

## МАРКЕТИНГОВІ КОМУНІКАЦІЙНІ СТРАТЕГІЇ ПОЛЬСЬКИХ ПІДПРИЄМСТВ НА РИНКАХ ЄВРОПЕЙСЬКОГО СОЮЗУ (ВИБРАНІ АСПЕКТИ)

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**Ключові слова:** маркетингові комунікації, міжнародний маркетинг.

## MARKETING COMMUNICATION STRATEGIES OF POLISH ENTERPRISES IN EU MARKETS (CHOSEN ASPECTS)

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Development of business operations in international markets cannot happen without marketing communications as prerequisite for acquiring and maintaining successful business relationships. Polish enterprises focus on communication with institutional stakeholders. While relatively narrow in their tool choice, those processes take advantage of new media, adapt well to local conditions and stages in relationships with partners, and produce satisfactory level of effectiveness.

**Key words:** marketing communications, international marketing.

**Problem formulation.** The EU markets are the most frequent destination of the Polish enterprises that engage in economic activity abroad. The data collected by Poland's Central Statistical Office show 76.5% of Polish exports and 57% of Polish imports to be associated with the Community countries [1]. In order to be able to compete in the EU markets successfully, Polish businesses must take the right marketing actions with the key role to be played by a marketing communication strategy understood as a comprehensive method of selecting communication tools and channels, defining media forms and content, and making possible the achievement of goals [2, p. 220]. In fact, marketing communications of enterprises that actively pursue international markets is considered to be one of the most important factors in building and maintaining relationships with customers and other market entities. Its distinctive feature, in contrast to domestic marketing communications, is complexity resulting from the need to integrate many additional factors, especially of legal and culture-related nature. The issue of marketing communications of Polish companies in the EU markets generates a significant number of research questions concerning e.g. the stakeholders that take part in the communication process, the tools of communicating with those entities, the extent of standardization or adaptation of marketing communication practices, the impact of new media and of the relationship marketing concept on marketing communications, and the marketing communication effectiveness.

**Analysis of current research output and publications.** Businesses functioning in the modern economy, which constitutes a network of relationships and dependencies, need to collaborate with various entities in their environment. This problem is recognized by the marketing relationship concept and, within its framework, by the marketing communication theory [3, p. 13]. One may even say, after T. Duncan and

S.E. Moriarty, that relationships cannot be established without communication [4]. Marketing communications, then, should be looked upon as a set of activities that the enterprise employs to convey, in various ways and forms, its presence and market offer, as well as those activities that are intended to collect and report customer feedback in response to the enterprise's communication efforts [5, p. 21]. The activities in question should be of interdependent nature thus allowing one to perceive marketing communications as a unique form of dialogue taking place between the enterprise, on the one hand, and its current and potential customers and other stakeholder groups, on the other. It is a dialogue that gains intensity with the widespread use of new C&IT technologies by companies and consumers alike. The concept of marketing communications in international markets, beside its similarities to management objectives, means and process, reveals substantial differences that rise out of its being a particular form of an "intercultural meeting" between the enterprise and particular stakeholders abroad [6, p. 281]. Intercultural marketing is especially affected by 'cultural context', a term that refers to the set of conditions in which communication takes place [6, p. 282-287; 7, p. 243-244; 8, pp. 81-85]. The fact that marketing communications of businesses pursuing international ventures occurs at a point where different cultures come into contact has a major influence on many of its aspects, among them on standardization or adaptation of communication practices to the specific requirements of international markets. In most cases, communication doesn't respond well to standardization attempts, because countries' cultural diversity makes it necessary to adjust communicative messages to the local target. One can observe here the following relationship "the larger the differences between national and international markets (...), the more diverse the messages and communication channels pursued locally and abroad. Moreover, increasing diversification of the international markets in which a company does its business corresponds to a reduced capacity for coordinating and standardizing its promotion across countries, while the adaptation of communication processes to local markets gains in importance. (...) It should also be noted that the more distinct and established the international image of a product (brand) and its producer, the higher the chance of and the stronger the need for standardizing its further promotion." [7, p. 244 & 258, own translation]. This is also closely related to the company's involvement in the subsequent stages of internationalization. Many a times, it will at first concentrate on forced adaptation and, later, with the growth of its international experience and ability to define a sufficiently large number of segments with similar consumer expectations, the company will find it possible to standardize promotion internationally [9, p. 22-24]. The literature on the subject contains descriptions of the basic premises for standardizing or adapting marketing communications to local conditions [6, p. 293; 7, p. 254-258; 10, p. 24-31].

**Article objectives.** The aim of the article is to present chosen aspects of how Polish firms behave in terms of communicating with their stakeholders in the EU markets. In particular, it aims to identify the following: 1) entities that take part in the marketing communication process of Polish businesses, 2) tools of communicating with customers and other stakeholders, including those needed for conducting dialogue and building long-term relationships, 3) the way of conduct with respect to standardization and adaptation of marketing communications, and 4) managers' opinions of how effective Polish businesses are in their marketing communications in the EU markets.

The article is based on the outcomes of a direct research carried out in 2012 using the purposive sample of 243 preselected enterprises from the region of Upper Silesia (the Silesian voivodship) operating in the EU markets. The sample was dominated by small and medium enterprises of mixed economic profile (production-trading-services) with the international sales volume reaching up to 25% of their total turnover.

**Presentation of main materials. Stakeholders in the marketing communication process.** A company's market success depends on a large number of people and entities to be found in its market environment. That is why a company should communicate with all of the stakeholders present in its environment. The research findings show, however, that Polish businesses in the EU markets usually communicate with intermediaries (see Table 1).

### Stakeholders in the marketing communication process in EU markets

Specification	%*
Individual customers (consumers)	40.7
Institutional customers	50.2
Marketing intermediaries (wholesalers, retailers)	64.6
Suppliers	56.8
Society	7.4
Other entities	0.4

\*results do not add up to 100

Source: own compilation.

Collaboration with a local agent shifts the risk and costs of sales abroad as well as marketing duties, including marketing communications, from the company to the intermediary. This type of behavior is characteristic of enterprises with a low level of internationalization and little experience in foreign markets. On the other hand, companies with more international experience and stronger involvement in the internationalization process engage in direct communication with their customers more frequently. The research indicates the prevalence of direct contact among B2B companies over B2C businesses, i.e. 50.2% and 40.7% respectively. International markets are for many firms not only a selling place, but also a considerable source of supplies. Hence, a vital group of stakeholders in the marketing communication process is constituted by suppliers. Among the remaining groups, only a country's society stands out as a stakeholder in the marketing communication process. Still, it was indicated by no more than 7% of the companies surveyed.

**Marketing communication tools.** Effectiveness of marketing communications will depend on a number of factors, including the correct choice of tools. The research outcomes point to the most frequently used instruments of marketing communications that target the four major groups of end-users. A comparative analysis shows similarities and differences in those toolkits. Regardless of the target, broadly conceived Internet marketing is the most frequently used communication tool (see Table 2). It should be noted though that online advertising is common in targeting customers, especially individual clients, and somewhat less popular in addressing agents and suppliers. Other important marketing communication tools used in the B2C market are: print advertising (48.5% responses), press advertising (42.4%) and trade fairs and exhibitions (41.4%). As for the other three groups of end-users, one can notice a substantially reduced significance of mass communications. Outside online advertising, firms most often use opportunities that help put them in direct contact with the target and formulate individual messages, namely trade shows and exhibitions as well as personal presentations.

In communicating with institutional customers and sales agents, firms value print materials, such as brochures, catalogues and flyers. Sales promotions work especially well with the second group.

Table 2 reveals a significant number of marketing tools that are employed by Polish enterprises in their EU market operations. However, their diversity is no match for the abundance in the national market. This situation can be traced, on the one hand, to budget limitations, and on the other, to the limited targeting of individual end-users internationally, while it is the B2C market that benefits most from the available communication tools.

Nowadays, marketing communications has become a place of dynamic growth in the application of new media, such as web pages, electronic mail, social media and online advertising. The research shows that 69.1% of the surveyed companies consider new forms of communication to be more effective than the traditional ones. Among these new forms much attention has been paid to social networking, and yet, it is rarely used by Polish companies in their marketing communications abroad. Only a quarter of the surveyed enterprises do so. Many firms (61.7%) use different tools depending on the particular stage of relationship with their partners. Usually, during the initial phase of acquiring a business relation, companies use the more traditional, one-way forms of communication. These are succeeded by more interactive situations as the relationship continues and turns into a long-term one. Communication at this point becomes clearly bilateral, interactive, regular and characterized by widespread use of new technologies. Building long-term

relations with other market entities is associated with the diminishing role of mass communications and the expansion of individualized communication processes.

Table 2

**Marketing communication tools used to target customers, agents and suppliers (%\*)**

Tool type	Marketing communication end-users			
	Individual customers	Institutional customers	Agents	Suppliers
1. TV advertising	14.1	1.6	1.3	0.7
2. Press advertising	42.4	20.5	11.5	8.7
3. Radio advertising	15.1	2.5	0.6	1.4
4. Direct mail advertising	12.1	13.9	11.5	7.9
5. Print advertising (flyers, brochures)	48.5	39.3	35.0	26.1
6. Online advertising (web pages, e-mail)	100.0	90.2	72.6	71.0
7. Mobile phone advertising	7.1	7.3	8.9	6.5
8. Outdoor advertising (billboard, mobile ads)	26.3	11.4	10.8	10.8
9. Point of sale advertising (POS)	21.2	4.1	10.2	5.8
10. Sales promotions for wholesalers	12.1	15.6	42.7	12.3
11. Sales promotions for retailers	19.2	4.9	17.2	6.5
12. Sales promotions for consumers (contests, sampling)	19.2	3.3	4.5	3.6
13. Personal presentations	26.2	42.6	31.2	30.4
14. Trade shows and exhibitions	41.4	61.5	52.2	48.6
15. Sponsored articles in foreign press	13.1	11.5	11.5	5.1
16. Press conference	7.1	6.6	3.2	3.6
17. Interviews in foreign media	7.1	4.9	3.2	2.9
18. Marketing events	14.1	16.4	9.6	6.5
19. Sponsorship of cultural events	17.2	12.3	5.7	5.1
20. Sponsorship of sports events	16.2	11.5	7.0	5.8
21. Charity work	11.1	12.3	7.6	5.8
22. Viral or word-of-mouth marketing	13.1	8.2	11.4	14.5

results do not add up to 100

Source: own compilation

**Diversification in marketing communications.** As far as the diversification of marketing communications is concerned, enterprises follow strategies of standardization and adaptation. Almost half of the surveyed entities rely solely on the adaptation strategy convinced that the differences among the EU markets make it impossible to succeed with standardized communication. On the other hand, about a fifth of the respondents go down the line of full standardization in their marketing activities in the EU countries. First, they do not view the markets to differ significantly from one to another, and second, the cost of adapting their communications can be many a times unaffordable. Approximately 30% of the surveyed companies employ one strategy or another depending on the target country and stakeholders. Dealing with culturally related countries and institutional entities creates better standardization opportunities from the point of view of economic profits and the company’s identity or image.

Table 3

**Marketing communication strategies used in EU markets**

Specification	%
Standardization strategy	21.0
Adaptation strategy	48.6
Either strategy depending on end-users or country	30.4

Source: own compilation.

**Effectiveness of marketing communications.** More than 63% of the respondents encounter many problems when communicating internationally. Frequently, these can be attributed to the insufficient amount of direct contact (60.3%). It turns out electronic messaging cannot totally replace direct communication. Another frequent problem is posed by the language barrier (59.4%). Lacking essential foreign language skills can seriously hinder communication with stakeholders. Nearly half of all respondents suffer from funding constraints (49.7%) that limit the scope of their marketing activity in international markets. Notably fewer difficulties are caused by negative, irrational or inaccurate stereotypes concerning nationality, country, company and products (27.7%) or cultural barriers (21.9%). Relatively minor issues occur due to the unethical conduct of stakeholders (8.4%), legal barriers (4.5%) and technological circumstances (7.1%). Regardless of these problems, the majority of surveyed business representatives (60%) consider the effectiveness of their international marketing communications to be satisfactory, of which 8.6% regard it as definitely satisfactory. Only 5.7% see it as definitely or rather unsatisfactory. About a third of the respondents could not decide whether their marketing communications in the EU markets was satisfactory or not, which leads one to a conclusion that many firms do not verify the effectiveness of their marketing communication pursuits and have little appreciation for their role in maintaining long-term relationships with business partners abroad.

**Conclusions and perspectives for future research.** Both, entering a foreign market and maintaining a long-term presence there require on the part of an enterprise considerable skills in marketing communications, the role of which cannot be reduced to transmitting information, but should serve the purpose of developing lasting relationships with customers and other stakeholders. Polish enterprises active in the EU markets focus in their marketing communications on institutional stakeholders, most of them being agents and suppliers. A lesser role of customers, especially individual clients, translates into a more limited application of marketing tools than it happens in the case of domestic market. Further constraints can be considered a result of funding limitations and of pursuing a relatively costly adaptation strategy. In their choice of marketing communication tools, enterprises think of the current phase of their business relationships. The initial period of acquiring a partner is usually marked by the use of traditional forms of communication, whereas the subsequent phases are dominated by bilateral, individualized and regular communication processes taking place with the extensive help of new media. The majority of the surveyed companies consider the effectiveness of their marketing communications in the EU to be satisfactory, but few regard it as definitely satisfactory, which can be seen as a consequence of funding constraints and language barriers. Less significant are cultural differences or negative stereotypes of a country, a company or its products. This, in turn, can be seen as an indication of the improving reputation of Polish economy and companies abroad as well as of their better orientation in the European economic and cultural area. Further research should be devoted to the issues of standardization and adaptation of marketing communications of Polish enterprises in the EU markets.

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