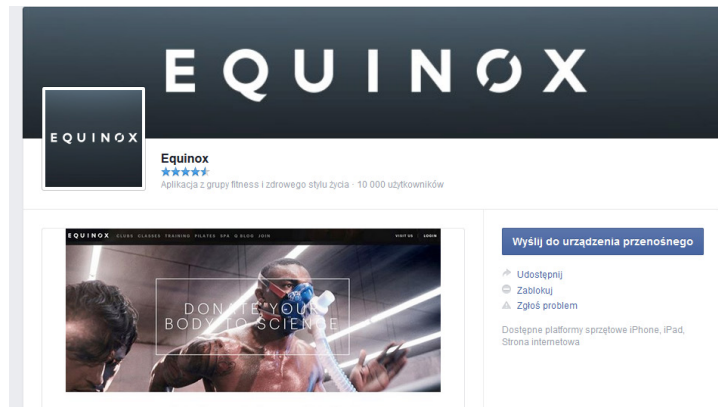


Figure 4. Equinox – serwis na Facebooku.

Source: Equinox: <https://www.facebook.com/games/equinoxfitness/?fbs=1101&fref=ts> (access 18.01.2015);



Figure 5. SoulCycle – integration post.

Source: SoulCycle : <https://www.facebook.com/pages/SoulCycle/64759509591?fref=ts> (access 18.01.2015);

Nike Training Club application as a „personal trainer” allows the user to choose the type of training and save results of exercises. Results and progress can be shared e.g through Facebook. The user may join gamification with others which enhances motivation.

Nike Training Club uses social media to communicate various contents. Twitter provides information about the application, Facebook is a place where information is exchanged by the community, Instagram is a “board” for presenting professional photos of Nike products (for further selling purposes).

3. **Equinox** (<https://www.facebook.com/games/equinoxfitness/?fbs=1101&fref=ts>(access: 18.01.2015))

Equinox is an exclusive gym located in big American, Canadian and British cities. Its community is very much involved in social media – about 45% (figure 4).

Equinox brand builds its success in social media thanks to interesting and rich contents of video

as well as communication coherency in all social media. The involvement of the community is also tied to direct brand communication, leaving „soft motivation” for the sake of impudent slogans and contents for “the tough ones”.

4. **SoulCycle** (<https://www.facebook.com/pages/SoulCycle/64759509591?fref=ts>(access 18.01.2015))

SoulCycle communicates through social media based on two basic slogans:

Work out for 45 minutes every day.

Change your body. Change your soul.

The brand succeeds in building bonds with the community, inspiring to group in the real world and overcome difficulties together, motivating each other when doing sport (figure 5 and 6).

Actions of the brand focus on Twitter (numerous quotations, motivating sayings) whereas Facebook is used for exchanging data and mutual motivation of the SoulCycle community.



Figure 6. SoulCycle – integration post.

Source: SoulCycle : <https://www.facebook.com/pages/SoulCycle/64759509591?ref=ts> (access 18.01.2015);



Figure 7. 24 Hour Fitness – on Facebook.

Source: 24 Hour Fitness: <https://www.facebook.com/24HourFitness?ref=> access 18.01.2015);

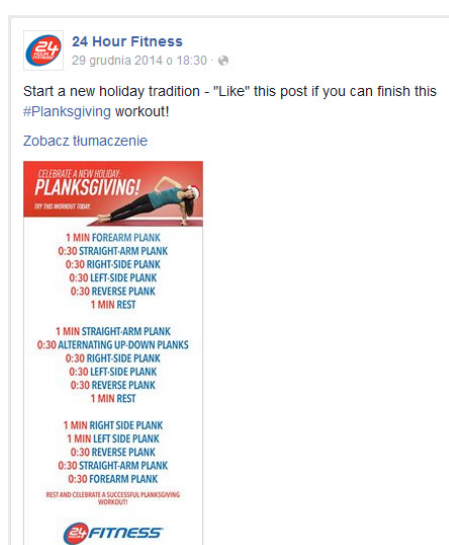


Figure 8. A post on Facebook - 24 Hour Fitness.

Source: 24 Hour Fitness: <https://www.facebook.com/24HourFitness?ref=ts> (access 18.01.2015);-

Table 3. Fitness applications in Poland – ranking

No.	Name	Description
1.	Endomondo Sports Tracker	The application register sports results and enables sharing information with acquaintances. It works for running, cycling, roller-blading, walking and other sports. The free-of-charge version registers the speed, time and calories burnt. It enables users to look at routes on the maps using GPS, manually control work-outs, gives instructions in voice.
2.	Runtastic	Runtastic is targeted at amateurs of running. It uses GPS for preparing and activity map and following the distance, the speed and the pace. It gives commands in voice, measures the beat, enables sharing your achievements with acquaintances and following results alive.
3.	RunKeeper	Free-of-charge „pocket trainer” allows users to check statistics and progress, observe their physical activity through GPS, gives instructions in voice, enables sharing achievements online.
4.	Aerobiczna Szóstka WeideraA6W	It is targeted at those who exercise aerobic Weider’s six. It contains a Schedule with exercises for 42 days and a speech synthesizer helping in the work-out.
5.	Kardiograf – Cardiograph	It measures the pulse during the work-out and save results, conducts a comparative analysis. A free cardiograph for a smart phone takes photos of one’s fingertips to calculate the pulse as in professional medical devices.

Source: elaboration of one’s own based on: <https://www.endomondo.com/>, <https://www.runtastic.com/pl>, <http://runkeeper.com/>, <http://www.6weidera.com/>, <http://www.androido.pl/kardiograf-cardiograph-zmierz-rytm-serca/> (access 18.01.2015);

5. **24 Hour Fitness** (<https://www.facebook.com/24HourFitness?fref=ts> (access 18.01.2015))

24 Hour Fitness is the largest in the world fitness Centre. It has over 420 gyms in 18 states in USA. With such a large network, it successfully supports its brand in social media both in terms of the number of fans as well as their involvement (figure 7 and 8).

The brand interacts with the community, inspires and motivates to further action. The brand succeeds in social media because it initiates contacts, asks questions, asks for opinions about various issues- also about services offered by the club. This way its customers become prosumers – they have a real influence on the company offer, they modify it and adjust to their needs.

Mobile applications are interesting tools in fitness services in social media. Their examples are as follows:

1. Fitocracy – the application enables following effects of exercises, one may take part in gamification with other participants (<https://www.fitocracy.com/> (access 18.01.2015)).
2. Strava – the application target runners and bikers. It is a self-motivating tool however it also enables users to compete in a selected segment (<http://www.strava.com/> (access 18.01.2015)).
3. Athlinks – the application is mainly for runners and triathlon participants and enabling them to compete, update and send photos and videos. (<http://www.athlinks.com/>

[Race/Event/?raceid=62844&courseid=0](http://www.athlinks.com/Race/Event/?raceid=62844&courseid=0) (access 18.01.2015));

4. MyFitnessPal – defines an interdependency between the amount of calories burnt and consumed. It enables users to keep control over the body weight and enjoy effects of the work-out (<http://www.myfitnesspal.com/> (access 18.01.2015)).

If we take into account the market in Poland, the most popular fitness applications are presented by table 3².

Considering the development of social media and activities of companies delivering fitness services one may say that these activities should not be mainly targeted at :

1. Winning new customers.
2. Keeping customers and enhancing their loyalty and profits from sales.
3. Cost reduction.

We may indicate activities in social media which make a fitness brand successful. These are:

1. An attractive content devoted to a subject.
2. Functionality and usability for people who take up sports.
3. Active listening to users’ needs and responding to them.
4. Interacting with the community.
5. Motivating, building confidence in one’s strengths and a “fighting spirit”.

² <https://www.endomondo.com/>, <https://www.runtastic.com/pl>, <http://runkeeper.com/>, <http://www.6weidera.com/>, <http://www.androido.pl/kardiograf-cardiograph-zmierz-rytm-serca/> (access 18.01.2015);

6. Multimedia – photo, videos, instruction materials- trainer’s advice, diet etc.

7. Mobile applications.

A marketing content takes a special place in fitness activities in social media. The marketing content involves providing social media customers with valuable contents, substantive information which will explain and resolve their possible problems and will satisfy their cognitive needs. The essence of the marketing content is to arouse interest and engagement of users in order to get their response which will translate into benefits for the message sender, confidence and loyalty of the customer/contractor towards the company and its products.

Social media is quickly changing and dynamically evolving into 3.0. The boundaries between the world on-line and the real one are blurred – as for example fitness watches are integrated into organism functions, GPS and they directly send pictures and results of exercises to a chosen social networking site.

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Summary

While building their brand through social media, fitness services should appropriately manage the contents of promotional and informational messages in order to enhance engagement of recipients and to build a brand-centred community. Social media as a communication channel and promotion of fitness services allows a brand to become successful and gain a competitive edge in the market. However one condition has to be met – fitness companies must perceive social media as the potential based on interaction and mutual motivation of participants in a brand-centred community. This involves devoting time, generating interesting content and listening to recipients’ needs. Sales itself and offering products through social media are not sufficient to create a committed and interactive community centred around a brand.

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Social media jako obszar komunikacji w usługach fitness

Abstrakt

Publikacje Hoffman i Novaka (Hoffman, Novak 1996: 66) wskazywały już na wpływ zmian w komunikacji poprzez Internet (komunikacji wielu-do-wielu) oraz dynamicznego rozwoju Internetu na zmiany w zachowaniach konsumentów. Sam rozwój Internetu i technologii informacyjnej, według R.V. Kozinets, zdeterminował powstanie wirtualnych społeczności, w tym konsumenc-kich, które stanowią „grupy e-konsumentów, których interakcje online są oparte na wymianie informacji, entuzjazmie oraz wiedzy na temat doświadczeń konsumpcyjnych” (Kozinets 1999: 254; Bickart, Schindler 2001). Usługi fitness, budując swoją markę poprzez social media, powinny w odpowiedni sposób zarządzać zawartością komunikatów promocyjnych i informacyjnych – tak, aby zwiększyć zaangażowanie odbiorców, budować społeczność skupioną wokół marki. Celem artykułu jest scharakteryzowanie social mediów jako kanału komunikacji, zaprezentowanie najlepszych praktyk dotyczących komunikacji usług fitness przez social media oraz wskazanie najlepszych, zdaniem autorki, sposobów budowania interakcji z odbiorcami usług fitness.

Słowa kluczowe: social media, fitness, Internet, content marketing, wirtualna społeczność

JEL: L83, M37