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Introduction

It is our great pleasure to deliver another volume of Research Papers on Asia-Pacific economic issues. Each year we present you multiple points of view on that topic, trying to show how much the processes in Asia & Pacific affect the world economy. After nine years of hosting international scientific conference dealing with that region's affairs, we are still confident that these issues are important not only for the countries of the region, but also for economies worldwide.

This year we have chosen for you 15 articles. All of them were submitted for this year's conference entitled "Asian Economies in the Context of Globalization". Seeing that some authors describe the issues of countrywide importance and others of those having regional or global meaning, we have decided to group them according to the criterion of impact range.

The first chapter – Asian Economies in the Global Context – is a collection of papers on general regionalization or globalization issues. T. Sporek is trying to refresh the view of the globalization processes occurring at the crossroads of economy and politics. M. Bartosik-Purgat is analyzing sources of information about products and services in the light of cross-cultural research. E. Majchrowska is using Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership case to show the importance of mega-regional blocks in global trade. In addition, we decided to add to this part the articles the subject of which is not so general, but it applies to trade relationships of a global nature. This will be the EU-India trade and investment agreement (G. Mazur), Poland-ASEAN agri-food products trade (K. Kita) or anti-dumping procedures against China under WTO rules (J. Skrzypczyńska).

Articles in the second chapter are – as the title implies – embedded in a regional context. P. Pasierbiak deals with trade regionalization in East Asia. S. Bobowski offers an insight into ASEAN-Japan Economic Partnership. A. Kuropka and A.H. Jankowiak analyse the impact of natural disasters on production networks in the region. As the last in this section we have placed the article about Singaporean Competitiveness Model applied in European economies (M. Żmuda). It may be not strictly connected with Asia & Pacific, but its concept is to transfer Asian experience to Europe at the regional level.

The last chapter – Asian Economies in the Local Context – is mostly about domestic matters of Asian countries. You will find there three articles about China (J. Bogołębska writing about Chinese monetary policy, A. Klimek describing cross-border mergers and acquisitions by Chinese state-controlled enterprises, S. Stępień and A. Sapa showing Chinese pork sector), one about Indonesia (*Development of Islamic banking in Indonesia* by I. Sobol) and one about North Korea (M. Kightley applying game theory in prediction of political changes in that state).

We think it is an interesting set of papers you will find valuable in your studies. We also hope that your scientific interests will continue to be associated with Asia and that is why we invite you to the 10th anniversary conference which will be held at the Wrocław University of Economics in November 2017.

We appreciate your time and consideration, as also time and effort of our peer reviewers. We look forward to the further submissions of interesting papers on Asia & Pacific. Thank you!

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**SOCIAL MEDIA AS A SOURCE OF INFORMATION
ABOUT PRODUCTS AND SERVICES IN THE LIGHT
OF CROSS-CULTURAL RESEARCH IN CHINA,
POLAND AND UNITED STATES**

**MEDIA SPOŁECZNOŚCIOWE
JAKO ŹRÓDŁO INFORMACJI O PRODUKTACH
I USŁUGACH W ŚWIETLE BADAŃ
MIĘDZYKULTUROWYCH W CHINACH, POLSCE
I STANACH ZJEDNOCZONYCH**

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Summary: Social media (SM) are a valuable source of information in various areas. One of them is receiving and sharing information about products and services from and with friends who are social media users. The main goal of this article is to identify the types of products and services toward which SM users show particular customer behaviours. The paper is both theoretical and empirical. The literature study has been complemented with the results of the empirical studies that were conducted by the author in foreign markets. The empirical analysis focuses on three markets, that is China, Poland and the United States. The results of the studies demonstrate that in the Chinese group the respondents gather information in SM, and share their opinions with other SM users particularly on foreign language courses. On the other hand, in the Polish group tangible assets include clothing and films, while in terms of services the Polish respondents concentrate on hotels, restaurants and cultural events. As far as the American respondents are concerned, the attention is paid to household goods, and, similarly to the Polish group, hotels, restaurants and cultural events.

Keywords: social media, consumer behaviour, products and services categories, China, Poland, United States.

Streszczenie: Media społecznościowe stanowią cenne źródło informacji w wielu zakresach. Jednym z nich jest zdobywanie i przekazywanie informacji o produktach i usługach od i wśród grona znajomych, użytkowników mediów społecznościowych. Głównym celem artykułu jest identyfikacja rodzajów produktów i usług, w stosunku do których użytkownicy SM wykazują określone zachowania konsumenckie. Opracowanie ma charakter teoretyczno-empiryczny, studia literaturowe zostały uzupełnione o wyniki badań empirycznych, które autorka prowadziła na rynkach zagranicznych. Analiza empiryczna dotyczy Chin, Polski oraz

Stanów Zjednoczonych. Rezultaty badań pokazują, że w grupie chińskiej respondenci gromadzą informacje w SM i dzielą się swoimi opiniami z innymi użytkownikami szczególnie w odniesieniu do kursów językowych. Z kolei w grupie polskiej wśród produktów są to ubrania oraz filmy, a wśród usług są to usługi hotelarskie, restauracyjne, a także wydarzenia kulturalne. Wśród respondentów amerykańskich na szczególne podkreślenie zasługują produkty gospodarstwa domowego i, podobnie jak w grupie polskiej, usługi hotelarskie, restauracyjne oraz wydarzenia kulturalne.

Słowa kluczowe: media społecznościowe, zachowanie konsumentów, kategorie produktów i usług, Chiny, Polska, Stany Zjednoczone.

1. Introduction

The growth of the Internet and new technologies has changed and is constantly changing peoples' lives all over the world. Nowadays, it is not only a valuable source of information about various events or areas of knowledge. It is a "place" where people meet, talk, work, study, do shopping, entertain and perform many other activities that have been moved from the offline world to the online reality.

A particular event that took place in the development of the Internet and its instruments was the appearance of social media (SM). They not only enable communication with people from other parts of the world, the development of education or professional career, but are also a valuable source of information in various areas. One of them is receiving and sharing information about products and services from and with friends who are social media users. SM is a mechanism that enables users to communicate with a large number of people all over the world [Williams et al. 2012]. Such use of SM stems from their particularity and definition where A.M. Kaplan and M. Haenlein [2010] call SM a set of applications technically and ideologically based on the foundations of Web 2.0 that make it possible to create and exchange content among their users. The term SM comes from their nature of connecting people into groups, exchanging information about both private and professional lives. It is also a valuable source of information about products and services available in a particular market.

The main goal of this article is to identify the types of products and services towards which SM users show particular customer behaviours. The paper is both theoretical and empirical. The literature research in the discussed area has been complemented with the results of the empirical studies that were conducted by the author in foreign markets. The empirical analysis focuses on three chosen and culturally diversified markets, that is, China, Poland and the United States.

2. Literature review and hypotheses development

Consumer behaviour is a process consisting of subsequent activities which aim at choosing the best variant of a product (or service), buying it and then consuming

[Foxall, Goldsmith 1998, p. 41]. Sometimes one more post-consumption stage is distinguished where the information about e.g. the quality of a particular product or service is included [Bartosik-Purgat 2011]. In this sense consumer behaviour is related to three types of reaction, that is, communication, purchase and consumption [Hoyer, MacInnis 2004]. SM play a significant role in terms of the reaction related to communication and at two stages in the consumption process. First of all, they are used as a source of information in order to make a decision that is a solution to a problem of a specific purchasing need [Park, Kim 2003]. Consumers most often look for information in various sources in order to evaluate the existing variants of a product or service before buying it [Peter, Olson 2004]. Nowadays, one of such sources are SM. Secondly, a stage in consumer behaviour where these media are often used is the post-consumption stage as consumers often share their experience of using a product they have bought (both positive and negative ones).

The information shared in SM is the online word of mouth. On the other hand, the studies prove that WOM – *word of mouth* – is very important when making consumer decisions. Its strength is sometimes greater than a high-cost advertising campaign. Consumers believe more other consumers [Christodoulides et al. 2013] who are on the same side than information conveyed by producers by means of marketing tools, e.g. as advertising messages [Chen et al. 2011]. Social media play a significant role in creating an image or forming an opinion on particular products and companies on the Internet [Lee et al. 2011]. Such activities are called e-WOM where the today's platform for conveying information are SM [Chatterjee 2011; Wallace et al. 2014]. Moreover, international access to many SM makes it possible to gather and exchange information on products and services on a global scale [Williams et al. 2012].

Using social media in consumer behaviours depends on the type of product (or service) purchased by a consumer who is at the same time a social media user. While referring to the new marketing approach and differentiating goods from services (service dominant logic of marketing – SDL) these two categories were separated.

People do not search for information online about all products and services. There are some groups and categories of products and services which are particularly interesting for the users of the Internet, including SM, both in terms of searching for information as well as online shopping. In the group of goods one of the top categories are clothing and shoes as well as broadly defined fashion [Hansen, Jensen 2009]. They are more often more expensive products and buying them requires spending larger sums of money. Therefore, the Internet seems to be a good source of gathering information about particular categories of products or particular brands. As far as FMCG are concerned consumers make purchase decisions fast and do not search for information about them too long. Similar results were presented in the study conducted by one of the largest statistics portals Statista, where the most popular types of products bought by the users of Pinterest were researched. The most often purchased types of products were clothing, bags, jewellery and shoes [Statista.com 2012].

Taking into account the previous research accomplishments of other authors within the discussed field, the following hypothesis has been formulated:

H1a. *Product which the respondents search for the information about to the greatest extent and share it in social media is fashion.*

Similarly to goods, not all services are related to the same frequency of using SM as sources of information. Their particular use is visible in situations when we are to make a decision about using a service which will take place far from the place where we live, which makes it more difficult to gather information in a traditional way (e.g. WOM), e.g. touristic services. M.L. Kasavana et al. [2010] claim that two thirds of adult tourists watch various video clips online about tourist spots, about 40% of people read blogs, browse photographs and use virtual tours offered by particular hotels. These tools are very important sources of information for tourists who have not visited the place before. Commentaries posted on Internet forums or in Internet communities, where information about a hotel as well as rating scores come from the people using a particular establishment are very valuable [Schmidt et al. 2008; Kleinrichert et al. 2012]. More and more places offering touristic services, e.g. restaurants, hotels, hostels as well as privately owned apartments strive for a place in different media used by their potential customers [Inversini, Masiero 2014]. However, the significance of SM in the research by S.O. Lagrosen and K. Grunde [2014] on using them by local customers in marketing activities, illustrated with an example of Swedish wellness establishments, is not unambiguous in this type of places. It can be related to the previous statements on the greater significance of social media in services offered in a large geographical distance; thus, the popularity of rating scores on booking.com or www.tripadvisor.com. Taking into account the aforementioned information and the previous research accomplishments of other authors within the discussed field, the following hypothesis has been formulated:

H1b. *Services which the respondents search for the information about to the greatest extent and share it in social media are touristic services (hotels and restaurants).*

3. Methodology

Empirical research on the importance of SM in consumer behaviour in different international markets was conducted with the use of a quantitative research method such as paper and electronic inquiry forms (CAWI), filled out by the respondents themselves [Craig, Douglas 2006]. The applied measuring tool was a questionnaire which is the original instrument prepared for the purpose of the described research. The only element differentiating the measuring instrument in all markets was the language [Malhotra et al. 1996; Craig, Douglas 2006]. In order to collect more filled out questionnaires the language used in Poland was Polish, in China Chinese and in the USA English. The original language of the questionnaire was Polish. It was later translated into English and Chinese using a forward and backward translation method.

Empirical research was conducted in 2015 and 2016 among 295 respondents from China, 296 from Poland, and 260 from the United States. The respondents were selected using one of the nonprobability sampling methods, i.e. purposive sampling. In each market there were designated people responsible for providing the respondents with questionnaires, either in a paper or electronic version.

The consequences stemming from the applied sampling method are connected with the interpretation of the obtained results which, in the discussed case, should not be fully generalized for the population of the researched countries and SM users.

4. Results and data analysis

4.1. Respondents' profile

The surveyed respondents in each country were people who agreed to participate and were willing to express themselves on how they use SM. The study was attended by people of all ages and three age groups were distinguished, i.e. 15–20, 21–30, and 31 or more (Table 1). In China and Poland the respondents within 21–30 age group predominated. On the other hand, in the United States most participants belonged to the age group of 15–20. Considering the number of participants within the age ranges it can be stated that in the studied cultural groups the representatives of the so-called Generation Y are prevalent.

Table 1. Respondents' profile (%)

| Categories | Characteristics | China | Poland | United States |
|------------|-------------------|-------|--------|---------------|
| Gender | | | | |
| | women | 68.1 | 70.9 | 56.5 |
| | men | 31.2 | 27.7 | 43.1 |
| | n.d. | 0.7 | 1.3 | 0.4 |
| Age | | | | |
| | 15–20 years | 14.2 | 35.5 | 79.6 |
| | 21–30 years | 66.4 | 63.5 | 16.9 |
| | 31 years and more | 19 | 0.7 | 3.5 |

n.d. – no data.

Source: own research.

Taking into account the diversity of the study group in terms of gender it should be emphasized that the biggest advantage of women was observed in two groups, Chinese (68.1%) and Polish (70.9%), where their structure in terms of gender is very similar. In the United States there were almost equal proportions of both genders.

4.2. Data analysis

In order to identify consumer behaviours the respondents were asked to determine their frequency by indicating a category – *very often, often, from time to time, rarely, very rarely, never* – for statements describing a behaviour, firstly at the stage of gathering information and secondly, at the post-consumption stage. The following discussion focuses only on the selected and the most common aspects regarding the consumer behaviour (CB), which were identified during the first and trial measurement. These are: searching for information about products and services (CB1), following advice of friends on buying a product or using SM (CB2), recommending various products, which according to a particular person are worth it, to other users of SM (CB3), and informing other potential buyers if the purchased product has turned out to be of very low quality (CB4). On the other hand, in order to identify the correlation between a type of a product/service and the indicated consumer behaviours in SM Spearman's correlation indicators were used, which made it possible to determine the existence/lack of interdependency between the researched variables. The following categories of products and services were assessed: mobile phones (P1); computers/laptops, tablets, iPads (P2); radio and TV sets (P3); household goods (P4); cars (P5); cosmetics (P6); fashion – clothes and shoes (P7); films (P8); services: events/cultural offers – cinema tickets, theatre, concerts, galleries, etc. (S1); hotels/tourist offices (S2); language courses (S3); restaurants (S4).

The respondents were asked to indicate the frequency of using SM. They could choose from a list of the most popular media in particular markets [Kemp 2015, 2016]. Table 2 presents the obtained results that are the percentage of users in particular groups using SM at least once a day. Both in Poland and the United States the most popular website is Facebook which is used by nearly 90% of the respondents in particular groups. The second most often used website in terms of the number of daily users in these two countries is YouTube. Significant differences were noted in relation to the frequency of using Twitter which in the American group has 53.5% of daily users, while in the Polish one only 3.04%. The important and interesting results differentiating these two groups were obtained in the case of Instagram which in the American group is used daily by 33.8% of the respondents, whereas in the Polish group only a few percent of indications related to a non-daily use of this service were observed.

In the Chinese group the situation is slightly different as the Chinese respondents do not have access to international media. In China the most popular website is Qzone which due to its availability is called the Chinese equivalent of Facebook. Many Chinese respondents also use Weibo which, on the other hand, is recognized as the equivalent of Twitter. Similarly, Youku is a Chinese service that offers similar functionality as YouTube. Comparing the results in the Chinese group to the ones obtained in the American one it can be stated that they are divergent. The most

popular SM identified in both groups have very similar functions, although they are not identical.

Table 2. The most popular SM – % of the respondents using a particular SM at least once a day

| China | | Poland | | United States | |
|-----------|-------|-----------|-------|---------------|------|
| Qzone | 49.15 | Facebook | 89.8 | Facebook | 85 |
| Weibo | 44.8 | Twitter | 3.04 | Twitter | 53.5 |
| YouTube | 8.5 | YouTube | 69.6 | YouTube | 55 |
| Youku | 27.5 | Wikipedia | 21.96 | Wikipedia | 16.5 |
| Wikipedia | 13.5 | LinkedIn | 1.7 | LinkedIn | 1.15 |
| RenRen | 9.5 | Nk.pl | 1.35 | Groupon | 1.53 |
| Facebook | 8.8 | Groupon | 2.7 | Instagram | 33.8 |
| Twitter | 1.7 | | | | |

Source: own research.

In order to present the interdependencies between a type of a product and a particular consumer behaviour in SM Spearman's correlations were used. Spearman's correlation coefficients presented in Table 3 are significant at $p < 0.05$. It needs to be emphasized that all the distinguished relations are statistically significant and show a positive value of Spearman's correlation. However, while analysing the obtained results the differences between the studied countries in relation to the strength of relations (correlations) between the types of products/services (P1, ..., P8; S1, ..., S4) and consumer behaviours in SM (CB1, ..., CB4) can be observed.

In the Chinese group the strongest correlations were obtained between CB2 and P6 as well as CB4 and P8. Referring to a type of product/service most correlations > 0.3 (medium correlation) with reference to particular consumer behaviours were obtained in language courses (S3), restaurants (S4), cars (P5) and films (P8). On the other hand, taking into account particular behaviours in SM it needs to be emphasized that the Chinese respondents to the greatest extent: look for information in SM (CB1) about products from the P2 category and S3 services; seek for advice from friends (CB2) about buying P5, P6, P8, S3 and S4 products, recommend good quality products (CB3) and services from the P3, P5, S3, S4 categories to others and provide information if the purchased product turns out to be of poor quality (CB4) in the case of P1, P8, S1, S2, S3. Referring to the hypotheses that have been formulated earlier it needs to be emphasized that they are not valid in the Chinese group. Despite the correlation between the types of products such as clothes and shoes (P7), touristic services (S2, S4) and consumer behaviours (CB1, CB2, CB3, CB4) in most cases their strength was established at the weak level < 0.3 . The strongest correlations were obtained with reference to language courses. Therefore, it can be stated that in SM the Chinese respondents to the greatest extent look for information about language teaching services, and share it with friends.

Table 3. Spearman's rank correlations between the types of products/services and consumer behaviours in SM*

| | P1 | P2 | P3 | P4 | P5 | P6 | P7 | P8 | S1 | S2 | S3 | S4 |
|---------------|-------|-------|-------|-------|-------|-------|-------|-------|-------|-------|-------|-------|
| China | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| CB1 | 0.28 | 0.311 | 0.214 | 0.239 | 0.24 | 0.25 | 0.201 | 0.269 | 0.24 | 0.221 | 0.361 | 0.296 |
| CB2 | 0.255 | 0.236 | 0.25 | 0.171 | 0.308 | 0.372 | 0.206 | 0.305 | 0.277 | 0.277 | 0.355 | 0.348 |
| CB3 | 0.224 | 0.249 | 0.344 | 0.231 | 0.313 | 0.222 | 0.254 | 0.211 | 0.199 | 0.236 | 0.266 | 0.256 |
| CB4 | 0.31 | 0.256 | 0.226 | 0.19 | 0.271 | 0.275 | 0.229 | 0.372 | 0.349 | 0.338 | 0.352 | 0.299 |
| Poland | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| CB1 | 0.214 | 0.268 | 0.248 | 0.2 | 0.191 | 0.4 | 0.422 | 0.472 | 0.417 | 0.388 | 0.362 | 0.456 |
| CB2 | 0.189 | 0.257 | 0.285 | 0.233 | 0.233 | 0.275 | 0.361 | 0.436 | 0.331 | 0.33 | 0.292 | 0.445 |
| CB3 | 0.233 | 0.284 | 0.313 | 0.271 | 0.225 | 0.223 | 0.233 | 0.283 | 0.269 | 0.287 | 0.294 | 0.329 |
| CB4 | 0.36 | 0.426 | 0.39 | 0.353 | 0.281 | 0.27 | 0.277 | 0.29 | 0.233 | 0.354 | 0.368 | 0.344 |
| United States | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| CB1 | 0.216 | 0.285 | 0.334 | 0.354 | 0.273 | 0.311 | 0.444 | 0.257 | 0.378 | 0.34 | 0.14 | 0.245 |
| CB2 | 0.236 | 0.262 | 0.311 | 0.42 | 0.329 | 0.224 | 0.277 | 0.29 | 0.388 | 0.358 | 0.279 | 0.371 |
| CB3 | 0.215 | 0.232 | 0.257 | 0.342 | 0.258 | 0.18 | 0.288 | 0.422 | 0.332 | 0.398 | 0.298 | 0.324 |
| CB4 | 0.124 | 0.144 | 0.23 | 0.406 | 0.242 | 0.176 | 0.205 | 0.352 | 0.342 | 0.362 | 0.31 | 0.28 |

* Correlation coefficients are significant at $p < 0.05$.

Source: own research.

Spearman's correlation coefficients in the Polish group indicate the existence of many relations with medium strength (> 0.3). Among the analysed types of services the greatest number of correlations with medium strength (> 0.3) were obtained with reference to restaurant (S4) and hotel (S2) services. Therefore it can be stated that H1b has been validated in the Polish group. On the other hand, among tangible assets the greatest number of correlations with medium strength (> 0.3) were observed in the case of films (P8), fashion products (P7) and radio and TV (P3). Therefore, it can be concluded that in the Polish group H1a stating that the information users search for to the greatest extent through SM is about fashion has been validated. Taking into account particular behaviours in SM it needs to be emphasized that the Polish respondents to the greatest extent: look for information by means of SM (CB1) in relation to P6, P7, P8, as well as S1, S2, S4, S4; seek for advice from friends in SM (CB2) in relation to P7 and P8 as well as S1, S2 and S4; recommend good quality products and services through SM in the case of P3, P8 and S2, S3, S4, and warn against poor quality products and services (CB4) in relation to P1, P2, P3, P4, S2, S3, S4.

In the American group the greatest number of correlations with medium strength (> 0.3) between the types of products and consumer behaviours in SM were observed in the case of household goods (P4), cultural events (S1) and hotel and touristic

services (S2). Referring to the hypotheses that were formulated earlier it needs to be stated that the H1a have not been validated in the American group, while H1b have been confirmed. Although in the case of fashion products (P7) mentioned in H1a statistically significant Spearman's correlation indicators (R) with positive value were obtained, only in the case of CB1 the strength of this relation is at the > 0.3 level. Taking into account particular behaviours in SM it needs to be emphasized that the American respondents to the largest extent: look for information by means of SM (CB1) in relation to P3, P4, P6, P7 and S1, S2; seek for advice from friends in SM about P3, P4, P5 as well as S1, S2 and S4; recommend good quality products and services from the P4, P8 and S1, S2, S4 categories to other users; and warn against buying bad quality products from P4, P8 and S1, S2, S3 categories.

5. Conclusions and implications

The obtained results provide interesting information on the types of products in particular countries SM users pay attention to. In the Chinese group the respondents gather information and share their opinions with other SM users particularly in relation to language courses. On the other hand, in the Polish group among tangible assets there are clothes and films, while among services hotels and restaurants as well as cultural events. In the American group the respondents focus on household goods as well as hotel and restaurant services and cultural events. In other words, the distinguished categories of products and services are subject to specific behaviours of consumers using SM.

These results have a significant application value. The knowledge about what types of products and services SM users pay special attention to can be extremely important for companies (producing particular goods and offering services) that want to use SM in marketing communication in the chosen foreign markets.

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