

GROUPS ON FACEBOOK AS A MARKETING TOOL

GRUPY NA FACEBOOKU JAKO NARZĘDZIE MARKETINGOWE

Iwona Lupa-Wójcik, Ph.D.

Pedagogical University of Krakow, Faculty of Social Sciences, Institute of Law, Administration and Economics,
Podchorążych Street 2, 30-084 Krakow, Poland
iwona.lupa@wp.pl • ORCID: 0000-0003-1673-7077

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ABSTRACT

The aim of the article was to determine the use of Facebook groups as a marketing tool. The author conducted the research using a survey. To distribute the questionnaire author used a Facebook ad tool targeted at Polish women, who are planning a wedding or are shortly after it. Based on the example of the wedding industry, it was found that the content on these types of groups has large reach and generate high involvement of their participants. Members of Facebook wedding groups often take into account the recommendations they find on these groups when making wedding-related purchasing decisions. Companies often take advantage of this by using word of mouth marketing or direct sales (promotion). They can also create their own Facebook groups gathering the community around interests related to their activities. There is currently insufficient research on the possibilities of using Facebook groups as marketing tools. The article indicates various ways of using them to achieve marketing goals.

Key words: Facebook, Facebook groups, Facebook marketing, social media, social media marketing, e-marketing, wedding industry

ABSTRAKT

Celem artykułu było określenie możliwości wykorzystania grup na Facebooku jako narzędzia marketingowego. Do realizacji celów badawczych autor zastosował ankietę. Kwestionariusz ankiety został skierowany do kobiet w Polsce planujących ślub lub tych, które są krótko po ślubie. Do jego dystrybucji wykorzystano reklamę na Facebooku. Na przykładzie branży ślubnej stwierdzono, że treści publikowane w tego rodzaju grupach mają duży zasięg i generują relatywnie duże zaangażowanie ich uczestników. Członkowie grup ślubnych na Facebooku w swoich decyzjach zakupowych dotyczących planowanego ślubu często biorą pod uwagę rekomendacje, które znajdują w tych grupach. Firmy często to wykorzystują, stosując marketing szeptany w tych grupach lub promocję bezpośrednią. Mogą również tworzyć własne grupy na Facebooku, skupiające społeczność wokół zainteresowań związanych z ich działalnością.

Słowa kluczowe: branża ślubna, Facebook, Facebook marketing, grupy na Facebooku, media społecznościowe, social media marketing, e-marketing

JEL: : M00, M30, M31

Introduction

Currently social media play a key role in businesses marketing communications. Companies use them to achieve various communication goals, mainly of a long-term nature, such as building customer loyalty and satisfaction, maintaining constant and direct contact with clients, constantly informing them about a change in the offer, creating a positive image of the company or implementing the concept of socially responsible marketing (see Smith, Wollan & Zhou, 2011; Mergel, 2013; Klososky 2011; Thomas & Barlow, 2011).

This is because these communication channels are gaining popularity around the world. As of January 2019, 3.4 billion people in the world had active social media accounts, representing 45% of the world's population. Compared to the same period of the previous year, this number increased by 288 million (9% increase). The largest number of users in the world are on Facebook (2,271 millions of users) (Global Digital Report, 2019). In August 2019, more than 16 million Polish users were registered on this social network (i.e. 42.3% of the total population), of which 53.5% were women and 46.5% were men. Officially, people who are at least 13 years old can be registered on Facebook. In Poland, the largest group consists of people aged 25–34 (28.6%; including women — 14.9% and men — 13.7%), the second group consists of people aged 35–44 (21.8%; women — 11.8%, men — 10%), third group — people aged 18–24 (20.5%; women — 10%, men — 10.6%), fourth — people in ages 45–54 (11%; women — 6.2%, men — 4.8%) (NapoleonCat, 2019). All generations have their representatives on Facebook. This is a great business potential for companies (and other organizations) that increasingly use Facebook in their marketing activities to achieve their goals. These types of actions can be referred to as Facebook marketing.

There are many studies on Facebook marketing (Carter, Levy & Levy, 2012; Dunay & Krueger, 2009; Hansson, Wrangmo & Solberg Soilen, 2013; Haydon, Dunay & Krueger, 2012; Holzner, 2008; Levy, 2010; Ramsaran-Fowdar & Fowdar 2013; Treadaway & Smith, 2012; Zarrella & Zarrella, 2010). Most of them are practical guides on how to conduct marketing on Facebook. However, there is a lack of in-depth research on how to use Facebook's potential in marketing activities. Currently, Facebook (as well as other social platforms) provides many marketing tools. These include primarily paid advertising.

In Poland, the share of expenditure spent on advertising in social media within the expenditure dedicated to online advertising was 16.7% in 2018. It was an increase of 22% compared to the previous year. Social media ads industry is growing extremely dynamically, it is one of the fastest growing sectors of online advertising (IAB Polska, 2018). According to the Stelzner (2019) marketing specialists most often regularly use the Facebook platform (72%), as well as Instagram (38%) for social media ads. In the B2C

sector, Facebook ads (76% B2C vs. 65% B2B) and Instagram (43% B2C vs. 30% B2B) are more often used. In the B2B sector, advertising on LinkedIn is more popular (24% B2B vs. 9% B2C) (Ibid). Facebook is the world's second major global digital ad seller. As of February 2019, its net digital ad revenue was USD 67.37 billion. Only Google was ahead of it (USD 103.73 billion) (eMarketer, 2019).

Running an advertising campaign on Facebook is conditioned by having one's own fanpage, which consists in setting up an official organization profile on this social network, publishing various types of content on it by administrators and other users, and gathering community in the form of page likes and page followings. This is the main form of marketing activity on Facebook and the most popular by far. However, it has some limitations, mainly related to the fact that published posts have limited organic reach (i.e. unpaid). This means that the content provided by the organization on its Facebook page reaches only a small percentage of its fans. To increase the reach, companies need to purchase an ad.

Another marketing tool on Facebook are groups. They are relatively little explored by researchers (Holzner, 2008; Levy, 2010; Xia, 2009). According to Levy (2010, pp. 60–61) "Facebook Group" is "a real-life interest group to declare an affiliation or association with people and things", where one can create "a community of people and friends to promote, share and discuss relevant topics" (Ibid). Each Facebook user can set up their own group or groups. This also applies to organizations. Groups can be associated with a fanpage. Their main advantage is that they have relatively large organic reach. One can say that they are in original form of social media, they provoke discussions and content exchange. Therefore they have the potential to boost engagement among users.

Moreover, one can set up three different types of groups on Facebook: open groups (anyone can join them), closed groups (user has to request to join the group and it must be approved by the administrator) and secret groups (user must be invited into the group and the group is not shown in any searches) (Levy, 2010, p. 61). In result, groups can be used for various marketing purposes, e.g. they can be dedicated to anyone interested in a given topic, or only for an elite group, e.g. customers or employees.

Groups on Facebook usually have their own regulations, defining e.g. rules for publishing posts, rules for marking them (e.g. an order to use certain hashtags), or e.g. rules for communication (e.g. prohibiting the use of invectives). Failure to comply with the regulations may result in the user being thrown out of the group by the administrator. It is worth noting that sometimes post moderation takes place before the content is published on the group's page (first the administrator must approve it before it is published).

Each group has its own specific purpose. On the example of the wedding industry, they can be:

- groups dedicated to specific issues (e.g. inspiration for future brides),
- groups of members from specific locations (e.g. bringing together future brides from a given location, city, etc.),
- groups of "advertising column", where everyone can place their own advertisement (for example, "I will give ..." / "I will exchange ..." / "I offer ..." / "I search ...", etc.),
- strictly sales groups — these are groups with additional options, such as: price (marked in green with the possibility of raising and lowering it), name of the sold product, the ability to place its photos, the ability to set the location — the place of receipt, etc.

All these features of Facebook groups make them a very effective marketing tool which can be used in various ways.

In conclusion, Facebook provides many marketing tools for companies and other organizations. Activity on this social network does not have to be limited to running a fanpage and buying ads. Groups that are characterized by relatively larger organic reach than fanpage and often also greater audience involvement provide more opportunities.

Methodology

The aim of the research is to determine the use of Facebook groups as a marketing tool on the example of wedding industry as well as to investigate the forms of using Facebook groups in marketing.

The following research problems are adopted:

1. What is the marketing potential of Facebook groups on the example of wedding industry.
 - a. How often do posts from Facebook wedding groups reach respondents?
 - b. To what extent are the respondents involved in the content published on Facebook wedding groups?
 - c. What is the role of the Facebook wedding groups in making purchasing decisions related to the wedding according to respondents?
 - d. What is the activity of the wedding industry companies on Facebook wedding groups in the opinion of respondents?
2. What are the forms of using Facebook groups in marketing?

As a research method author used survey. The survey questionnaire consisted of 16 questions regarding the attitude of respondents to the role of the wedding group on Facebook in making purchase decisions related to the wedding. In addition, the questionnaire contained 5 metrics questions about age, education, marital status, the period from which the respondents are members of the Facebook wedding group and when their wedding is to take place. Author used purposive sampling. To distribute the questionnaire was used a Facebook ad tool targeted at Polish women, who are planning a wedding or are shortly after it. The questionnaire could only be completed by people who are members of Facebook wedding groups.

The research sample included 175 people. Respondents were women (100%). They were mainly aged 24–27 (60%). Every fourth surveyed person was at the age of 20–23 (25.7%). Other researched people were 28–31 (11.4%) and 32–35 (2.9%) years old. Half of the respondents (54.3%) have higher education and 40% have secondary education. Other people have

vocational education (5.7%). Most respondents are unmarried (62.9%). Every third surveyed person is a married woman (37.1%). Most respondents have been a member of the wedding group on Facebook for a long time: 28.6% from 1–2 years, 22.9% from 6 to 12 months, 14.3% from 4 to 6 months, and 11.4% — over 2 years. Only 14.3% of respondents are members of a wedding group on Facebook for 1 to 3 months, and 8.6% — less than a month.

The research was carried out in September 2019.

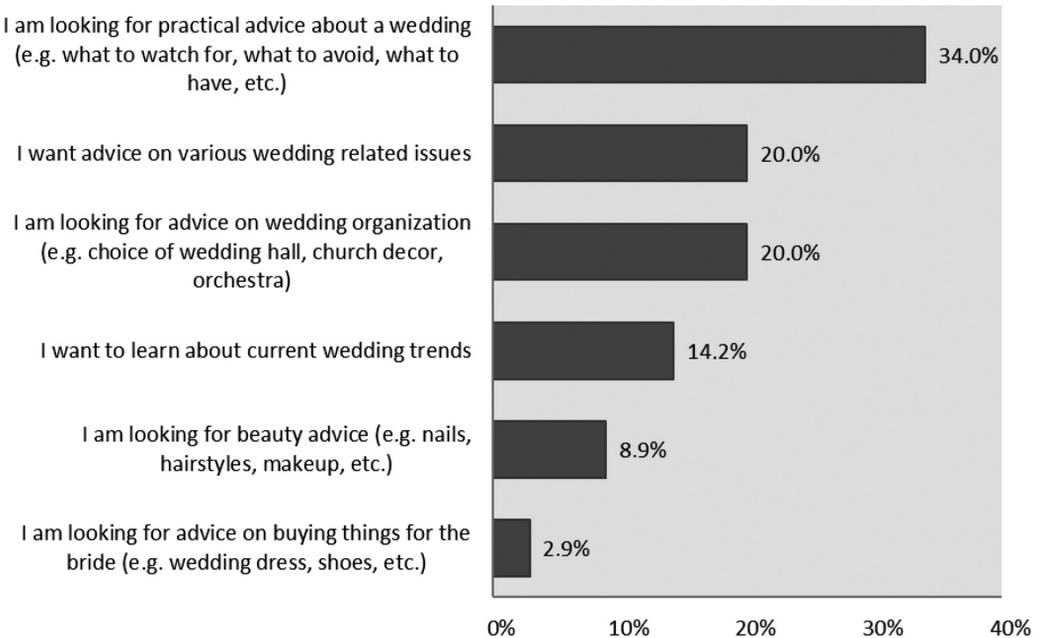
Findings

The aim of the research was among others to determine the use of Facebook groups as a marketing tool using the case study of the wedding industry. To achieve it, respondents were asked about various aspects of their membership in the Facebook wedding groups. The results are shown below.

First, a question was asked about the reason why respondents joined the wedding groups on Facebook. It turns out that many of them are looking for general practical advice on how to organize a wedding (e.g. what to avoid, what to buy, etc.) (34%), but also specific advice, e.g. what wedding hall to choose, what DJ or a band is worth choosing, etc. (20%). Many group members want to advise others on the various problems they face when organizing a wedding (20%), and become familiar with the current wedding trends (14%) (Figure 1). This already shows the huge marketing potential of Facebook groups.

It is also important that posts published on wedding groups reach respondents up to several times a day (82%). This proves that respondents are very much involved and interested in the content posted on this type of group, because the more often the user browses and is interested in the content in a given group (clicks on it, likes, comments, shares, etc.), the more often the posts from this group appear on his Facebook News Feed (this is due to the principle of Facebook algorithms). This is another indicator of the great marketing potential of Facebook groups.

Figure 1. Reasons for joining a wedding group on Facebook according to the respondents



Source: own elaboration.

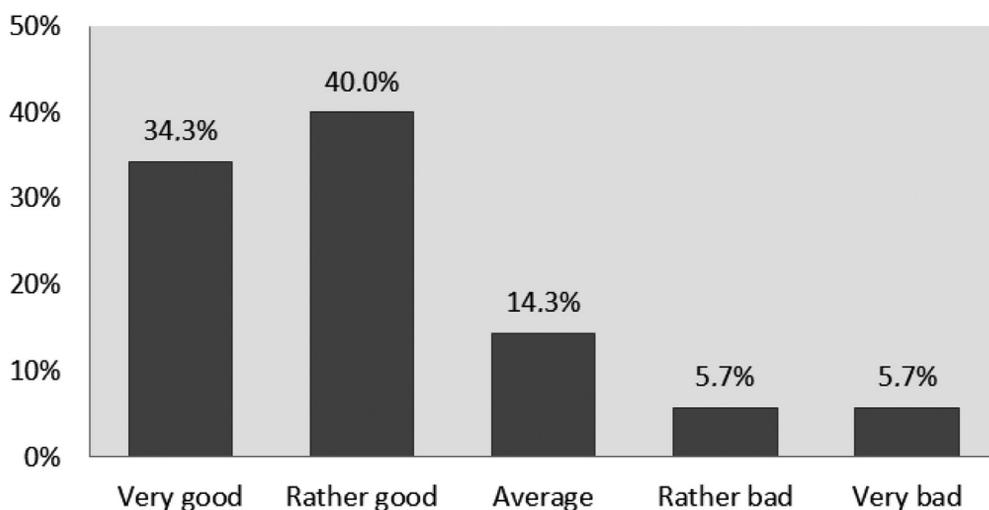
Users only sometimes (26%) or rarely (very rarely — 26%, rather rarely 17%) comment on posts published on the Facebook wedding groups they follow. Very rarely (34%) they also publish their own content on such groups. This shows that the vast majority of Facebook wedding groups are passive members in terms of commenting and publishing their own content. It is rather in line with the general trends of communication in social media (most of us rather remain passive readers).

As mentioned, respondents often expect specific help regarding the organization of the wedding. It turns out that 48.6% of them often receive such help. This shows that Facebook wedding groups can play a very important role in brides' preparations for the wedding. Future married

women find there a lot of valuable information that they use in practice. Often, these can be suggestions for purchasing specific products or services.

Research shows that the vast majority of respondents (74.3%) assess the usefulness of a Facebook wedding group in organizing a wedding very well (Figure 2).

Figure 2. Assessment of the usefulness of the Facebook wedding groups in organizing the wedding by respondents



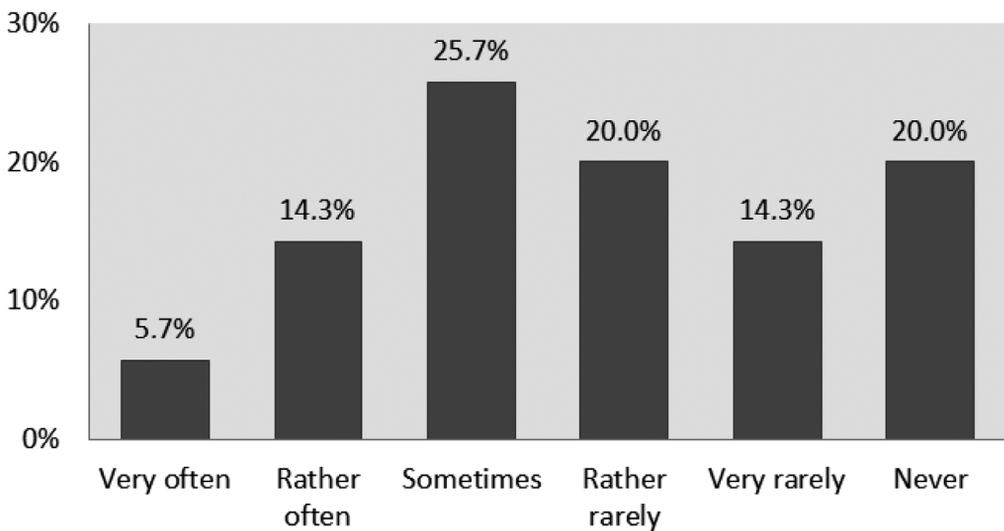
Source: own elaboration.

The research also aimed at determining the role of Facebook wedding groups in making purchasing decisions related to the wedding. Admittedly, the respondents themselves rarely recommend products or services of a specific company on the Facebook wedding group (20% — rather rare, 17% — sometimes, 17% — very rare). On the other hand, they themselves are often faced with recommendations of someone's product or services of a company on the Facebook wedding group (37% — very often, 37% — rather often). Therefore, since respondents are unlikely to recommend products or services to other people and they are

often exposed to them at wedding groups on Facebook, it can probably be a sign of high activity of companies that use word-of-mouth marketing and thus try to encourage group participants to buy their products or services.

Sometimes someone on a Facebook wedding group recommends to respondents some products or services of a company related to the wedding (26% — sometimes, 20% — rather rare) (see Figure 3) and respondents sometimes buy them. Only 23% of respondents said that they never use such recommendations. This shows how important Facebook groups marketing activities can be for companies.

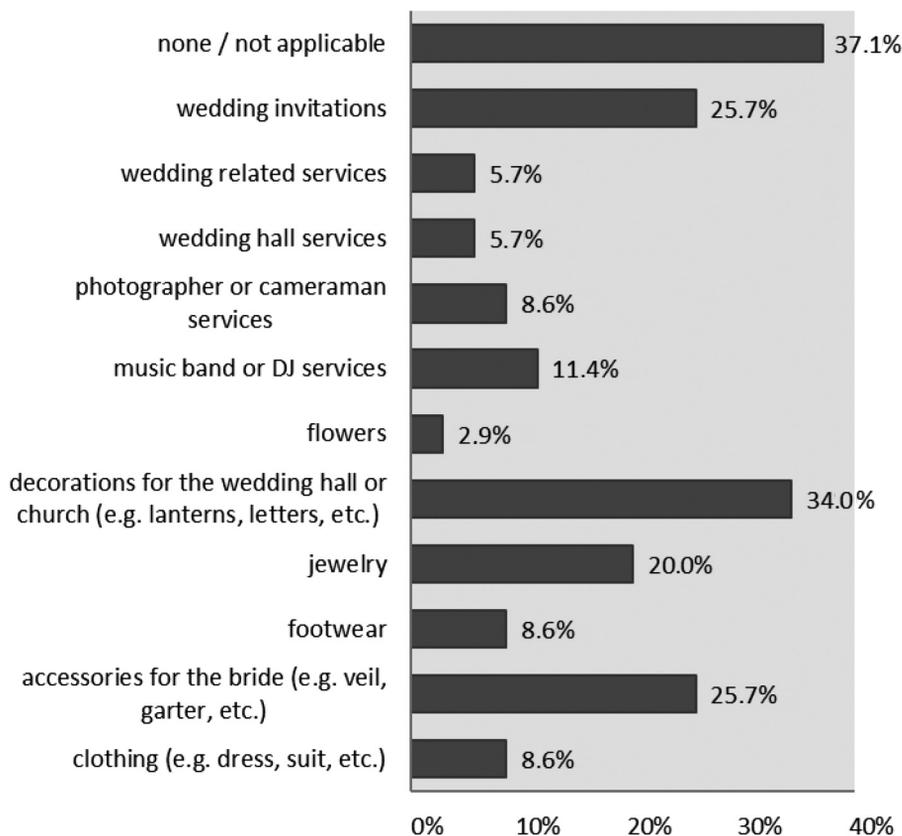
Figure 3. The frequency of recommending products or services from some company to respondents on the Facebook wedding groups



Source: own elaboration.

In result of recommendations on Facebook wedding groups, respondents bought many different products or services related to wedding (Figure 4). They were mainly: decorations for the wedding hall or church (eg lanterns, letters, etc.) (34%), accessories for the bride (eg veil, garter, etc.) (26%), wedding invitations (26%) and music band or DJ services (11%).

Figure 4. Types of products or services that respondents bought as a result of someone's recommendation on a Facebook wedding groups*



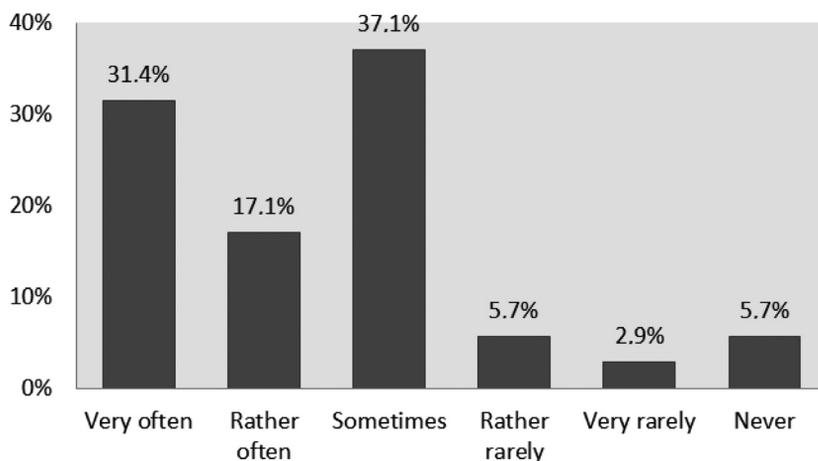
*The sum is greater than 100%, as the respondents could indicate more than 1 answer.

Source: own elaboration.

Moreover, they were rather successful shopping: 26% of respondents rated them rather good, and 23% — very good. No wonder, then, that product and service recommendations on a Facebook wedding group enjoy rather high trust among respondents (43%).

Many companies are rather aware of the marketing potential of wedding groups on Facebook. The surveyed respondents quite often (37% sometimes, 31% very often) meet on a Facebook wedding group with the fact that some company offers their products or services related to the wedding there (Figure 5).

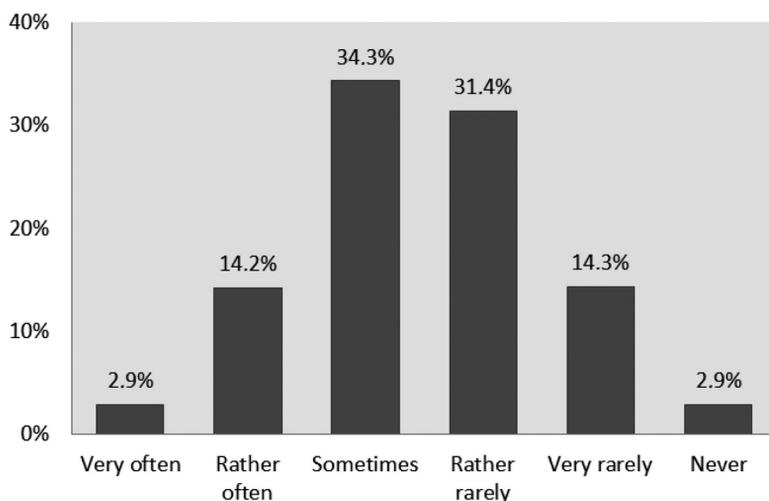
Figure 5. The frequency of contact with companies offering their wedding products or services on the Facebook wedding groups



Source: own elaboration.

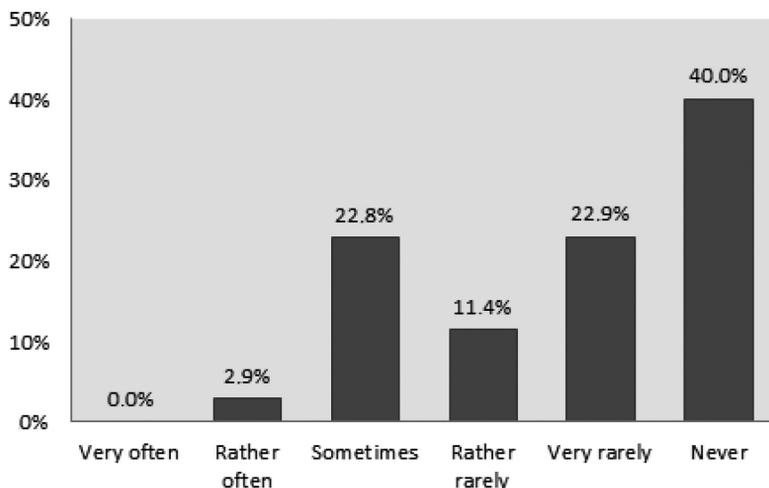
Respondents sometimes get interested in a service or product that some company offers at a wedding group (34.3%), however they relatively rarely buy them (23% sometimes, 23% very rarely, 11% rather rare) — see Figure 6 and Figure 7.

Figure 6. The frequency of respondents' interest in wedding products or services offered by companies on the Facebook wedding groups



Source: own elaboration.

Figure 7. The frequency of the purchase of the wedding products or services offered by companies on Facebook wedding groups according to respondents



Source: own elaboration.

Comparing this with previous conclusions, it can be stated that direct recommendations (direct sales / direct promotion) of companies on Facebook wedding groups enjoy less interest than the recommendations of ordinary group members. This means that word-of-mouth marketing will be more effective on Facebook groups. At the same time, the presented research results confirmed the great marketing potential of Facebook groups.

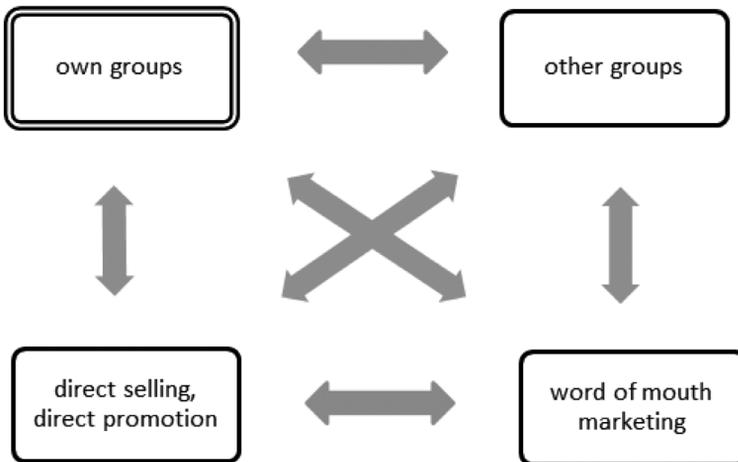
The aim of the research was also to investigate the forms of using Facebook groups in marketing. Research has shown that Facebook groups can be used for marketing purposes in at least several ways:

- a company can set up its own Facebook groups and gather a community centered around interests related to the business; it may carry out various marketing activities on Facebook groups, e.g. promotion of other groups in exchange for promoting their group;
- a company can do word of mouth marketing on groups that already exist or on groups that it has created; word of mouth marketing can be supported by direct sales (direct promotion);

- a company may sell directly on groups that already exist or on groups that it has created; direct sales (direct promotion) can be supported by word of mouth marketing;
- a company may carry out marketing activities on other groups that already exist in the form of, for example, the promotion of their group.

The above-mentioned forms of using Facebook groups in marketing activities are illustrated on Figure 8.

Figure 8. Model of using Facebook groups in marketing



Source: own elaboration.

Conclusion

The research allowed to achieve the research goal, which was to determine the use of Facebook groups as a marketing tool on the example of the wedding industry, as well as to investigate the forms of using Facebook groups in marketing. Based on the example of the wedding industry, it was found that the content of Facebook groups has large reach and boost high involvement of their participants. Members of Facebook wedding groups often take into account the

recommendations they find on these groups when making wedding-related purchasing decisions. Companies often take advantage of this by using word of mouth marketing or direct sales (direct promotion), with word-of-mouth marketing being more effective. Companies can also create their own groups on Facebook, gathering the community around interests related to their business and conducting various promotional activities on them.

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Iwona Lupa-Wójcik, Ph.D., Pedagogical University of Krakow, Faculty of Social Sciences, Institute of Law, Administration and Economics, Poland — the author has been an adjunct at the Institute of Law, Administration and Economics at the Pedagogical University of Krakow (Faculty of Social Sciences) since 2018. This same year she was granted her doctorat degree at the Cracow Univeristy of Economics. Her doctorate thesis concerned the marketing potential of the social media. The author's scientific output consists of numerous books on the usage of social media in marketing and management, as well as several dozens of publications related to the topic.