
The Role of Selected Themes and Formats in Social Media Marketing Communication of CSR Activities

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Abstract:

Purpose: The adoption of sustainability efforts by organisations, which respect people and the environment, has become standard. Nowadays, great importance is attached to the marketing communication of these activities - so that it is authentic and at the same time consistent with the overall marketing strategy. That effects in selection of themes and formats, which were particularly crucial in the undertaken research. Presentation of its results is the purpose of this article.

Design/Methodology/Approach: The authors chose large companies in Poland because of their commitment to helping Ukraine and their overall high level of implementation of CSR solutions. In order to realize the research objective, authors used a netnographic study focused on activities within social media of selected enterprises.

Findings: The results of the research include CSR communication matrix of: pro-environmental and pro-social activities, static and dynamic formats, local and global content, product and non-product posts. These results will update and complement the existing knowledge and will serve practitioners in undertaking future activities in the area of CSR-related marketing communication.

Practical Implications: Employees of large enterprises responsible for content publication on social media platforms should primarily focus on publishing non-product content related to CSR and strive for a balanced approach between environmentally friendly and socially oriented communication.

Originality/value: The presented article highlights the trends arising from the 2022 published content of corporate social responsibility (CSR) on social media platforms by the top large companies in Poland from the Responsible Companies Report. An analysis of marketing communication also pays attention to the communicative aspects related to the ongoing war in Ukraine in terms of assistance provided by companies operating in Poland.

Keywords: Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR), social media, communication.

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Paper Type: Research study.

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1. Introduction

Over the past few years, there has been a significant research interest and consequently a large number of academic publications on Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) in the advertising, marketing and management literature (Chu, Chen, and Gan, 2020). Market research confirms that customers are interested in the pro-social activities of companies (Baskentli *et al.*, 2019). They reward these organisations through more frequent purchases and other 'pro-firm' behaviours, such as brand loyalty.

Given the above, CSR is no longer just a moral imperative, but increasingly a business imperative (Baskentli *et al.*, 2019). This is a consequence of top-down regulations, including EU Directive 2014/95/EU, which requires large companies to publish reports on non-financial activities, including environmental and social issues (Krzysztofek, 2016). It is important to mention that the communication of CSR activities is a company-generated perspective (Chu, Chen, and Gan, 2020).

Corporate CSR is an issue area eagerly addressed by Polish and foreign scholars. Foreign literature includes studies linking the sphere of social media and CSR, such as: the relationship between publishing CSR information on social media and company performance (Abbas *et al.*, 2019), strategies for communicating CSR activities on social media (Cho, Furey, and Mohr, 2017), elements of CSR messages on social media (Saxton *et al.*, 2019), the impact of CSR messages on corporate reputation (Grover *et al.*, 2019), and consumer engagement with CSR communication on social media (Chu, Chen, and Gan, 2020).

However, few undertake qualitative research - those published so far include: storytelling elements in CSR messages on social media (Araujo and Kollat, 2018), co-creation of socially responsible actions with social media message audiences (Okazaki *et al.*, 2020), social media rules and regulations and their impact on limiting CSR messages (Stohl *et al.*, 2017), social media branding of employers as socially responsible (Benitez *et al.*, 2020).

Polish publications that address similar issues can also be mentioned. They concern, for example: building bilateral relations between stakeholders and the company with the application of social media in the aspect of CSR activities in the field of sport (Gajek and Pawlak, 2016), shaping the image of the organisation by means of communicating CSR activities in social media (Mazur-Wierzbicka, 2021), CSR value of pharmaceutical companies (Dryl, 2018), benefits of using CSR announcements in social media (Leoński, 2016; Proszowska, 2013).

Therefore, this article undertaking a qualitative netnographic study on the social media marketing communications of large companies in Poland will fill the research gap and update the knowledge on the topics of CSR and social media.

2. Literature Review

2.1 The Importance of Corporate Social Responsibility

Many definitions of Corporate Social Responsibility have been formulated over the years. Their multiplicity results from the interdisciplinary nature of the problem, as it concerns not only management or marketing sciences, but also psychology and ethics.

CSR refers to the social, environmental and ethical responsibilities of companies formed as a result of their economic, commercial and operational activities (Contrafatto *et al.*, 2019). The European Commission's Green Paper mentions that companies voluntarily choose to participate in creating a better society and a cleaner environment (Sheng *et al.*, 2022).

The International Organisation for Standardization has introduced the ISO 26000 standard, according to which a company's socially responsible activities for society and the environment should be transparent and ethical, contributing to a sustainable society (Kaźmierczak and Zapłata, 2021). The World Business Council for Sustainable Development highlights the need for ongoing efforts contributing a sustainable economic development as a result of improved quality of life for employees and their families, as well as the local community and society as a whole (Riano and Yakovleva, 2019).

The scope and nature of CSR activities in a given country is shaped by cultural values, the economic and political system, and the stage of development (including economic development), and therefore it is necessary to diversify these activities and related messages into target markets (Matten and Moon, 2008). The growing interest in the CSR concept in Poland emerged after the 2008 financial crisis. The existing economic structures in Poland, after years of turbulent history, allow the necessary social needs to be met, consequently creating a basis for the CSR concept.

However, the socio-political situation does not positively influence the development of CSR in Poland, as the country remains one of the EU countries with limited water and strategic resources, the economy is coal-based, resulting in high carbon emissions, and infrastructure is still being developed. For many Polish companies, raising funds to pay employees or develop and resolve conflicts with authorities is still the main problem. As a result, promoting sustainable consumption or use of natural resources remains difficult and a long-term approach remains for many unattainable.

However, more and more Polish companies are paying attention to the benefits arising from the implementation of Corporate Social Responsibility in their long-term strategies and are voluntarily disclosing their activities (Dyduch and Krasodomska, 2017).

CSR activities can be divided into the following categories (Chojnacka, 2013; Czajkowska, 2020):

- market (e.g., respecting consumer rights and applying basic ethical principles),
- workplace (e.g., respecting workers' rights and creating safety rules at the workplace),
- local communities (e.g., employee volunteering and supporting local initiatives),
- environment (e.g., reducing emissions and efficient use of natural resources and electricity).

Corporate Social Responsibility in practice has two dimensions: internal and external. The first refers to (Leśna-Wierszołowicz, 2016):

- human resource management (e.g., employee equality, fair pay),
- ethics programs for employees (e.g., ethics training),
- occupational health and safety (e.g., various forms of health care for employees not required by the labour code),
- adaptability to change (e.g., employment flexibility and dismissal rules),
- the environmental impact of the company (e.g., reducing consumption of natural resources and reducing negative environmental impact),
- company corporate governance principles (e.g., transparency of information).

The external dimension refers to (Leśna-Wierszołowicz, 2016):

- positive impact on the local community (e.g., creating jobs for people with disabilities, employee volunteering),
- relationships with business partners, suppliers and customers (e.g., providing environmentally and human-safe products to the market or meeting deadlines in payments and deliveries),
- respect for human rights (e.g., providing equal opportunities and not employing children),
- care for the environment (e.g., use of green energy).

The benefits of implementing socially responsible activities are long-term, but postponed in time. These include (Leśna-Wierszołowicz, 2016; Ocieczek, Gajdzik, and Kuczyńska-Chałada, 2011; Wołkowicka and Dąbrowski, 2012):

- enhancing the company's image and building it as socially responsible,
- creating new business opportunities as a result of investor interest (including easier entry into new markets and use of innovative solutions),
- ensuring stability and understanding in the community, better perception of

- the company as an employer,
- increasing the level of organisational culture,
- synergies between the company and its environment through positive internal and external communication.

Businesses can communicate and interact with their stakeholders from anywhere at any time using the Internet and social media (Chen, Fay, and Wang, 2011). In times of technology advancement, there are many tools through which companies share knowledge and create content, consequently driving higher profits. Social media develops business networks and relationships, resulting in reduced running costs and a stronger competitive business environment (Gaganis, Pasiouras, and Voulgari, 2019; Abbas *et al.*, 2019).

2.2 Marketing Communication in Social Media

Companies in the 21st century are characterized by a very dynamic implementation of innovations (Kotler and Keller, 2017). One of these is the adaptation of activities relevant to the digital age, which means: new business models, profit sources, innovations and ways to compete or improve operational management, new methods of talent and customer management, and new performance metrics (Świerczyńska-Kaczor, 2012).

These activities also require the use of digital media, which can be defined as various paid communication channels to reach and engage audiences - they include advertising, email and instant messaging, search engines and social media (Chaffey, 2016). In this article, the focus is on the last of these.

Social media are variously defined. Among the frequently quoted explanations is the one belonging to Kaplan and Haenlein (Kaplan and Haenlein, 2010). According to them, social media are a group of web-based applications based on the ideological and technological foundations of Web 2.0, which enable the creation and exchange of user-generated content. According to Kotler and Keller (2017), on the other hand, social media is a medium that allows users to post, share and receive text, images, audio and video content from others. The theories presented here focus specifically on the technological aspect.

However, due to the nature of the article, this article is closer to the Polish author's definition, which also takes into account the social aspect. According to her, social media is a form of information transfer that takes place via websites or applications operating on the Internet, within communities and created by their users (Polańska, 2011).

The use of social media is growing year after year. Currently, they are used by 4.76 billion users worldwide - more than 3% than last year. It is worth noting that users spend an average of almost 2.5 hours a day in this way, and the most popular

platforms are (Digital 2023: Global..., 2023), Facebook (FB), YouTube (YT), WhatsApp, Instagram (IG). However, when it comes to the most used platforms by organisations, these include Facebook and Instagram.

The social media market in Poland reaching 27.50 million people (Digital 2023: Poland..., 2023). The reason for the widespread popularity can be attributed to the numerous benefits that arise both on the side of users using private fan pages on SM and on the side of businesses using business fan pages. For the first group, these include opportunities related to (Digital 2023: Global..., 2023):

- keeping in touch with family and friends,
- filling free time,
- reading news stories,
- finding content,
- seeing what is being talked about.

With reference to the business perspective, social media has benefits related mainly to (Kotler and Keller, 2017; 2022; Social Media..., 2022):

- redirection to online shopping,
- increased exposure and traffic,
- increased sales,
- developing a loyal community,
- gaining customer information,
- stimulating business innovation.

To conclude, two-way communication is possible through social media and there are many advantages that encourage users and companies to use it, including marketing communication. It is an interactive exchange of messages between a company and its external and internal environment and aims to manage the demand for the company's offer and to shape a favourable image of the offer or its provider (Wiktor; 2013).

3. Research Methodology

The aim of this article is to present the results of a research study on CSR in the marketing communication of large companies in Poland. The authors chose large companies in Poland because of their commitment to helping Ukraine and their overall high level of implementation of CSR solutions. The following research questions were formulated:

- How do large companies in Poland communicate CSR activities on social media?
- Does social media marketing communication include more:

- pro-environmental or pro-social themes,
- static or dynamic formats,
- local or global content,
- product or non-product posts?

A netnographic study focused on social media marketing activities implemented by major Polish different types of companies selected from the Responsible Companies Report. Each of companies scored 96 points in the overall combined ranking (Ranking Odpowiedzialnych Firm, 2022). The study focused on their social media marketing communications throughout 2022.

4. Research Results and Discussion

ING Bank Polski's activities were definitely the most extensive among the companies analysed. They used the following communication channels: Facebook, Instagram, YouTube, Twitter, LinkedIn. The content was diverse for each platform, with the majority of publications dedicated to the chosen placement and thus taking into account the characteristics of that channel.

Facebook has played a very important role in the communication of CSR activities by ING. A variety of both dynamic and static forms of posts were published here. The numerous user and company discussions that emerged in response to the content suggest that one of the channel's main objectives was to engage the community around ING.

Communications including the following themes were found on Facebook:

- ING Grant Program - communication of a competition for start-ups and researchers - content was met with qualitative audience engagement and comments with positive sentiment.
- ING for eco - a series of videos with influencer Karol Wojcicki on pro-environmental activities undertaken by ING, e.g., eco-volunteering, green bank buildings - apart from numerous views, the publications were accompanied by qualitative engagement, but some comments had a negative sentiment
- Support for Ukraine - posts about facilities introduced by ING, e.g., free bank transfers to Ukraine - content distinguished by numerous reactions (more than 2,000) and comments (several hundred) and positive sentiment of commentators' statements.
- Occasion based marketing posts - referring to occasions, usually in the form of titbits, including communication of pro-social and pro-environmental activities, including the original Zero Waste Map, communication of an online game with an environmental theme and product communication - content was not particularly popular among the audience.
- Special events - publications about ING's participation in various events

organised by it or in which it was a patron or sponsor, including CSR aspects, e.g., a stand full of ecological gadgets at a music festival or Career Days for students - the content was not particularly interesting for the audience.

- Eco-loan - product communication regarding the offer of a loan for the purchase of ecological goods - content did not stand out in terms of particular interest among viewers.

On YouTube, a communication including the following topics was posted:

- What is economic, is ecological! - a series of product videos placed in a CSR context, inspiring product communication activities - each video had around 11-16k views. Other videos: 16k v., 12k v.
- Working at ING - a series of videos on good working conditions in the organisation, e.g., presentation of selected results of an employee survey - the best viewed videos had over 100k views.
- Zero Waste - videos related to the Zero Waste Map, including one featuring Katarzyna Nosowska, which received around 21,000 views.
- In the rhythm of zero waste | Katarzyna Nosowska | ING Bank Śląski - Mapa Zero Waste - 21 thousand impressions / 89 likes.
- ING for eco - a series of films with influencer Karol Wójcicki on pro-environmental activities undertaken by ING, e.g. eco-volunteering, green bank buildings the films with the highest number of views received more than 180,000.

Another channel used to communicate CSR activities is Instagram. In the case of ING in 2022, it acted as an additional marketing communication placement, but did not engage the community to the same extent as FB. It included the following themes: Map Zero Waste - differently than on Facebook because in the form of static posts, the activities of the ING Children's Foundation, support for Ukraine and ING's participation in a music festival.

Communication on Twitter can be considered analogous - as an additional positioning of content, such as: posts taken from and referring to the blog, including the series Because what's economic is ecological!, as well as: support for Ukraine, communication of pro-environmental solutions, information about the educational program. We Save the World, in which ING was a strategic partner, and a post about the award of the HR Highest Quality certificate.

ING also communicates on LinkedIn. Posts about CSR within this platform were distinguished from others by detailed descriptions of specific solutions implemented at the company - this included indicating financial data or cooperating companies. As with the previous platforms, information on support for Ukraine was the most popular among the audience, one of posts received more than 2,000 reactions.

The following were also published: the ING for EKO series, e.g., financial support for the construction of photovoltaic power plants, water recycling - the content received 35-100 reactions; ING Foundation for Children campaigns, e.g., Kindergartens of Tomorrow - 75 reactions; the Zero Waste Map - 42 reactions; a music festival - 56 reactions; as well as individual content with low community engagement, e.g. information on the Grant Program, the 18th Sosnowiec Sports Olympics for children and young people with disabilities and other local initiatives.

In the case of Orange Polska, the most intensively used communication channels for CSR activities were Facebook, Twitter and LinkedIn. Within the first of these, the following topics were covered:

- Support for Ukraine - communication of activities such as reduced call prices or better cross-border network connection - similarly to the ING posts, these were the most popular posts, e.g., one of the posts received 8,200 reactions, and also the most commented with positive sentiment, e.g. one of the posts received 631 comments.
- Orange Goes Green - a series of posts about the company's green solutions, e.g., e-invoicing, the forest planting initiative or Green Week - the content received a lot of qualitative engagement as comments - remarkably, there were usually many more comments than reactions, e.g., 635 comments compared to 42 reactions. However, many user discussions had a negative sentiment.
- Product communication - content on environmentally friendly accessories or refurbished smartphones
- Pro-social activities: series of posts about online training for seniors - also in the form of Facebook events or an educational program for schools. The content did not meet with particularly high customer engagement.

On Twitter, communication mostly referred to content published on the Orange Polska press office's website subpage. Topics that appeared here were:

- Orange Goes Green - a series of posts including, for example, receiving an Environmental Management System certificate, the use of photovoltaic panels.
- Support for Ukraine - content enjoyed high user engagement, e.g. 1,000 likes.
- Pro-environmental actions - content on smaller environmental actions, e.g., introduction of eatable plants in Orange offices.
- Local activities, e.g., city bikes in Szczecin.
- Product communication - EKO GB - donation of unused GB per m² of forest
- Climate protection declaration.

Apart from the topic of Ukraine, the content did not stand out in terms of audience interest. Customers engagement on LinkedIn was similar - a post on support for Ukraine received 100 reactions, while other CSR communication received a maximum of 90. The few comments that appeared under the topic of sustainability had a positive sentiment.

What distinguishes Orange Polska from other companies is that it had very diverse communication within LinkedIn, both pro-social and pro-environmental, used a variety of formats: both static, dynamic and linkposts, and used hashtags to mark posts communicating larger CSR campaigns. Topics featured on LinkedIn included:

- Orange Goes Green - a cycle analogous to Facebook's, the most responses were associated with a post about receiving an Environmental Management System Certificate, there were 90.
- Blood donation campaign.
- Woman Update social campaign.
- Yoga classes for employees in the Orange Town in Warsaw.
- 'Knowledge has no gender' campaign.

Orange also used YouTube in its marketing communication, with posts about workshops for senior citizens on how to use new technologies on Facebook and posts about its support for Ukraine on Instagram.

The last company analysed was DB Schenker, which had local marketing communication on Facebook and Instagram. The first channel was the primary placement and selected posts were later copied on the second platform.

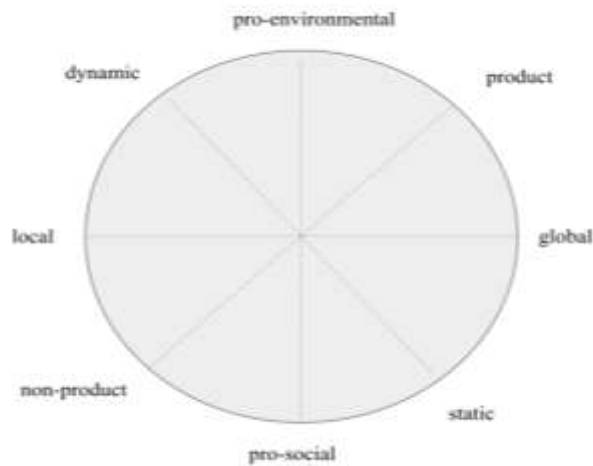
Thus, the content analysis was based on Facebook, where the following topics were covered:

- Meeting for employees with their families - content did not feature notably among the viewers.
- Planting a forest for employees and their families - a series of posts in the form of an album or a single graphic - one of the posts received 90 reactions.
- 150 years of elevating lives: a series of posts, e.g. on RES energy, which received 76 reactions and 21 comments, on the Sopot tennis club, which received 111 reactions and 2 comments, on the social action on driving after drinking, which received 56 reactions and 2 comments. The series also included a product post about zero-emission services.
- Time to help - communication of actions for animals - there was a variety of content here, but the most popular was a static post with a symbolic depiction of a dog's paw, with 591 reactions, 18 comments and 22 shares.
- Support for Ukraine - content received varying levels of engagement, e.g. 151 reactions, 4 comments.

DB Schenker's communication also included a video summary of the year, other pro-environmental activities, e.g., the introduction of sustainable air fuel, a world clean-up campaign, as well as pro-social activities, e.g., a campaign on mental health care for employees.

In summary, ING, Orange and DB Schenker made intensive use of social media marketing in 2022 to communicate CSR activities. Therefore, the above analysis has answered the first research question. In order to complete the analysis and answer the second research question, the authors of this text have created a dedicated matrix of social media marketing communication towards CSR activities - Figure 1.

Figure 1. *Social media marketing communication matrix*



Source: *Own elaboration.*

As a result of the analysis of the selected three companies' social media activities, the distribution of communication was located as shown in Figure 2, where ING Bank is marked in orange, Orange Poland in pink and DB Schenker in blue.

The analysis shows a diverse approach of large companies in Poland to the communication of CSR activities within social media. All companies attempted to balance pro-environmental and pro-social communication, but a slight predominance of the first was noted in ING Bank Polski and DB Schenker.

These two organisations mainly used dynamic formats - in contrast to Orange Polska, whose communication was mostly based on static graphics. The communication of ING Bank Polski and Orange Polska had a strong local dimension.

Figure 2. Social media marketing communication matrix of ING Bank, Orange Poland, DB Schenker



Source: Own elaboration.

The situation was different for DB Schenker, which had a strong global presence on its social media, which seems logical considering its industry. What seems most relevant to this analysis is the overwhelming predominance of non-product content in CSR communication on social media. Companies have taken care to ensure that the majority of sustainability posts are not linked to product communication encouraging the purchase of a product or service, presumably to enhance the authenticity of the organisation's sincere intention to care for the environment.

5. Conclusions, Proposals, Recommendations

The research undertaken for this paper confirms the validity of the use of social media marketing in CSR communication by large companies in Poland. It presents the topics covered by three leading companies in conducting CSR activities. The theme of support for Ukraine played here a significant role. Notably, these publications were the ones with which consumers were particularly positively and qualitatively engaged.

As a result of the whole analysis, an original communication matrix was created with a comparison of the marketing activities undertaken by the companies. It shows predominance of non-product social media content related to CSR and a balance between pro-environmental and pro-social communication.

Thus, the study fills a research gap and can also serve practitioners in making decisions about the communication of CSR activities in their organisations. This qualitative study is a first step for further exploration.

On the basis of this analysis, it can be presumed that good practices in CSR communication include maintaining a balance between pro-environmental and pro-social themes and keeping a predominance of non-product content. The next step, therefore, will be to examine the correlation and actual impact of this communication on corporate performance.

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