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ANALYSIS AND EVALUATION OF SELECTED INTERNET GROCERIES

Abstract: The aim of this article is to characterize and evaluate Internet groceries websites with regard to their quality measured by their usefulness for a potential client. In the beginning of this paper the author presented characteristics of the sector and basic methodological assumptions of the research. Next, the author conducted studies evaluating websites by means of a simple scoring method and a scoring method with preferences. The findings were analyzed and the results were compared.

Keywords: e-business, food sector websites, quality evaluation, evaluation methods, evaluation of Internet shops.

1. Introduction

The basic aim of this article is to characterize and evaluate food sector websites from the point of view of an individual client. This article belongs to a group of studies on the quality of websites from various sectors performed by the author in the last few years. The author did not conduct any in-depth analyses of food sector websites because until now this branch did not seem so important for the development of e-business [Ranking sklepów... 2009]. However, it turned out that the crisis in 2009 caused certain revaluations in the electronic market. Usually, under such circumstances, we may observe a tendency to buy clothing and footwear, and purchases of these goods appear to take priority over other items (21% sales, 9% shops); yet, in 2009 sales of food products for the first time exceeded 2% of all electronic market [E-Commerce w Polsce... 2009]. It is the equivalent of the share of the number of websites supplying food in the overall number of internet shops. If we assume that in 2009 the number exceeded 7,000, then it gives more than 140 shops. At this point we should also note that these are often shops with a long tradition of conducting business activity with a group of loyal customers, which is – as we may observe – quite difficult to achieve in the Internet [E-Commerce 2009... 2009]. Also, studies concerning this sector seem particularly interesting for a number of reasons. Firstly, food industry

is one of the most important sectors of economy – in 2009 its share in the country's GDP was close to 15%, and the value of food market was close to 200 billion zlotys. What is more, the sector is characterized by very good financial results (range of 7-8 billion a year) and high financial stability (15%). Almost half a million people work in the sector (2009), which accounts for about 5% of all people employed in Poland. A characteristic feature of the sector is its ownership structure, where over 95% of companies which are responsible for over 80% of production are in private hands. We may notice that the food sector is characterized by a large number of small and scattered plants. It is mainly the result of dispersed sources of raw materials and the necessity to adapt to the local demand. The majority of suppliers of raw materials to processing plants are small and medium agricultural farms, and the degree of their specialization is – so far – low. In turn, construction of large processing plants is connected with a considerable financial investment in means of transport. We may observe that businesses of the food sector are characterized by a large degree of diversification and a wide product range. We should also add that the production of food, beverages and tobacco products dominates the market [Raport Millward Brown... 2009].

The specification above, on the one hand, points to a wide range of possibilities of applying e-business solutions in the sector; on the other, it shows their limitations which result from certain qualities of products and the characteristics of the market. Despite the great importance of the product range in the sector for the population, we note a number of potential problems caused by a limited consumption period and – even though there appear more and more advanced storage technologies – deteriorating quality of many products from the moment of delivering the goods to the market. Another specific limitation is logistics (in terms of time and space) – great distances both from scattered producers and from a frequently individualized client. Obviously, the Internet plays a significant role in accelerating the dissemination of information about a product range and activities connected with ordering and paying for the goods; however, we cannot ignore the problems related to physical and material character of the supply of food products. Transport of ordered goods plays a crucial role in the sector. Cooperating with couriers is not possible because of the nature of the goods, you need to sell the products via the Internet and supply the goods using your own fleet of vehicles and a sophisticated logistics service. The fact causes a certain limitation (despite potential possibilities resulting from the use of the Internet): it is possible to deliver the goods covering a distance which is not longer than several kilometres from a warehouse where goods are stored. Therefore, the shops operating in this sector are usually located in the biggest cities, mainly Warsaw, Cracow, Wrocław and the Tri-City. As a result, we may observe a great diversification in the forms of relations with clients in this sector of e-business.

2. Characteristics of selected food sector websites

Diversification in relations with clients can be seen mainly in various forms of presentation of the business's activity in the Internet. Among many intermediate forms we can distinguish:

- internet groceries,
- websites of food sector companies,
- specialist food sector vortals.

According to Internet Standard analyses, in the first group we can identify three basic models of business activity:

- small and medium-sized companies acting as intermediaries, cooperating with one high street shop or a chain of shops. Operating procedure is as follows: an internet shop collects orders, fulfils them in a traditional shop and delivers the goods to the specified address (examples: Supersam24.pl, Dodomku.pl), whose income does not exceed PLN 1million,
- internet sales channel of high street shops or a chain of groceries. These shops deliver the goods on their own (examples: E-piotripawel.pl, Hipernet24.pl, and Alma24.pl). The best scores in the group are achieved by E-piotripawel.pl because in 2008 it fulfilled more than 63,000 orders in total. Its revenue amounted to around PLN 15 million [E-Commerce 2009... 2009]. To compare: Hipernet24.pl generated the income of PLN 12 million, and Alma24.pl nearly PLN 6.5 million,
- internet shops operating only in the net (example: Frisco.pl which delivers the goods directly from its warehouse). Frisco.pl in 2008 served more than 34,000 orders and reached the income of PLN 9 million (together with specialty shops).

The fourth business model is represented by one of the oldest shops on the Polish market (1994) To-Tu.com.pl. Operating procedure is as follows: the shop accepts internet orders, forwards the information to traditional shops which, subsequently, have to deliver the goods to the clients. In practical terms, it is a variant of the first model. This article is concentrated on the first model of business activity in the area.

Only two shops in the group presented above operate in several cities (Alma24. pl and E-piotripawel.pl). The area of activity of other shops covers only Warsaw and its surrounding area. The three most popular shops on the Warsaw market are: Hipernet24.pl – first place, Frisco.pl takes a second position and the third place belongs to Alma24.pl.

Taking into consideration the visualization of the website, we can distinguish two styles of presentation of the websites which were established on the basis of a chain of traditional groceries and act as their electronic sales channel:

reference to stylistics, colouring and lettering of a traditional shop – e.g. alma24.
 pl (its logo is a derivative of the logo of the traditional shop and the dominating dark green colour is also present in a traditional shop) or e-piotripawel.pl (logo

is the same as the logo of a traditional shop, colouring is similar to the one of a traditional shop),

creating a completely new design – e.g. Hipernet24.pl (the colouring and lettering differ substantially from the ones of the traditional shop: E.Leclerc, still, the logo of E.Leclerc can be seen on particular advertising banners).

Below the author presents characteristics of a food sector website based on the example of e-piotripawel.pl website. Immediately after entering the main page a user has to specify a place of making a purchase by selecting a particular location of a traditional shop. After choosing a given branch of the shop, a user is directed to the website where in the centre of the page he/she can find information about the latest special deals. A list of product categories can be found only in a toolbar on the left side of the webpage. Product categories are clearly specified, which forces a user to search a given product for a long time. There is an option "shortcuts" on the left; however, the links change depending on the number of clients interested in particular goods and they are not always located in the same place, which makes product search much more difficult. If a user has precise product information, he/she can use a search engine. On the right side of the web page there are links directing users to the most popular sections, such as: fresh bread and rolls, spices and mineral water. There is clear information about accepted payment cards and a possibility of conducting secure payment transactions online. E-piotripawel.pl website does not provide anything more than offering a particular product range. The advantage of the website is a convenient toolbar which can be found on the top of the page. The toolbar contains basic options: Jak kupować/How to buy? (after selecting this option the user is directed to regulations with an expanded menu on the left that lets the user find an answer to a specific question), Moje zakupy/My purchases (described earlier), Kontakt/Contact (contains contact forms concerning questions related to orders and complaints), Zaloguj/Log on and Zarejestruj/Register. Unfortunately, due to the problems with basic functionality (finding items for purchase) described above, we need to note that the website is not user-friendly and requires a lot of attention on the part of the user when ordering goods.

The second way of using the Internet in food sector is **food industry websites.** They mainly present general data concerning a company. Other information which may be found on the website is: information about products, their nutrition values (Danone.pl website – nutrition values of cheese and yoghurt), the latest discounts and news (maspex.pl website – the link *News*). Interestingly, on the websites we can also find examples of balanced diets (bakoma.pl website) and suggestions for leisure time activities (bakoma.pl website – a quiz concerning nutrition knowledge and Bakoma products).

Websites of companies operating in food sector are rich with regard to content and attractive in terms of a graphic design. On all the examined websites one can find information about a particular company, product range, news and recent events as well as the information concerning employment opportunities in the corporation. However, the websites differ with regard to graphics and specific content. Let us look at Danone website as an example. Despite its rich content, it is readable and user-friendly. The website is designed mainly for individual clients – consumers of Danone products and institutional clients. On the main page one may see news as well as information about social responsibility actions undertaken by Danone Company. Website navigation is possible thanks to a top toolbar with links such as: O nas/ About us, Praca@Danone/Work@Danone, Produkty/Products, Zdrowie i żywienie/ Health and Nutrition, Społeczna odpowiedzialność/Social Responsibility, Nowości i wydarzenia/News and Events, Media/Media, Kontakt/Contact. Health and Nutrition appears to be particularly interesting, as after opening it a user accesses detailed information concerning health aspects of consumption of particular products, advice concerning nutrition, knowledge concerning food ingredients as well as information about the involvement of Danone in the action of disseminating information on healthy food. The colouring of Danone's website appears to correspond with the colour of the corporate logo. Returning to the main menu is very easy: just below the top toolbar a user may find an exact access path which shows all the subsequent web pages a person visited to get to the one he/she is browsing at the moment. There is Site Map button at the bottom of the page which helps visitors to the website find the information they need.

The third way of using the Internet in food sector is food industry vortals presenting specific issues related to the functioning of the food market. Websites such as rynekspozywczy.pl, fresh-market.pl and portalspozywczy.pl are representatives of the group. The first one, rynekspozywczy.pl, is mainly an information platform for companies from food sector. Additional information which can be found there is: current events in the sector, addresses of the biggest distributive networks and necessary links. The second one, fresh-market.pl is a website which presents current prices on merchandise exchanges on Polish and foreign markets. Portalspozywczy. pl, in turn, is a website where you can find current data concerning food sector – articles about food industry, data concerning current prices and exchange quotations. It is a readable and user-friendly website which presents a general situation in the food sector.

These websites differ significantly from internet shops or corporate websites. They are targeted at people from the same sector and they are often very simple as regards graphic design. However, they differ as far as layout and content are concerned. They are aimed at professionals operating in the sector and they are supposed to help them in everyday work using various tools.

Www.fresh-market.pl is an example of such a vortal. It is designed with interesting colouring and it is adapted to the target audience [http://www.fresh-market.pl]. The dominating colours are green, yellow and orange, which is immediately associated with fresh fruit and vegetables. The most important information concerning the functioning of fruit and vegetables market is displayed already on the main page. In a link "catalogue of products" one can find information (in an alphabetical order)

about fruit and vegetables – characteristics, occurrence, exemplary photographs as well as current information concerning this product. It is a useful and interesting source of knowledge for a client. A user of this portal pays attention to another link - On-line prices. It is a place to present current prices of raw materials on various exchanges in Poland and in the world. Data are placed in an alphabetical order with the consideration of minimum, maximum and average prices as well as a price index. Another link, Advertisements, is also important for visitors. Advertisements present offers of sale of fruit and vegetables and the data are organized in such a way that users browsing the website start with the most recent announcements. A toolbar on the left allows for a quicker navigation and directs a user to particular sections e.g. fruit, greens, etc. After opening the dedicated links, a list of advertisements is displayed starting with the most recent ones. It is undoubtedly a very good place to search and offer goods, and what follows – a good place to establish business contacts. This last functionality may be realized also with the use of another link, namely, Catalogue of companies. The catalogue contains corporate data divided into particular sections. These are both local and foreign companies (from Europe, Africa, America, Asia, and Russia). Subsequent links dividing pages into particular categories: producers, processing plants, wholesalers, importers, exporters, ECO suppliers allow for finding a suitable firm. After selecting an appropriate category, a list of corporations with their logos, profiles and contact data is displayed.

3. Assumptions of the study

A scoring method will be used preliminarily to compare the quality of groceries' websites. It is a technique which assumes constructing a list of criteria which will constitute the evaluation of solutions of a given problem. Experts establish criteria in a particular field taking into consideration key components into which an analysis of a problem may be divided. Five independent experts gathered to analyze the research problem, and the experts performed a scoring evaluation individually. Each expert is a person of the age 20-50, they use the Internet to work and do shopping online. What is more, all experts are proficient users of the Internet.

The experts established an evaluation scale with a range of points, used at this stage of the analysis, specifying the degree to which each examined aspect fulfils the assumed criteria. The following scoring scale will be used to evaluate each criterion:

- 1.00 very good, complete criterion fulfilment, maximum score,
- 0.75 good, almost complete fulfilment of criterion,
- 0.50 medium, partial criterion fulfilment,
- 0.25 low level of criterion fulfilment,
- 0.00 insufficient, the lowest score, not fulfilling a criterion.

Subsequently, the appointed experts evaluate each criterion and assign scores using an assumed evaluation scale. We establish a mediana score from particular

experts' evaluations. Eventually, we arrive at a synthetic evaluation which is a total of scores for all criteria and we calculate a percentage of the fulfilment of the maximum score. This way we obtain results on the basis of which we choose a solution which achieved the highest score.

Then the results of a scoring method are multiplied by preference coefficients for a selected group of considered criteria. This way, evaluation factors which are believed to be the most significant acquire greater importance (60% is assigned to the groups of criteria seen as the most important ones by the experts, 20% is assigned to the remaining ones).

For the purposes of the study three criteria groups have been formulated, namely: availability, visualization and functionality (see [Smolak 2009]).

Availability: Google.com positioning – the position of a website on the list of search results (what is the position of a website on the list?, is it on the first page of search results?); availability in sponsored links – did the company purchase sponsored links on the right side of Google.com?, which position it takes in sponsored links?; the speed of loading – do you have to wait long for the page to be loaded?, are there any graphic elements which slow down loading of the page?

Visualization: Readability – a font size, colour of letters and the contrast with the background, is the length of the text without full display clear enough or do you need to look for the text?; graphics (background, contrast, colours of the lettering, colour combinations); the quality of photographs, professionalism of the photographs – evaluation if the photographs are visually attractive, of good quality, consistent with the contents of the website; information display – is the information interesting, encouraging a user to continue using a website? and is it placed on the sightline?, if there are some information headlines, is there a clear, intuitive menu?

Functionality - for internet shops: mechanisms attracting attention and determining a repeated use - if a given website distinguishes itself among other shops, what is the characteristic element?; easy product search – is there a possibility to search an item using a name of the product?, is the division into product categories clear?, are the product categories wide or narrow?; the speed of placing an item on a shopping list – is there a clearly visible button add to cart?; view of the shopping list – is the list of purchased items visible during selecting another product, or is it updated regularly?; the quantity of products and product range – is there a wide product range?, the number of categories, the number of products in particular product groups; product descriptions – if information about a product is sufficient or too casual, is there a "best before" date, weight of the product?; the ease of selection - a possibility to select any quantity in the case of purchasing non-packaged products; payment options – which payment methods are available?, are credit cards accepted?, are all available cards accepted or only selected ones?; scope of activity – how far and to how many clients; prices of products; information, help or contact mechanisms – is there a help line, telephone number, contact form?, is the same form used to send an enquiry and a claim?, are other forms of contact available (Skype, Gadu Gadu)?

4. Analysis of internet groceries

As a result of experts' evaluations, and subsequent averaging the scores of their judgments the following combined table for internet groceries has been obtained.

Table 1 presents scores of internet shops assigned by experts on the basis of applied criteria. The last row presents the ranking of shops examined in the study in a form of a percentage score. Frisco.pl is in the first position with 83.33% of the maximum score. It gives the website a small advantage over the second shop, Alma24.pl which received 79.17% of the maximum score in the experts' evaluation. The results of next shops in the ranking were more than 10 percentage points lower: e-piotripawel.pl – 65.28% and Hipernet24.pl – 61.11%.

Table 1. Combined evaluation scores for websites of selected groceries

Evaluation criteria	Alma24	e-piotr i pawel	Hipernet24	Frisco
Google positioning	0.75	0.50	0.25	1.00
Presence in sponsored links	0.00	0.00	0.00	1.00
The speed of loading	1.00	1.00	1.00	0.75
Text clarity	0.75	0.50	0.75	1.00
Graphics	1.00	0.75	0.50	1.00
The quality of photographs	0.75	0.50	0.75	1.00
Information display	0.50	1.00	0.25	0.75
Mechanisms attracting users' attention	0.50	0.00	0.25	0.00
Easy product search	1.00	0.75	0.50	1.00
The speed at which an item is added to a shopping cart	0.75	0.50	0.50	1.00
View of the shopping list	1.00	0.50	0.50	1.00
The quantity of products and product range	0.75	0.75	1.00	1.00
Product descriptions	0.75	1.00	1.00	1.00
The ease of selection	1.00	0.75	1.00	0.75
Payment options	1.00	1.00	0.75	1.00
Scope of activity	1.00	0.75	0.25	0.75
Product prices	0.75	0.75	1.00	0.50
Information, help and contact mechanisms	1.00	0.75	0.75	0.50
TOTAL	14.25	11.75	11.00	15.00
Percentage of maximum score	79.17	65.28	61.11	83.33

Undoubtedly, the value influencing such a high score of Frisco.pl is its positioning in Google.pl search results. When we enter: groceries, grocery, Frisco.pl always appears first in search results. It is an only shop which is displayed in sponsored links. The next point where Frisco pl outperforms its competitors is the quality of photographs. The photographs which may be seen on Frisco.pl are professional and they can be enlarged by a user. What is more, the shop distinguished itself in the most important functionality, namely, the speed of adding items to a shopping cart. However, it was inferior to Alma24.pl with regard to product search and viewing the shopping list. Moreover, Alma24.pl gained the first position also, among others, in the case of analyzing the information, help and contact mechanisms as well as in the scope of activity (it is easy to find the specification of the scope of activity on the website). Similarly clear information can be found on the website of E-piotripawel.pl immediately after opening the home page, and for this reason experts assigned the total of 1 point in this category. Alma24.pl distinguishes itself with regard to mechanisms attracting users' attention. However, the general scores for this functionality were low as, generally, the mechanisms did not impress the experts in any shop. In this regard Frisco.pl, which achieved the highest score in the general evaluation, received only 0.25 point, while Alma24.pl received 0.50. Even Hipernet24 with 0.25 point was better in this evaluation than Frisco.pl. Hipernet24 also earned the best score in the case of product prices criterion (1 point). Considering an examined sample of products, experts assigned a good score (0.75) to E-piotripawel.pl for this criterion. Additionally, E-piotripawel.pl received the highest score in the case of evaluation of making payments for ordered goods.

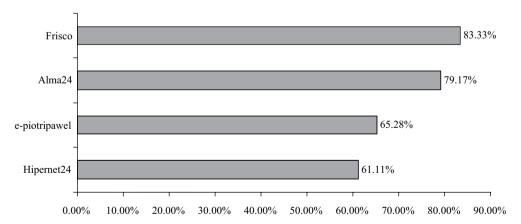


Figure 1. Results of the ranking scores for Internet groceries

It turns out that Hipernet24.pl, which received the lowest score in the analyses of a few aspects such as prices, the quality of photographs, payment options, is still able to compete with market leaders, despite the limited area it operates on. The shop

outperforms its rivals with regard to the wide product range it offers and the ease of making a precise choice. The analysis presented above justifies a claim that internet groceries try to adapt to current needs of the market and particular groups of clients on a regular basis.

Graphic presentation of the ranking scores can be seen in Figure 1. Subsequently, a specified preference scale has been applied. All categories which evaluated functionality of the websites were considered to be the most important ones and they were assigned a weight of 60%. Remaining categories are significant; however, they were evaluated at 20% for each. After applying preference weights the order of leaders on the market of Internet shops has changed and Alma24.pl has moved to the first position obtaining the score of 83.13%. To compare – according to previous experts' evaluations the shop occupied the second position in the ranking. After revaluation, Frisco.pl gained the second position receiving 80.00% points. Undoubtedly, such a score might be the result of the price policy implemented by Frisco.pl. The prices of products offered by Frisco.pl were regarded as very high, which led to lowering the general scores made by the shop. The two remaining shops did not change their positions, and consequently, E-piortipawel.pl obtained 66.88% points, and Hipernet24.pl – 65.00%. In experts' evaluations both shops received about one percentage point less than in previous computations. Simultaneously, the higher position of Alma24.pl was influenced by high scores gained for functionality. It has a specific justification, for instance in the case of such a functionality as view of the shopping list (Alma24.pl achieved higher scores than Frisco.pl), payment options, information, help and contact mechanisms. Moreover, Alma24.pl has a wider scope of activity than Frisco.pl. Therefore, after revaluating, Alma24.pl gained a leading position in the ranking of internet groceries.

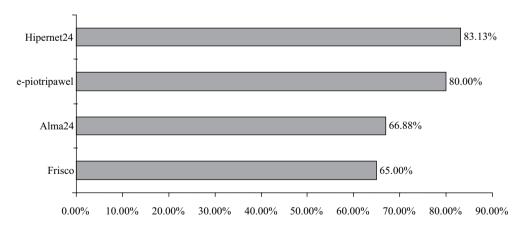


Figure 2. Results of the ranking scores with a preference scale for Internet groceries

The general scores of groceries are very stable taking into consideration applying both evaluations. However, there emerges a question: which elements should internet

shops focus on when modernizing their websites or creating websites of new shops which will start their operations? After recalculating the scores it seems justified to focus on websites' functionality.

Graphic presentation of the ranking scores with a preference scale can be seen in Figure 2.

5. Summary and conclusions

After analyzing the contents of the websites of both internet groceries and food sector vortals, we can assume that they encourage users to visit them. The websites creating the image of the companies are well and attractively designed; they contain diversified information and interesting content. In order to examine the general qualities of food sector internet shops, the author has chosen a representative group of groceries (a resultant of the general situation observed in the Internet). However, the analysis does not include all aspects of the phenomenon. Certain aspects were not tested in the study: physical completion of the delivery or the quality of the customer service during direct contact with a customer. For the sake of the analysis the experts accumulated the list of items for purchase in the examined shops; however, the orders were not fulfilled. The analysis is based exclusively on the information presented on the websites of particular shops. The number of shops in the segment is increasing constantly. It may be seen e.g. in outdoor advertising. For example, from November 2009 to January 2010 in Warsaw there appeared advertisements e.g. of Bomi supermarket and Kmdelikatesy. The advertising campaign was markedly intensified in the Christmas period. The shops try to reach target audience also through traditional marketing channels. For example, Frisco.pl used such tools. A visitor to a website registered in a shop for the sake of the analysis. After a few weeks an employee of Frisco contacted the user who was registered but did not make a purchase asking about the reason of not ordering the goods. Frisco also offered a gift for a new customer when placing the first order. The fact confirms the following assumption: there are two leaders on the market of groceries in Warsaw – Frisco, pl and Alma24, pl. Undoubtedly, in both cases the main advantages are clear graphics, efficient mechanisms of ordering goods and the product range. Admittedly, Frisco.pl has a certain disadvantage: the designers of the website concentrated more on the visual side of the website, whereas functionality (mainly prices) is not equally developed. Nevertheless, it does not change the opinion that probably these leaders will set trends of the quality of navigation and stylistics of the websites in the future; these shops will probably be the ones that may be expected to implement new functionalities on the website.

Each of the analyzed shops possessed certain features which made it stand out among other websites. In the case of hipernet24.pl it was the widest product range. E-piotripawel.pl received the best scores for "product descriptions" and "payment options" categories (the same applies to Alma24.pl). Undoubtedly, Internet shops have a greater possibility to adapt to individual customer's needs than high street

shops. It is interesting to speculate what direction the development will take and how the offer will be improved. IT, broadly defined, offers a possibility to apply mechanisms of predicting and suggesting customer orders (enhanced mechanisms of making orders), creating mechanisms finding products which perfectly match the customer's profile with regard to his/her income, general outlook (e.g. Eco products), favourite brand (an offer is better adapted to the needs of the client), etc. Wide adoption of Internet sales channel proves how profitable such enterprise can be: this kind of activity is interesting for both small companies which started their business with one conventional shop in the form of sole proprietorship (e.g. Piotr i Paweł delicatessen, which later on developed into a chain of shops, Kmdelikatesy – local delicatessen) and large corporations, such as Zasada Group which owns Frisco.pl. This form of sales is also attractive for traditional chain of shops such as E. Leclerc, operating in the Internet using Hipernet24.pl.

Thus, in the nearest future we may observe a rapid growth of the activity of such type. Changes which occur in the society are conducive to the development – more and more people work longer hours and they do not have enough time to do shopping. It concerns mainly young, educated and wealthy people, who are well acquainted with modern Internet tools and they fulfil the criterion described above. Additionally, we may assume that the recent trend towards modernity is another aspect in reinforcing the tendency.

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ANALIZA I OCENA WYBRANYCH INTERNETOWYCH SKLEPÓW SPOŻYWCZYCH

Streszczenie: Celem niniejszego artykułu jest charakterystyka internetowych witryn sklepów spożywczych i ich ocena pod kątem użyteczności dla potencjalnego klienta. Na początku artykułu autor przedstawił charakterystykę sektora spożywczego w Internecie oraz podstawowe założenia metodyczne badania. Następnie przeprowadził badania oceny stron internetowych metodą punktową i metodą punktową ze skalą preferencji. Zanalizowano i porównano uzyskane wyniki.