MARKETING COMMUNICATION IN THE CONTEXT OF SOCIAL RESPONSIBILITY OF PUBLIC ADMINISTRATION

KOMUNIKACJA MARKETINGOWA W KONTEKŚCIE SPOŁECZNEJ ODPOWIEDZIALNOŚCI ADMINISTRACJI PUBLICZNEJ
Abstract: The main focus of the article is to indicate the role of marketing communication in the context of social responsibility of public administration. The objective is to analyse selected forms and tools of marketing communication of Local Government Units. The communication conducted by local authorities should stimulate civic activity in public matters which is necessary for the proper management process in local government units. The more active the citizens are, the greater the chance to strengthen the resources of municipalities. These deliberations are based on the authors' experience, supported by the analysis of literature.

Keywords: public administration, social responsibility of public administration, marketing communication, social activity of citizens

Streszczenie: Głównym celem artykułu jest wskazanie roli komunikacji marketingowej w kontekście społecznej odpowiedzialności administracji publicznej. Celem jest analiza wybranych form i narzędzi komunikacji marketingowej jednostek samorządu terytorialnego. Komunikacja prowadzona przez władze lokalne powinna stymułować aktywność obywatelską w sprawach publicznych, która jest niezbędna dla właściwego procesu zarządzania w jednostkach samorządu terytorialnego. Im bardziej aktywni są obywatele, tym większa szansa na wzmocnienie zasobów gmin. Artykuł opiera się na doświadczeniu autorów, popartym analizą literatury.

Słowa kluczowe: public administration, administracja publiczna, społeczna odpowiedzialność administracji publicznej, komunikacja marketingowa, aktywność społeczna obywateli

Preface

The idea of local government is part of a broader meaning of the term, the essence of which, for the purposes of these deliberations, is an independence, as defined by law, from the superior authority, i.e. the state. The ability to decide about their affairs autonomously. A community pursuing the idea of self-government can be determined by various characteristics, e.g. a workplace, then this is an employee self-government; a profession, then the idea is pursued by a professional self-government; a place of residence and this is where local government appears. The key to self-government is the delegation of specific tasks and powers by the higher level of authority directly to the organisations to which these tasks relate. The benefit for the state from the delegation of powers is the anticipated effect of streamlining its activities, understood in particular as the ability to meet the needs of its citizens and stimulate their development, intensifying a sense of community and responsibility for their behaviour in their attitudes, going beyond the area of subjectively pursued objectives, engaging their fellow citizens in the quest for a better life. P. Dahlke raises an important aspect, stating that in order for regional development to occur, certain circumstances must exist, reasons causing both quantitative as well as qualitative and structural changes in the region, economy, social life and

1 www.prezydent.pl [access: 26.02.2020].
in the natural environment. They create a set of regional development factors, its determinants. Alternatively, concepts such as factors of regional development and its determinants are used in the literature on the subject. The quoted author refers to the opinion of T. Kudłacz\(^2\) who distinguishes between these concepts. The development conditions include determinants that are non-controllable from the position of a particular subject system, while factors should be associated with those determinants that are controllable. T. Kudłacz presents an opinion that the qualification of the degree of controllability of many determinants is a derivative of the interpretation of regional development mechanisms. When outlining the functions of local government authority, it is necessary to understand that it is the level of authority closest to the citizen. Its location implies the pursuit of the principles of decentralization and subsidiarity. These principles include basically the delegation of power to the local government authority in the field of management resulting in the decision-making process that has a direct impact on the living conditions and development of citizens living in a specific area. A relative autonomy, on which the operation of local government bodies is based, is also supposed to lead to the protection of the interest of the local community. The delegation of powers goes hand in hand with responsibility for decisions, based on the best understanding of the needs of the local community. However, this understanding should also lead to building local government resources, using the skills and capabilities, creativity and innovation of its individual members or groups. The value of self-governance is to provide citizens with the widest range of decision-making, choice and powers to decide on matters related to their daily lives. Executive local government bodies, as described by law, are bodies that manage local government units, following the guidelines set by the ultimate decision-making body. In the case of a municipality, the head of the municipality, the mayor or president of the city, is the executive body, while the commune council is the body adopting resolutions. These bodies are subject to a democratic election process. The executive authority at the county level differs from that at the province level since the executive bodies are collegial in nature and their members are elected from among the councillors by members of the county councils or the province council\(^3\).

Building the resources of local governments that use the skills, creativity and innovativeness of its individual stakeholders and their participation in decision-making processes requires the identification of mandatory actions, the necessity to create appropriate instruments in the field of social responsibility of public administration. One of the important types of relations between the state, economy and society and the effect of the constitution of public-private space is the presence of


\(^3\) www.prezydent.pl [access: 26.02.2020].
the principle of ethics in public administration. This builds up an elementary sense of conviction of stakeholders to the reliability and honesty of public administration. It must have features of honesty and involvement in the process of providing public services. The simplest, available tool will be the official’s code of ethics, which not only defines the legal framework, but also moral norms, standards of behaviour and basic rules of conduct of public administration officials.

1. Communication as a concept of shared responsibility

Strategic documents of the European Union emphasize the need to involve citizens in public policy-making in the regional development processes in the long and medium term. Their main justification is the need to systematically overcome the noticeable alienation of public administration from citizens. Abandoning a conservative administration style and striving to open to the need to make people more interested in how to influence decisions that affect them, set out and pursue together the idea of improving living conditions, not only by looking at this issue from the perspective of their own needs, but also from the perspective of the needs of local communities. The above principle of social responsibility of public administration has gained in importance and has become an imperative of time. Local administration should be characterised by thinking that sustainable development cannot be achieved in isolation, and the path to success leads through the synergy between the authorities and the respective society. Socially responsible authorities, using the available marketing communication tools and professional management of such tools, must motivate the citizen to engage in public affairs. Creativity and innovation of citizens create a potential for effective improvement of the quality of life in the region.

Top-down strategies that often involve external experts tend to be detached from the realities of local society. The vision they define may be distant from the desires of citizens living in a specific territory, in this case it is difficult to identify and, as a consequence, implement the plan. A change in thinking about strategy building should aim at developing project guidelines, strategic documents, together with the persons and entities to whom these documents directly relate. Wide social consultation is possible because traditional, and especially new media, perfectly facilitate this. As a result, it is possible to achieve the effect of vertical, civic participation, fulfilled by actively involving citizens in policy-making by the authorities.

The cornerstone of participation is the creation of a common platform for cooperation between various social groups with diverse interests, not only to diagnose the needs of the community more effectively, but to design them, placing emphasis the

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4 K. Mizera, Odpowiedzialność społeczna w administracji publicznej, „Zeszyty Naukowe Wyższej Szkoły Bankowej we Wrocławiu” 2011, nr 24, p. 122.
5 Communications Toolkit. The Voice of Local Government in Tasmania [access: 26.02.2020].
development of citizens. In this process, it is necessary to make optimal use of available resources and the added value that can be obtained from the local environment. Shortening the distance between policy makers and recipients is one of the methods of legitimizing the authority which is an expression of the social responsibility of public administration. The operation of the public authority understood in this way should be continuous. Full citizen participation implies their participation in various stages of the process: project planning, diagnosis of needs, formulation of its results, implementation of activities, monitoring and evaluation. It should be based on the lasting feeling of the participants that they really act together and that the energy they devote is actually useful. This leads to a greater involvement that also results in a greater support for future activities. The actions indicated should be consistent with the very behaviour of the authorities themselves, which must be characterised by a sense of responsibility and obligatory application of ethical principles.

The process of involving citizens in the decision-making process of public administration units must go in parallel with the presence a responsible partner for stakeholders. In the process of building relations between the public administration and the society, the use of marketing communication may be an appropriate tool. Marketing communication is an instrument that allows creating a dialogue, which makes the process of building and maintaining relations more credible. Improvement of public services, one of the foundations of which is the reliability and honesty of the bidder’s behaviour, not only makes the offer more credible, but also allows for its use in a convincing way, fulfilling an elementary human need, which is a sense of security. Especially towards the inhabitants of a given area. This assumption should include all stakeholders, not only the residents themselves, as each of them who have an interest in public administration expects ethical and reliable behaviour. If they do not have such a conviction, they will be sceptical about binding the satisfaction of their needs in relation to the place managed by a specific public administration. This obstacle may result in a lack of enrichment of the resources of the managed area, having an impact on its development.

An important way to involve citizens in joint action and attract people to achieve the planned objectives is to use marketing, in particular marketing communication. In the commercial sphere, on the product and service exchange market, marketing communication aims to stimulate the consumption and sale of products. However, in the public sphere, the product offer is for the “sale” of ideas. The use of social marketing and marketing communication serves to promote, and pursue together the public policy, and to promote values resulting from participation in social practice.

Many authors note that public participation is an effective way to overcome some of the deficiencies of public administration and improve its management activities. In May 2018, the Summit of Local Government Specialists in Melbourne was held.

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The idea behind this annual event is to help local governments and municipal councils adopt an efficient and effective approach to communication. Especially that the technological progress necessitates constant learning and development of communication competences. The main conclusion from the debate of the international forum was the thesis that good communication underlies the democratic system of governance. It develops partnership by informing about directions of policy development and streamlines the provision of public services, anticipates future problems, manages expectations, and increases public participation in the management process. According to experts, society expects that every authority, regardless of its level, should keep them informed about programmes, services and matters that may affect its benefits, rights and obligations. Moreover, it was clearly stated that the social responsibility of authorities must lead to the understanding that society expects those managing public affairs to listen to the voice of society: learn about their views, priorities, needs and expectations. People definitely expect communication to be clear and take into account the needs of a diverse society.

2. Changes in marketing communication of local government units

In Poland, the involvement of citizens in the process of marketing communication of municipalities varies significantly. It is difficult to assess, especially that the level of involvement should be preceded by an analysis of forms of communication conducted by managers. It is impossible to draw general scientific conclusions without analysing tools, content and interactivity. One can only refer to research results as case study results. The results of the survey conducted in March 2017 among 300 residents of Rzeszów can serve as an example of such research and the resulting conclusions. According to the survey, city residents rated their involvement in the marketing communication process of Rzeszów on an average level, but they are aware of the opportunities that the city offers them in this respect. Statistical analysis showed that interest in marketing communication decreases with the age of respondents.

As a result of changes in the operation of local government units, including in particular access to products of technological progress and various communication tools, traditional forms of marketing communication evolve, increase their effectiveness, and are constantly enriched with new functions. They enable the society to contribute to the management process and the organization of an interactive dialogue between authorities and the society. At the Melbourne Summit of Local Government Specialists, a group of researchers presented the results of studies carried

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7 Communications Toolkit. The Voice of Local Government in Tasmania [access: 26.02.2020].
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out in over 25 local governments and councils across Australia⁹. Guidelines for local governments were formulated, describing the essence of various modes of action and the values of proposed tools to be used:

1. Social media play a key role – the widespread use of social media provides messengers with a tool to significantly expand their contacts with recipients. Social networking sites whose origin was associated with interactive communication between friends, currently perform many other functions that organise their lives: they facilitate purchasing processes, planning participation in events, access to entertainment, seeking opinions and much more. They can be used in communication with managers of local government units. They create an opportunity to significantly increase their accessibility for residents. Information posted on websites, in full access to various social networking channels can make everyday life easier, e.g. informing residents about road works, and more broadly about future infrastructure projects.

2. Responsibility and transparency – the use of communication tools leads to both greater transparency of activities and to a significant increase in the responsibility of authorities. Including access to meetings of municipal councils, which not only increases the scope of information, but also allows to follow the views expressed, often contrary to the views of politicians who gained power, by their opposition. Thus, it increases the social responsibility of public administration. It can also lead to a wide involvement of the public in commenting and discussing their thoughts and opinions.

3. Two-way communication – social media are the basic two-way communication tool. According to the Sensis Social Media 2017 report (SSMR 2017), 9% of Australians use social media mainly to directly serve customers by brands. Australian experience shows that more and more councils and local governments are implementing these tools in the communication process, and even introduces chatbots to their Facebook accounts.

4. Community pride – a skilful use of new media tools can lead not only to actions aimed at increasing the involvement of local communities, but also to a greater pride in the area where they live. The presence of authorities in social media leads to the strengthening of the conviction of residents that they are represented by the local authority. Very simple communication activities can lead to this. In the opinion of Australian researchers of communication processes, these include not only sequences presenting the region, communicating current news, announcements and coverage of events, but also publishing photos taken by residents. Illustrating what is happening in the city or providing valuable information to residents boosts their involvement. The advantage of communication at the local level is the fact that, as opposed to the national level, local governments need only a narrow approach.

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Due to the fact that the recipient of messages is their community, the approach to content and initiating interaction is much simpler and leads to the involvement of residents and the release of their civic attitudes.

Even small local governments can be an excellent example of using communication through new media to build relations with residents. It is in their case that the use, especially of social networking sites, provides tools to make the activities of authorities more transparent, conduct two-way communication and build pride of the local community in the place where they live and for which they work together with the authorities.\(^1\)

Megan Macpherson\(^2\) noted 10 significant changes in the way local governments interact with their constituents while building relations with the media.

1. Society is changing more and more, each person becomes their own information channels, and there is a huge number of them in their surroundings. Faced with the multitude of information sources, they re-evaluate the elements of influence, and press release or television commentary has become a less important critical tool. The power of influence shifted from media institutions towards the opinion of friends. Especially that competition in the broadcasting market often causes divergent comments. The promotion of issues that are often quite important in an atmosphere of sensation desensitizes viewers to important topics and key issues. It is necessary to prepare for situations, and these may appear more often due to the growing number of Internet users, where a video message about a controversial local event or actions of a politician or local government official becomes viral and attracts widespread attention or criticism.

2. It is necessary to recognize that information media remain key partners for those managing local government units. The role of the media in ensuring a healthy and well-functioning democracy is to demand not only from the authorities, but also from ourselves, to act responsibly. Therefore, pressure to create content cannot be at the expense of reliability. Now, more than ever before, any unreliability is associated with its wide reception. Reactions that are often very radical. In the process of credibility of the authorities and the media, they need to establish a mutual relationship based on ethical principles.

3. Accuracy is a must in the communication process. It should dominate over directness, with fast response being a key factor. Fast response is particularly important in crisis situations. Referring to facts, not speculation. The credibility of local authorities is a key element of management of the local government, and it is very easy to destroy. Fixing errors is a process that requires extensive work, in which it should be assumed that the corrective information may no longer reach recipients who have ceased to pay attention.


\(^{11}\) M. MacPherson, *10 Changes Shaping Local Government Communications*, “Western City”, June 1, 2017.
4. It is necessary to respect authenticity. This rule overrides the desire to please recipients. The content should be conveyed in a simple, legible and concise manner – without the use of hyperboles or jargon. The recipients do not pay attention over long periods, and especially do not tolerate messages that they perceive as not true.

5. The organisation of social communication of the local government should be characterised by the awareness of politicians and Public Relations services that people believe their friends. Personal interactions have a great impact on perception. The skilful use of direct relations of residents requires the involvement of message creators in following social media forums. Non-intrusive presentation of content provoking to assess the local government managers in their own social media channels.

6. Online presence requires resilience. It should be noted that every organisation and person can be an inspiration of content and retain social media users as a result of its absorption. The involvement of people with social impact has a positive effect on recipients and can be a remedy for anonymous commentators, often online trolls, and also allows to increase the planned effects of communication strategies. Appropriate motivation of message senders will neutralize the effects of stressful situations. At the same time, it allows achieving the effect of focusing on progress and understanding their constructive contribution to the process. It should be noted that moderating dialogue should preserve the right to freedom, a cornerstone of democracy.

7. The quality of the dialogue reflects on the level of communication. In order to get a sense of satisfaction of an organisation, it is necessary to observe its influencing role in the network. Is the organisation open to listening to opinions? Is its tone respectful? If the local government absorbs these features, residents will be more likely to pay attention to emerging problems and believe that problems that affect them will be solved. A positive response to this expectation leads to increased trust.

8. Expectation of parties to the communication process as to the anticipated interaction in real time remains high. The habit of obtaining information in an easy way, due to the knowledge and frequency of online communication, has resulted in residents’ expectations that their local governments will be available to them personally, in real time. Communication that includes political content has replaced the intentionally organized forums, the need to reach for newspapers, cafe forums, pop-up outreach during events, and interactive ways of solving problems of the community.

9. The evolution of communication processes, and the vast range of the tools used, created a level of awareness that did not exist before. The ability to navigate through social assumptions and various opinions is often distorted by the lack of context or facts, which increases the requirements of communicators in terms of having the required level of diplomacy in their interactions and having reliable and verifiable information.

10. Responsibility for helping people understand the reality rests with all the people concerned. It is necessary to help interpret the rules and restrictions, and in-
terpret politicians’ behaviours that drive the actions of local authorities; it is important to inspire people to try to understand them. A clear, two-way communication is necessary in the process of understanding each other.

Cities are currently the main areas of residence of most of the world’s citizens, driving the development of regions. According to Spanish researchers, K. Sanders and M. José Canel, the reputation of the city is particularly important in the context of interests of city managers, as it determines how their voters assess their political usefulness. The impact of reputation on the views of residents is an interesting research area for scientists. Politicians are making efforts to position their cities in such a way as to gain confidence in themselves, placing a special emphasis on their efforts to improve the well-being of their citizens and good relations with the environment. It is puzzling that the opinions of residents are not always directly proportional to the wealth of the areas where they live. The research process based on partially structured interviews and focus groups showed, for example, the paradox that the inhabitants of less wealthy Malaga are more satisfied with the information they receive from managers compared to the degree of satisfaction of the inhabitants of more wealthy Vitoria with communication with their managers. The complacency of local government managers which does not tally with the views of the local community indicates the need to conduct research processes, the results of which will allow to understand the way in which marketing communication of the local government can reach a better balance between the method and content of messages initiated by the authority, expectations and perception in the level of satisfaction of citizens with communication with managers and the effects of their management.

According to researchers, there are many reasons for the divergence between the views of the authorities and citizens as to their achievements, objectives and priorities. Defective processes of setting priorities by authorities, ineffective communication strategies that do not align messages with actions, and inadequate attempts of local authorities to adapt to the expectations of citizens (understanding their needs and priorities) can provide some explanations. The analysis of the results indicated that the example of Vitoria showed no real interaction with the citizens. It must be assumed that cultural factors can also affect this. In Vitoria, citizens are considered by themselves and city communicators to be “eternal testers and complainers” and “they are never satisfied with what they have.” In addition, they do not perceive any improvement of this state of affairs.

Analysis of research results in Malaga showed, among others, that citizens usually blame themselves for the shortcomings of their city. Attributing a low level of cleanliness in the city to fellow citizens and their low level of civic awareness is an example of this way of reasoning. Researchers suggest that in the future research should consider the role of urban culture in influencing the perception of their city by residents.

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12 K. Sanders, M. José Canel, Mind the gap: Local government communication strategies and Spanish citizens’ perceptions of their cities, “Public Relations Review” 2015, No. 41, p. 777-784.

13 Ibidem.
In the opinion of respondents, Vitoria and Malaga, which are situated close to large cities – in the former case Bilbao, and in the latter Seville – have a much stronger sense of identity and, what is more, civic pride in comparison to the place where they live. The conclusion is that making comparisons with influential large urban centres can also affect the assessment and expectations of citizens in relation to their cities. It was possible to conclude from the opinions of respondents what kind of communication citizens expect from local authorities. Systematic research initiated by local authorities can contribute to ways and tools of communication in such a way as to achieve a better balance between the scope and distribution of information and persuasion, or between the obligation of the authority to explain what actions it will conduct and the mission of persuasion. By making a comparative analysis of the cause-and-effect relationship between the communication of information and citizen satisfaction, Spanish researchers referred to similar research work by O. James. This researcher showed that citizens who were aware of the positive achievements of local authorities had higher expectations, but what is more important, their assessment of the actual result was lower and, consequently, they were not satisfied with it. These results confirm the conclusion of Gelders and Ihlen that conducting the analysis of divergences indicates the importance of expectations and perceptions regarding the satisfaction of residents in terms of communication with the local government.

In the process of two-way communication of local authorities, it is particularly important to recognize the importance of closer monitoring of the environment in which they operate in such a way as to generate mechanisms that allow them to understand the needs and mutual expectations. The authors of the research process, setting the directions of future research, quote the opinion of V. Luoma-aho, who noted that it was necessary to measure the experience and expectations of end users using public goods and services, including in particular communication. In a broader context, the authors of the research suggest, and this suggestion is in line with the views of O. James, that research on the expectations and satisfaction of citizens should be developed, the results of which will lead to a better understanding of the relationship between the intentions of local government managers, and the presented effects of citizens.

their activities and assessments of residents that often differ from the expectations of messengers themselves as to the results of their work\textsuperscript{18}. The research methodology in the research area in question should be considered in the local development process.

**Conclusion**

The level of marketing communication between the managers of local government units and the public is an indicator of the social responsibility of public administration. The transparency of their actions, the level of understanding that the increase in civic activity in public matters is an essential element of local government resources. The management process in Local Government Units requires unconditionally the participation of the managed people – residents of communes. They have the potential for change, and resources for creativity and innovation. They are the value that every regional and local authority should understand. The greater the citizens’ activity and their participation in management, the greater the chance for development. It must be noted that the development of local areas must be complementary to the development of people who live in these areas. This principle is the essence of social responsibility of public administration. The authors of the article recommend that research processes be carried out in Polish local government units on the effects of communication processes conducted by local authorities, not only in terms of the initiated messages reaching the residents, but also ways leading to an increase in their civic activity.

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