

## THE DIVERSITY OF MARKETING ACTIVITIES ON THE WEBSITES OF POLISH DAIRY COOPERATIVES

Dariusz Strzębicki

Warsaw University of Life Sciences – SGGW

**Abstract.** The article presents evaluation of marketing activities of Polish dairy cooperatives on their websites. The objective of the research was to determine whether the marketing activities are uniform or differentiated, and what were the differences between the researched websites. In the research the content analysis method was used. In the course of the research the elements of a website were classified into three categories representing marketing functions. Using content analysis, 20 of websites were analysed in terms of websites' elements performing marketing functions of advertising, public relations and sale. The research proves that the Polish dairy cooperatives implement on their websites differentiated marketing activities in terms of the number of the elements and their marketing functions. Some of the researched cooperatives attach greater importance than others to using their website as a marketing tool.

**Key words:** website, promotion, dairy cooperatives, content analysis, Internet marketing

### INTRODUCTION

#### **Specifics of marketing in dairy industry**

Dairy industry is an important sector of the Polish agribusiness. Processed dairy products in Poland are to a considerable degree produced by the enterprises that are of cooperative legal form. The Polish dairy enterprises are considered as less efficient comparing to the dairy enterprises in Western Europe. At the same time they lose their competitive price advantages on domestic and international market [Baran 2013]. Therefore the Polish enterprises should look for possibilities of increasing competitive advantage using the non-price instruments.

Changing technological environment causes attempts of enterprises to harness electronic media in their competitive strategies. The Internet is particularly important for enterprises that base their business models on the medium. Nevertheless its importance

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Corresponding authors – Adres do korespondencji: Dariusz Strzębicki, Warsaw University of Life Sciences – SGGW, Faculty of Economic Sciences, Department of European Policy, Public Finance and Marketing, Nowoursynowska 166, 02-787 Warsaw, Poland, e-mail: [dariusz\\_strzebicki@sggw.pl](mailto:dariusz_strzebicki@sggw.pl)

is increasing even for firms that sell FMCG products through traditional intermediaries. Many enterprises spot the opportunity to use a website as a tool for improving their marketing communications, managing brand and develop loyalty.

The Polish dairy cooperatives are similar in terms of legal form, organizational form, and products offered on the market. It may be assumed that the similarity translates into the similarity of marketing activities between their websites. The research attempts to assess marketing activities of dairy cooperatives implemented on their websites. The main objective of the research is to determine whether the marketing activities are uniform or differentiated, and what are the differences between the researched websites.

### **Website as a marketing tool**

Internet marketing is a broad area of the Internet usage in the enterprise marketing strategies. The article is focused on the topic of a company's website that is one of the Internet marketing areas among others, such as display advertising, search engine marketing, and social media marketing.

The websites of Polish companies usually contain some characteristic and common elements, such as [Bonek, Smaga 2012]:

- "About our firm" which is a description of the firm and its history;
- "Offer" or "Products", that is a catalogue of offered products with photos and descriptions.
- "Contact" which includes addresses, e-mail addresses, phone numbers, electronic contact forms, and the other information enabling clients to communicate with a company and its employees;
- "News", which is an element that includes current information connected with a company and its operation;

The other relatively often occurring elements are: "Information for investors", "Certificates and awards", "Information on business partners", "Price promotions", "Company's branches".

A firm's website combines many elements and features of traditional media. The elements are integrated with each other therefore the marketing effect of a single website is more than the sum of the elements [Hoffman, Novak 2011]. A website has a potential for performing all the marketing mix elements [Winer 2009]. A website offers the opportunities to augment a product [Pralhad, Ramaswamy 2004]. In many firms a website is used as the alternative distribution channel [Bockstedt et al. 2006]. Internet enables more efficient price comparison for customers [Frischmann et al. 2012]. A website can support all the promotional mix instruments, which are advertising, public relations, sales promotion, personal selling, and direct marketing.

However, it is a problematic issue how the elements of websites should be interpreted as regards marketing functions. A firm's website is an important tool of public relations since it enables a firm to act as a journalist and to develop mutual understanding with the company's audiences [Christ 2007]. A firm's website performs advertising functions since it can inform, persuade and remind about products. A company's website can be also considered of having the attributes of both advertising and direct selling since a website encourages potential customers to initiate a dialog with a firm and buy a prod-

uct [Deighton, Kornfeld 2009]. The different views on a firm's website prove, that it constitutes a very complex marketing tool of integrated marketing elements and functions.

A firm's website is a commonly used marketing tool. According to the data of the Main Statistical Office (GUS) at the beginning of the 2012 year 67.6% of the Polish enterprises had their own websites. In the group of big enterprises there were 93.2% of enterprises having a website, comparing with 85.5% of the medium enterprises and 63.2% of small enterprises. In the group of the food industry enterprises the percentage was 53% [GUS 2013]. According to the GUS, the websites played mainly promotional role and were rarely used to perform advanced marketing functions. The selected functions of the food industry enterprises' websites are included in the Table 1.

Table 1. Selected functions of the websites of food industry enterprises

Functions of websites	Ordering products online	Personal data protection	Product catalogues and price lists	Online tracking of a shipment	Ordering of products according to a buyer specification	Content personalization
Percentage of food industry enterprises	8.6	22.7	44.9	5.4	8.2	3.5

Source: Główny Urząd Statystyczny, 2013. Wykorzystanie technologii informacyjno-(tele)komunikacyjnych w przedsiębiorstwach i gospodarstwach domowych w 2012 r., Warszawa.

Table 1 shows that the relatively advanced elements of websites such as enabling customers to order products online, enabling to track a shipment, content personalization according to the customer profiles and product customization, are rare on the food industry websites.

Having a website is not enough to achieve marketing objectives. To harness the potential of the Internet and its unique features, companies developing their websites should also consider the quality and scope of marketing activities performed on a website. According to the 6C concept, websites to be successful should meet such factors, as [Chaffey et al. 2009]:

- capture – that means attracting to a website as many visitors as possible;
- content – providing interesting and good quality information, so that visitors will like to return to the website in the future;
- community – creating an electronic community of people that will like to meet and interact with each other on the website;
- commerce – websites should support sales of a company. Even if a firm does not sell product via the Internet, still should seek ways of using its website to increase the sales in traditional distribution channels;
- customer orientation – companies should design websites considering the profiles of their target markets;
- credibility – designing websites, firms should find ways of including elements that will increase trust among visitors and ensure potential visitors that the company is credible.

Properly designed and developed website may contribute to the improved brand perception, customer loyalty and increasing sales. Improperly designed website may damage company's image and brand. From the food producers' perspective, it is important that website visitors are highly involved and active in acquiring information [Jiang et al. 2010].

Moreover, the market of food products is competitive. The market model is of monopolistic competition characterized by differentiated products. It is the reason why enterprises should consider their websites as an important tool of achieving competitive advantage and differentiating products on the market.

## MATERIAL AND METHODS

The method used in the research was content analysis. The method is defined as the systematic, objective and quantitative analysis of the content of messages [Neudorf 2012]. Content analysis is a research method for making replicable and valid inferences of data to their context [Krippendorff 2012]. The method is often used in the analysis of mass communications.

The method has been employed in studies of human – computer interaction analysis and website analysis [Kim, Kulijs 2010]. The analysis of websites are more complex comparing to the analysis of the content in traditional media. The complexity of website content analysis follows from such features, as [Neudorf 2012]:

- diversity of many content forms that occur at websites;
- various kinds of commercial activities performed on the Internet (e.g. display advertisement, selling, different forms of setting prices, various kinds of marketplaces);
- various methods of website design;
- great number of websites resulting in difficult sampling.

The research consisted of the following stages:

1. Defining the population. The population was represented by the Polish dairy producers' websites.
2. Initial observation of the websites of dairy cooperatives.
3. Identification of elements of websites that constituted the research variables.
4. Selecting the sample group. The sample of 20 websites was selected randomly from the population of 63 dairy cooperatives that possessed websites according to the list of the Polish dairy cooperatives included on the website [www.mleczarstwopolskie.pl](http://www.mleczarstwopolskie.pl) of The National Dairy Cooperative Association (Krajowy Związek Spółdzielni Mleczarskich).
5. Counting and coding of the websites' elements. The data were represented by values: 1 – element occurring on a website, and 0 – element not occurring.
6. Statistical analysis of the coded data.

The content analysis research was conducted in November and December of the year 2013. The addresses of the analysed websites and the names of the cooperatives are included in the Table 2.

Table 2. The websites selected for the content analysis

No.	Names of the dairy cooperatives	Website addresses
1.	Okręgowa Spółdzielnia Mleczarska w Kowalewie-Dobrzycy	www.osm-kowalew.pl
2.	Okręgowa Spółdzielnia Mleczarska w Głuchowie	www.osmgluchow.com.pl
3.	Spółdzielnia Mleczarska "RYKI" w Rykach	www.smryki.com.pl
4.	Okręgowa Spółdzielnia Mleczarska w Bochni	www.osm-bochnia.com.pl
5.	Okręgowa Spółdzielnia Mleczarska w Łowiczu	www.mleczarnia.lowicz.pl
6.	Okręgowa Spółdzielnia Mleczarska w Stalowej Woli	www.osmstwola.pl
7.	Okręgowa Spółdzielnia Mleczarska w Końskich	www.osm.konskie.pl
8.	Okręgowa Spółdzielnia Mleczarska "MILKAR" w Karczewie	www.milkar.com.pl
9.	Okręgowa Spółdzielnia Mleczarska w Pszczynie	www.osmpszczyzna.pl
10.	Spółdzielnia Mleczarska "LAZUR" w Nowych Skalmierzycach	www.lazur.pl
11.	Okręgowa Spółdzielnia Mleczarska w Krośniewicach	www.osmkrosniewice.com.pl
12.	Okręgowa Spółdzielnia Mleczarska w Piaskach	www.osmpiaski.pl
13.	Spółdzielnia Mleczarska Polmlek "Maćkowy" w Gdańsku	www.mackowy.com.pl
14.	Okręgowa Spółdzielnia Mleczarska w Sierpcu	www.osm-sierpc.pl
15.	Średzka Spółdzielnia Mleczarska "Jana" w Środzie Wielkopolskiej	www.jana.com.pl
16.	"JOGO" Łódzka Spółdzielnia Mleczarska w Łodzi	www.jogo.com.pl
17.	Okręgowa Spółdzielnia Mleczarska w Skierniewicach	www.osmskierniewice.pl
18.	Okręgowa Spółdzielnia Mleczarska w Limanowej	www.osm-limanowa.com.pl
19.	Okręgowa Spółdzielnia Mleczarska w Siedlcach	www.osm.siedlce.pl
20.	Spółdzielnia Mleczarska "Mleczwart" w Wartkowicach	www.mleczwart.com

Source: Own research.

In the research, variables represented distinct elements of analysed websites. The variables were classified into three categories representing marketing functions. The categories were named as: Advertising, PR and communities, and Sale and customer support. The variables are presented in the Table 3.

Table 3. Variables represented by elements counted in the content analysis

Variable category	Variables
Advertising	Catalogue, Photos of products, Advertising slogans, Products described by advertising messaging, Advertising films, Suggestions on product use, Dynamic graphic element in the form of billboard, Information on price promotions, Links in the form of pictures, Information on new products
PR and communities	Logo, About our enterprise, Information on production technologies, Certificates and awards, News, Recipes, Information on a webmaster, Integration with Facebook, English version of a website, Photo gallery, Privacy policy
Sale and customer support	Contact information, Electronic contact form, Location on Google Maps, Online product ordering, Electronic storefront for consumers, Information for business partners, Addresses of shops selling the products for consumers

Source: Own elaboration.

The numbers of variables in each category were: Advertising – 10 variables; PR and communities – 11; Sale and customer support – 7.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The analysed websites were different in terms of the number of elements. The Table 4 presents statistical values calculated for the elements of the websites.

Table 4. Statistical calculations of the elements occurring on the websites

Statistical calculations of the elements of the website			
Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Standard Deviation
7	18	12.05	2.91
% of websites in terms of the number of elements			
70–10 elements	11–14 elements	15–18 elements	
30	50	20	

Source: Own calculations.

The Table 4 shows that the analysed websites were different in terms of the number of marketing elements. The range between the largest and smallest number of elements is 8. The mean value of elements is about 12, and the standard deviation is about 3. The group of the investigated websites on which the scope of elements was relatively great (15–18 elements) was small, with only 20% of the researched population.

Figure 1 shows the frequency of advertising elements occurring on the analysed websites. The most frequently occurring elements were catalogues with photos of products that were provided by every analysed website. Some of the cooperatives (30%) described products in the electronic catalogue using advertising messaging. On three websites occurred suggestions on the possible ways of a products use. Information on the new

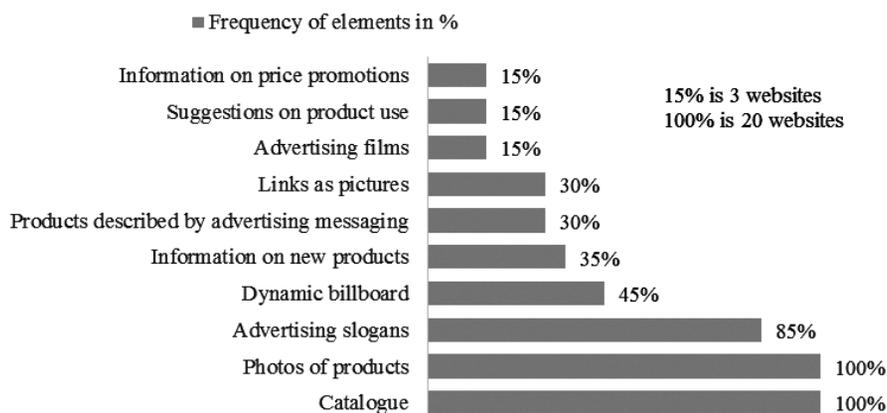


Fig. 1. The frequency of advertising elements on the analysed websites

Source: Own research.

products being introduced by the cooperatives were found on 35% of the websites. Three of the websites included information on the current price promotions.

Very often occurring, were advertising slogans found on 85% of the home pages. The slogans often featured a theme that stressed taste, tradition, accordance with nature. Less frequently stressed were such features, as quality, product use, unique production technology.

Figure 1 also shows that many of the home pages included dynamic graphic elements of a billboard shape. On 30% of the websites were placed links in the graphic form, which is an element that makes users to perceive a website as more user friendly and of more advanced design.

The next category of variables was named PR and communities and was represented by 11 elements. Figure 2 shows a frequency of the PR elements occurring on the analysed websites.

The most frequently used PR elements were Logo and basic information about enterprise, which occurred on every website. Information on certificates and awards won by an enterprise were provided by 75% of the websites. News that were important information connected with a cooperative operation were included by 45% of the websites. Information on the webmaster were included by 40% of the websites. Recipes of which the main ingredients were products offered, were found on 30% of the websites. The researched websites were very rarely integrated with Facebook. Only three websites had connections with the social portal. The information on privacy policy was also rare.

The third category of elements was named Sale and customer support and was represented by 7 elements. As Figure 3 shows it, the more frequently appearing elements of the category were basic contact information, electronic contact form, and location of the cooperative on Google Maps. The less frequently occurring were such elements, as online product ordering for intermediaries, and information for business partners.

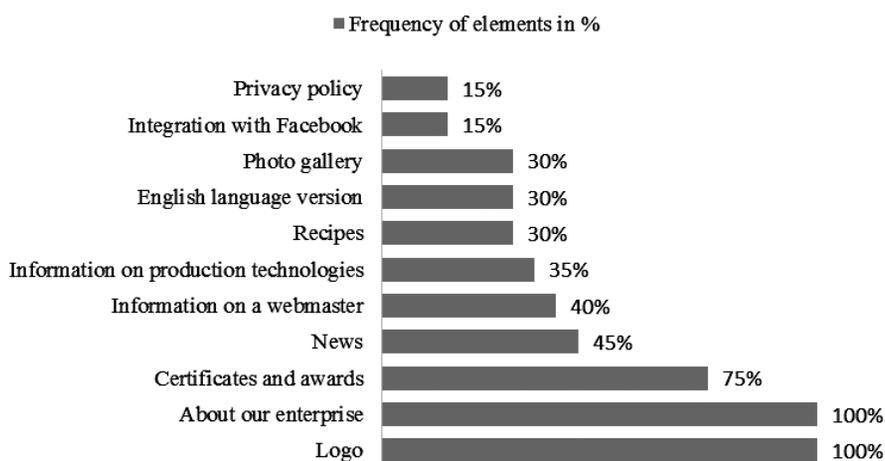


Fig. 2. The frequency of “PR and communities” elements on the analysed websites

Source: Own research.

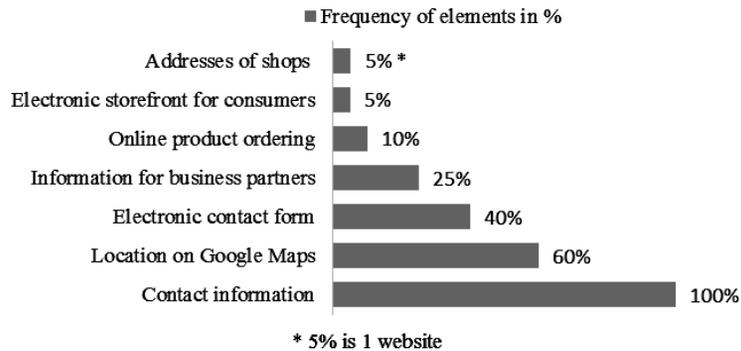


Fig. 3. The frequency of sale elements on the analysed websites

Source: Own research.

There was one case of an electronic storefront present on a website. The electronic storefront was implemented to sell products to consumers. On one website occurred addresses of shops selling the products for consumers.

## CONCLUSIONS

The presented content analysis prove that websites of the Polish dairy cooperatives differ in performing marketing functions. As the research shows, the websites were different in terms of number of elements representing marketing functions.

In the course of the research website elements were grouped into individual categories representing marketing functions. Despite the theoretical difficulties of determining marketing functions performed on a website it was possible to classify the website elements into three categories regarding advertising, PR, and sale functions.

The more differentiating advertising elements, which occurred on the websites were: using advertising messaging in the description of products in catalogues, placing advertising films on a website, suggestions on a product use, using links in the graphic form, information on new products and information on price promotions. The theme of advertising slogans placed on homepages also varied among the websites.

The next important function performed on the analysed websites was PR. The untypical PR elements that differentiated PR function between the websites were: recipes, integration with Facebook, English language version, photo gallery, and privacy policy.

Some of the cooperatives were especially active in using their websites to support sales. The elements that differentiated the sale function between the websites were, such as: information for business partners, information for consumers on shops, electronic store for consumers, and online ordering for intermediaries.

The conducted content analysis prove that the marketing functions on the websites of dairy cooperatives are differentiated between companies. The results show that some cooperatives attach greater importance to their website as a marketing medium and seek opportunities of using it as a tool for performing advertising and PR functions, supporting brand image, and increasing sales.

Comparing the websites according to the 6C concept, it was found that some of the researched cooperatives were especially engaged in the improvement of the content and commerce factors.

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## ZRÓŻNICOWANIE DZIAŁAŃ MARKETINGOWYCH NA STRONACH INTERNETOWYCH POLSKICH SPÓŁDZIELNI MLECZARSKICH

**Strzeszczenie.** W artykule zaprezentowano ocenę działań marketingowych, które polskie spółdzielnie mleczarskie prowadzą na swoich stronach internetowych. Głównym celem badania było określenie, czy działania są zróżnicowane, czy jednolite oraz na czym polegają różnice. W badaniu użyto techniki badawczej zwanej analizą treści. Elementy stron internetowych sklasyfikowano do trzech kategorii reprezentujących funkcje marketingowe.

Wykorzystując metodę analizy treści, przeprowadzono analizę 20 stron internetowych pod względem elementów stron pełniących marketingowe funkcje reklamy, public relations oraz sprzedaży. Badanie pokazuje, że polskie spółdzielnie mleczarskie stosują na swych stronach internetowych zróżnicowane działania marketingowe pod względem liczby oraz funkcji poszczególnych elementów stron. Niektóre z badanych spółdzielni przywiązują większą wagę od innych do wykorzystywania strony internetowej jako narzędzia marketingu.

**Słowa kluczowe:** strona internetowa, promocja, spółdzielnie mleczarskie, analiza treści, marketing internetowy

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