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# Gender-based analysis of social media popularity

## Abstract

Social media have significantly risen in popularity in recent years, which is linked to the internet becoming commonplace in almost all spheres of social and economic life. This paper analyses the activity of women and men in selected social media in Poland based on 2022 data, with the aim to identify possible consequences of different media consumption by gender. The research questions posed in the paper are as follows:

- Which gender is more likely to use social media?
- Which social media sites are most frequently chosen by women, and which by men?
- What is the average monthly number of advertising contacts (Ad Contacts) by gender?

Non-reactive research methods are applied in this paper, such as an analysis of the available literature on the function of social media in today's world, an analysis of the available statistical data on the activity of women and men in the most popular social media, and reports from companies conducting research in the area. Data analysis in the study shows that women use social media more frequently than men, and that they express their opinions on various topics through them. This knowledge allows e-commerce companies to better adapt their sales offer to women's needs and preferences.

**Keywords**: social media, women, men, internet

## Introduction

Social media are among the most important internet tools that effect society. Their diverse functions mean they are used not only in everyday life, but also in marketing. Recent research shows that the number of social media users in Poland is around 27.5 million, that they surf 2 hrs and 2 minutes daily. Women dominate the most popular portals, such as Facebook, Instagram and TikTok. Women are also much more likely than men to communicate with brands through these platforms [Digital Poland 2023].

This paper analyses the activity of women and men selected social media in Poland based on 2022 and aims to identify possible consequences of different media consumption by gender. The following research questions were posed for this paper:

- Which gender is more likely to use social media?
- Which social media sites are most frequently chosen by women and which by men?
- What is the average monthly number of advertising contacts (Ad Contacts) by gender?

The pertinent thesis is as follows: there are significant differences in the popularity of social media among men and women, with women being more active and engaged in interacting with social media platforms than men.

Research shows that 68% of influencers on social media are female. Women are more likely than men to set trends, shape audiences' tastes and influence their shopping decisions [IndaHash 2017]. The article uses non-reactive research methods, such as an analysis of the social media literature, an analysis of available statistical data, for instance in reports relating to social media activity by gender.

# The definitions and characteristics of social media

Social media are online platforms where users create communities and share information through sites or applications [Grębosz, Siuda, Szymański 2016, pp. 11–16]. In Poland, the internet is currently used by 88.4 per cent of the population (36.7 million), with an average daily time spent online of 6 hrs and 42 minutes. Data from 2022 show that 14.5 million women and 13.5 million men use social media [Digital Poland 2023].

The classification of social media is extensively debated, but several main categories tend to stand out [Kaznowski 2008, p. 4]:

- social networks – platforms that allow users to create and maintain contacts with others and share content,
- blogs – individual or group websites, where authors publish their personal entries, articles, or notes.
- microblogs – a type of blog that limits the length of posts, for example Twitter, where posts are usually short and limited to a certain number of characters,
- social sharing – sites that allow users to share content such as photos, videos, or links to interesting articles,
- social knowledge bases – platforms where users can collaboratively create and edit content, such as Wikipedia, to share knowledge on various topics.

The Dictionary of Media Terminology provides the following definition of social media: "techniques, technologies, and institutions for communication that use digital methods to record, save, store data, create and transmit messages. What is characteristic for the new media is a hypertext structure of transmission and reception, programmability (asynchronous transmission and reception), interactivity, cumulativeness, global reach, and at the same time individuality of access" [Bauer 2009, p. 45]. The hypertext structure of transmission and reception means that users can easily navigate between different content and information. Social media offer several features, such as the ability to programme messages in an asynchronous manner (transmitting and receiving at different times), which enables flexible use of the platforms. They are interactive, as they allow their users to actively participate in the exchange of information and opinions. Cumulativeness is yet another feature of new social media, as content and information can be accumulated gradually and expanded by users, becoming available to other users in the future.

According to Andreas Kaplan and Michael Haenlein, social media are a group of "web-based applications that build on the ideological and technological foundations of Web 2.0, enabling the creation and exchange of user-generated content [Kaplan, Haenlein 2010, pp. 59–68].

Dominik Kaznowski, an interactive marketing practitioner, defines social media as "socially controlled mass media that can be used on any scale, as they provide both the content of the message and possible viewpoints relating to the information [Kaznowski 2008, p. 81].

Social media are characterised by scalability, universal access, unlimited content modification possibilities, freedom of content creation and reception. In addition, they enable the circulation of messages through the involvement of a community of users (in a short time) and guarantee that the group will have an immediate effect on the final content and value of the information, which is created naturally and spontaneously [Bielawski, Ziolkowska 2018, pp. 86–89].

# Selected social media

Among the most popular social media platforms is **Facebook**, an interactive communication environment sometimes referred to as a microblog. It was originally created in 2004 by Mark Zuckerberg as a communication platform for students and alumni of Harvard University under the name TheFacebook. It was initially limited to users of this university only, but it quickly expanded to other universities and colleges in the United States. In 2006, Facebook became available to anyone with an email address. In 2015, Facebook's creator announced that one in seven people worldwide used it to connect with friends or family [Frost 2017, p. 42].

In 2009, Facebook acquired Instagram, and in 2014 it took over WhatsApp. At the same time, during the acquisition of Instagram, Facebook also purchased a patent for the "like" function, which has remained a hallmark of the platform to this day [Dominowski 2016, s. 6]. The Polish version of the service was launched in 2018, and in October 2021, "Facebook Inc.", the parent company of all three platforms, changed its name to Meta [Ahlgren 2023].

Facebook allows users to make posts with text, images, videos, links, and emoticons. Content can be posted to profiles, pages, groups, and events. Users can tag each other in their content and notify tagged individuals. The privacy of posts depends on user settings. You can create, share public or private events, invite friends to participate. Groups enable their members to share content with people who have similar interests, both in the private and business sphere [Mayko 2023].

In creating micro-communities, groups resemble expanded fora. They may be public, closed or secret, and they involve users who share content and create various surveys of interest [Veneo 2023]. Yet another feature, aimed at more effective communication among users, is Live, which was launched in 2015. [Krakus 2017].

Marketplace is a Facebook feature that enables users to engage in trading products and services. Users may post sales ads and negotiate prices. Marketplace is accessible both on the home site of Facebook, and in the mobile app. Facebook acts as an intermediary in the virtual world, providing a place of sale and handling payments [Piranda, Sinaga, Putri 2022, p. 81].

Launched in 2011, Facebook Messenger is a messenger that allows direct text exchange, audio and video calls, group creation and responding to messages from other users [KS 2023]. Facebook is used by 1.98 billion people globally daily. In Poland, 34.6% of internet users are present on the platform [Digital Poland 2023].

**Instagram** is a social media platform that allows users to share their photos and short videos. Launched in October 2010 by Mike Krieger and Kevin Systrom, it was originally only available to iPhone users. Initially, the app was called "Burbn" [Amaral 2016, p. 1]. Creating an Instagram account and using the app are free. In 2012, the service was purchased by Facebook, however it continues to operate as an independent entity, retaining some common elements such as account login and management [Czarnota 2017, pp. 130–139]. Instagram has 1.28 billion active users globally, with 6.8 million in Poland [Digital Poland 2023].

Users can customise their content using filters available in the app. A photo or video posted on Instagram can come with a short description, often including keywords preceded by the # symbol. Hashtags allow users to search for photos and videos related to particular topics. In addition to hashtags, there are other ways to highlight material (you can add the location where the photo or video was taken or tag your friends in the photos). On the Instagram app, users strive to gain as many followers as possible [Project 2015, pp. 1–2].

In 2016, an option called Instagram Stories was launched. This is a feature that allows photos and videos to be made available for a period of 24 hours to everyone following a particular account, or specific content to be sent directly to other users of the app. The concept of "disappearing" content previously appeared on the Snapchat app, so Instagram was accused of copying the idea [Marciuk 2016].

**TikTok** is a free app, mainly aimed at teenagers aged 13–18. It enables the creation and sharing of short videos, typically between 15 and 60 seconds long, recorded in a variety of formats, often with background music. Most of the content on TikTok is dance and lip-sync to popular songs [Verdugo 2020, p. 1].

TikTok is owned by ByteDance, a Chinese company. In its first year of operations, known as Douyin in the Asian market, it gained 100 million users. It was then scaled internationally under the name of TikTok. In November 2017, ByteDance bought the popular teen app Musical.ly for USD 1 billion, which precipitated the growth in user numbers [Standro 2018]. The merger between TikTok and the Musical.ly app was a very similar concept, based on short videos with visual effects and music. After this merger, TikTok gained more than 200 million users and strengthened its position as a platform for publishing "life moments", both in China and abroad. In less than a year after the merger, TikTok gained 27 million users in the US alone. In 2018, the app was downloaded 660 million times, which made it one of the most popular apps in the world, more popular than Twitter and Snapchat [Verdugo 2020, p. 2]. In 2022, TikTok's owners announced that the number of users had exceeded 1 billion [Bursztynsky 2021]. TikTok has been downloaded more than three billion times and its users have spent a total of more than $2.5 billion on it. Some 37% of users have decided to purchase a product after having seen it on the platform. TikTok already supports 75 languages and is available in more than 150 countries. The app's users vary in age (from 10 to 80), but as much as 60% of the population are Generation Z, i.e., born after 1995 [Doyle 2023].

TikTok is currently stirring up a lot of controversy. Organisations such as the European Commission, the Council of the European Union and the European Parliament have banned their employees

from using this app. The concern is that TikTok may be used by the Chinese authorities to collect user data. In 2020, India blocked the app completely on its territory out of concern for state sovereignty and integrity. Another controversy surrounding TikTok is the impact of its form on user behaviour. Rapidly changing shots, rhythmic music and a variety of audio-visual effects mean that users spend a lot of time on this platform (an average of 18 hrs and 31 minutes per month). There is also a growing concern that TikTok use can provoke attention and behavioural disorders, learning difficulties and reduce cognitive ability [Breczko 2023].

# Functions of social media

Social media have two important functions – communication and marketing and can be used by both for-profit and non-profit organisations. Users value social media's balance between conversation and the sharing of valuable content, with the previous model of one-way transmission of information from a sender to multiple recipients becoming a thing of the past. Today, users expect interaction and want discussion with content creators. With social media, they connect, talk, build relationships and participate in communities with shared passions and interests. They also appreciate the openness and authenticity of the messages communicated [Pacut 2016, pp. 239–249]. There is a growing importance of social media as a tool to support an organisation's activities in areas such as customer service, market research and service development and image building. Quick feedback from engaged internet users is used to assess the level of satisfaction with the services offered, and to make potential adjustments and improvements.

According to "Digital 2023: Global Overview Report", social media serve various purposes of their users [Kemp 2023]. The most popular purpose is to search for information (57.8 per cent of users) and to communicate with friends and family (53.7 per cent). What follows is current news and events check (50.9%), watching videos, movies, series (49.7%), instructions for how to use/create things (47.8%), and looking for inspiration and ideas (44.3%), products and brands (43.4%), as well as listening to music (43.2%). Slightly less popular purposes for use include education (38.3%), search for holiday destinations, holidays, and travel planning (36.4%), medical advice and pharmaceuticals (34.7%). The rarest purposes are gaming (30.5%), making friends (29.0%) or checking out business opportunities (28.9%).

From companies, social media users expect deeper relationships, permanent contact, sincere and direct communication. Social media impose marketing communication that is different from that of traditional media. The internet, which operates continuously in real time, favours the rapid spread of information, and strongly affects the shaping and changing of reality, with a round-the-clock instant response becoming a communication model on social media. Companies recognise the advantages of social media, but most businesses mistakenly assume that setting up and having a profile will mechanically translate into a positive corporate image. There are nearly 2.62 million companies in Poland, but only about 10% of them have Instagram accounts. Presence on social media alone, without knowing the specificity and method of operation of a particular medium, will not guarantee success [Ratajczak, Ochnik 2015, pp. 81–91].

Thanks to its continuous development and huge increase in the number of users worldwide, social media have become an extremely powerful marketing tool. Today, social networks enable both paid and free marketing activities. Free marketing activities include creating company profiles, building communities, strengthening customer relationships online to generate customer interest and loyalty, actively participating in various types of groups on behalf of the company or its employees, and organising competitions [Lamberti, Theus 2016, pp. 183–206]. Paid social media activities involve promotional campaigns using dedicated marketing tools provided by specific social media platforms. Thanks to demographic and behavioural targeting, the advertising campaigns target a strictly selected group of recipients who match a defined profile of a potential customer [Budzanowska-Drzewiecka 2010, pp. 40–50].

Social media marketing activities are a comprehensive plan involving a variety of strategies and tactics to promote a brand, product, or service. Here are some key elements that are important in this type of activity [Mazurek 2016, pp. 23–31]:
1. Market and audience analysis: effective marketing efforts begin with a thorough understanding of the market and audience preferences. Demographic, behavioural and psychographic research provides valuable information for precise targeting of campaigns.

2. Creating compelling content: an important element is the creation of engaging content, such as posts, images, videos, infographics, quizzes, or competitions. Content should be tailored to the preferences of the audience and provide valuable information, entertainment, or inspiration.

3. Community building and engagement: in marketing, it is crucial not only to publish content, but also build a community around the brand. Regular engagement with your audience, such as responding to comments, organising competitions or hashtag campaigns, enables developing a bond and loyalty with the brand.

4. Use of paid advertising tools: social media platforms provide the option to use paid advertising tools to reach a larger audience. Used effectively, such tools can increase the reach and effectiveness of a campaign.

5. Analysis of results and optimisation: social media marketing activities require regular analysis of results and optimisation of strategies. Monitoring indicators such as reach, engagement or conversions allow to adjust the activities to achieve better results.

## Gender activity on selected social media in Poland

Studying social media is a complex process. The primary reason is that this space is very dynamic and evolving at an extremely fast pace. However, due to social media ubiquity, such attempts are becoming increasingly frequent [Laskowska 2012, p. 3]. Traditional media consciously continue to create stereotypical gender images, assigning women and men different social roles and functions in relation to their biological sex. They shape the opinions of their audience, who then reproduce the stereotypes in the real world. Meanwhile, due to their nature and the fact that they enable active participation of users, social media allow free self-expression [Bogacka 2017, p. 113]. For women, social media provide a space for expressing tj own opinions, creating thematic groups, and shopping [Laskowska 2012, p. 3].

The data presented in Figure 1 show that, on a global scale, there are more make than female social media users, although this is different in Poland: Polish women are more active on social media

than Polish men. As a rule, they are more expressive than men and feel comfortable having several conversations at the same time. Women's online preferences exert a strong influence on media, advertising, and entertainment. It is therefore believed that with the rise of social media, women will be more likely to be the trendsetters, especially when it comes to e-commerce. On social media, women are most likely to post selfies (56%), fashion-related posts (40%), and travel-related posts (34%) (IndaHash 2017).

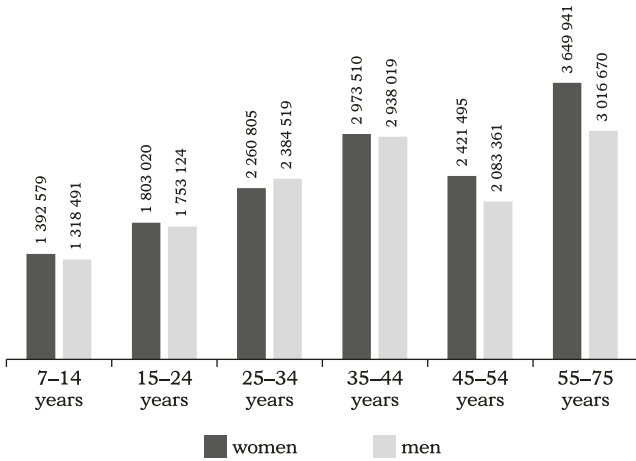**Figure 1.** Users of selected social media by gender worldwide in 2022
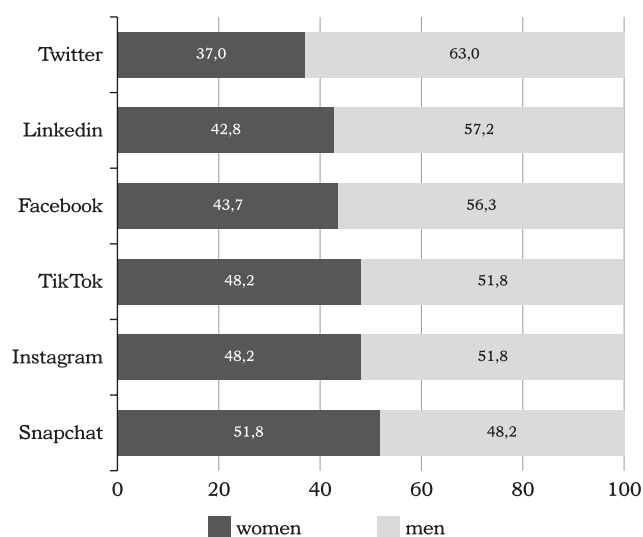


Source: Statista 2023.

In 2022, the average monthly number of users of the most popular platforms in Poland (Facebook, Instagram, YouTube, TikTok, Twitter, Pinterest, Snapchat, LinkedIn, Twitch) totalled 28 million (which translates into more than 93% of internet users), of which more than half (14.5 million) were women [Digital Poland 2023]. Only one age group (25–34) was outnumbered by men: 57.7% versus 51.0% among women [Social Media 2023]. The remaining age groups were outnumbered by women – see Figure 2.

As the most active target group on social media, women are more likely than men to look to social media for inspiration in the areas of shopping, interior decoration, styling, or gift ideas (most often on Pinterest, Instagram and TikTok). Men spend less time on social media than women – 1 hr 58 minutes and 40 seconds versus 2 hrs 4 minutes 11 seconds,

**Figure 2.** Social media users in Poland by gender and age (2022)



Source: Mediapanel, Real Users average monthly indicator, 2022.

**Figure 3.** Social media activity in 2022 – time share by gender and age in Poland



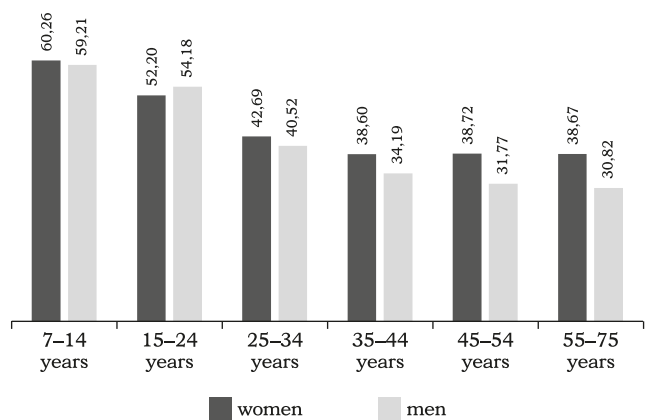Source: Mediapanel, Share of Time average monthly indicator, 2022.

respectively. Women create more content on social media: 64% of female users and 54% of male users post more than once a day [Social Media 2023].

A Sotrender report shows that most visitors to children's brands' Facebook fanpages are women. Women are more likely to use Facebook to communicate with friends, and most of them prefer to use social media to communicate with friends via chats [Sotrender 2023].

The data in Figure 3 shows that it is only in the age group of 15–24 that men spend more time using social media than women.

Women are generally more likely to use social media than men. Pinterest is a platform with clear female overrepresentation (70.7% of total users) (Figure 4), probably due to the specificity of the portal itself, which offers content for occasions such as weddings and renovations. Twitch, a platform for gamers, is a social medium that mainly attracts men (73.2%). It is dominated by 7- to 24-year-olds. Time engagement on this portal is low, at 0.32%, but given the growth of interest in e-sports, there is a good chance that this portal will grow [Digital Poland 2023].

Other platforms that men are more likely to use than women are Twitter (54.4% of men) and LinkedIn (51.9% of men). Women predominate for the remaining sites [Social Media 2023].

When analysing the activity of men and women on social media, it is worth noting the average monthly advertising reach. Platforms such as Facebook, Instagram, Youtube and TikTok have built higher average monthly reach among women, as shown by the data in Figure 5.
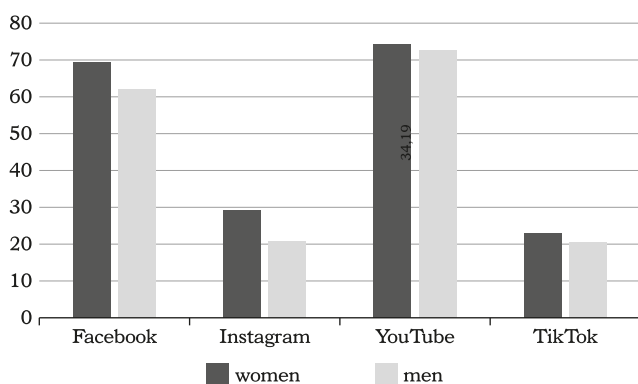
As women predominate among social media users, many brands and institutions make them the target of their strategies. They do so by posting striking

**Figure 4.** Social media users in Poland by gender (2022)
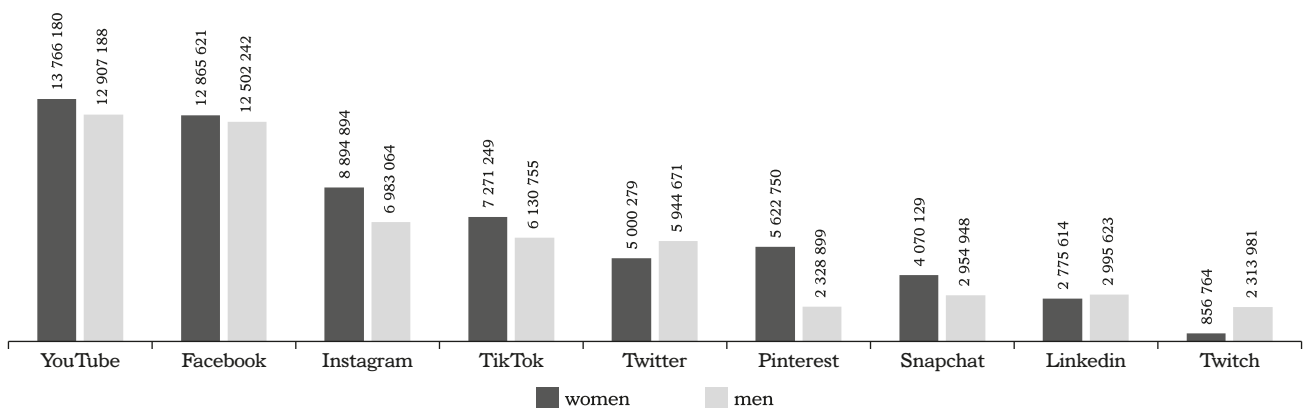


Source: Mediapanel, Real Users average monthly indicator, 2022.

**Figure 5.** The average monthly number of advertising contacts (Ad Contacts) by gender (2022)



Source: AdReal, Data for WWW+APP.

images, videos with catchy, sophisticated music, warm colours, friendly language. To win their loyalty, brands are increasingly turning their attention to women. In this respect, social media are a powerful communication channel to reach current and potential customers, create communities, and engage women in spreading awareness of a particular company and brand [Blakley 2010].

Women tend to be aware of the news, sales, and discounts of their favourite brands. They follow these brands primarily because they like or identify with them. Women are also more likely to generate feedback, give opinions on products, and participate in lotteries. Men take a more task-oriented approach to the online shopping process than women; they want to satisfy their needs as quickly as possible. Women are more likely to look for opinions on social media and evaluate alternatives fairly. However, such an approach does not apply to everyday products, in which case women are much more likely to buy impulsively than men. The reason for greater reticence in online shopping among women is that they prefer direct contact with the seller and physical proximity to the product [Piersiala 2014, p. 97].

Women are more likely than men to form each other's opinions online: 62% of women and 48% of men say that they find other social media users the most authoritative, which directly influences their shopping decisions; 45% of women and 31% of men say they have bought a product they have seen on social media in the last week [IndaHash 2017]. An e-commerce report shows that women most commonly buy online clothing, footwear, cosmetics, perfumes, books, CDs, and pharmaceutical products. Men are more likely to buy white/brown goods, smartphones, and car parts [E-commerce Report 2022].

Women are more active on shopping websites and apps than men. On a monthly basis, women aged 25–34 spend the biggest amount of time on them (3 hrs 35 minutes). When it comes to men, the oldest group (between 50 and 75 years of age) is the most active, spending an average of 2 hrs 45 minutes on online shopping each month [E-commerce Report 2022].

Women and the youngest age group are particularly susceptible to making shopping decisions based on online social media content. Women are motivated to make a shopping decision based on high-quality product images and the accessibility of websites on mobile devices. This is valuable information for business owners promoting themselves on social media [E-commerce Report 2022].

Women are more likely than men to follow the recommendation of influencers when shopping online (14% versus 6%) [E-commerce Report 2022]. It is important to note that when shopping online, women are more likely to show an attachment to a specific brand, while men are more likely to search by product category. The differences may be relevant for brand owners promoting their products on social media.

## Conclusions

The pertinent analysis of data on social media activity by gender shows that in Poland, women use social media more frequently than men. In so doing, they influence the nature of social media content, as well as advertising messages. Women are an important target group for many companies promoting their operations on social media; they are more likely to identify with a brand and rely on the opinion of influencers.

Although many companies understand the need to tailor their marketing message to social media users, there are still many gender stereotypes in place: traditional perceptions of the role of women, the creation of a uniform image of women as housewives focused mainly on family or their own appearance. It should be noted, however, that in recent years there has been an increasing number of reports and studies showing a growing focus on user activity on social media, with emphasis on the actual (rather than stereotype-based) preferences of women and men. This study illustrates this situation in relation to the most popular social media. For a broader perspective, more detailed analyses, and studies on a larger number of social media with more users and their preferences are recommended.

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