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## **MEDIA MISSION AND CSR IN POLISH MEDIA**

### **Abstract:**

The source of acceptance for public media is a strong belief in social value of honest and competent information reporting and its contextualization. At the same time, however, a basic deteriorating factor of media legitimization is their transformation into market-oriented economy. Commodification of media means constant pressure to increase the role of “business” rhetoric and “business” solutions. The pressure is manifested by the fact that numerous media organisations – commercial and public ones – have accepted solutions of corporate social responsibility (CSR). However, the scale of CSR implementation in Polish media organisations is diversified. The survey, which was conducted among the CEOs of some regional radio broadcast partnerships in Poland, indicates that only one of them has in fact accepted the CSR solutions. The majority of this group think there is no need to implement CSR because they consider it to be a duplication of the public media mission. Considering commercial media, all the biggest TV and radio stations apply CSR.

### **Keywords:**

media, CSR, Poland

**JEL Classification:** M14, L82

## **The idea of CSR**

In accordance with the concept of corporate social responsibility, business organisations should act responsibly, and they should not pursue only their economic aims.

Although there has not been any consent as to the nature of CSR (Moir, 2001) drawing on a classical definition presented by A. Davis, it is possible to assume that it involves consideration of responsibility outside a narrow field of economic, technical and legal requirements... (It) refers to social benefits achieved alongside traditional economic benefits” (Frederick, Davis, Post, 1998). An enterprise presents a responsible attitude towards internal and external groups which affect its functioning and also towards groups which are affected by the enterprise.

A growing number of research studies contributes to the fact that numerous new terms have appeared, describing the context in which organisations operate. Alongside CSR (Corporate Social Responsibility), CC (Corporate Citizenship) and CS (Corporate Sustainability) another notion has appeared, namely: CSRS (Corporate Social Responsibility Society). The differences between CSR and CS are still disputable, and they are sometimes considered as identical.

Considering the specific character of the media market, the exceptionality of CSR in media consists mainly in the transparency of its editorial sector, the lack of any interference of media owners into media content, protection of privacy, responsibility for the published content which might be insulting for social feelings and responsibility for published advertisement (Toker, 2013).

After the scandals of Enron, WorldCom, Tyco and other organisations, the need of more transparency in corporate operation refers to a belief that corporations have some more important tasks than just earning money for their shareholders. Reinforced by a decline of trust towards business as a whole after the financial crisis, the belief places the problem of corporate social responsibility among other important challenges which cannot be omitted in the discussion concerning the functioning of media corporations.

The discussion on social responsibility of media corporations involves two trends. On one hand, it refers to the operation of entities which are controversial because of the harmful character of their products (tobacco), or their operation affects natural environment (mining, fuel industry), or because of the welfare of their employees and work standards (well-known cases of Nike, Gap). On the other hand, social responsibility of business leaders is surveyed among those who “should be more concerned about social care”, especially in the United States.

The research carried out on the implementation of corporate social responsibility allows us to draw general conclusions stating that managers and owners of economic entities are the most important factor exerting pressure on social responsibility to be considered in business operation. Enterprises appear more as “passive pawns”,

objects of exerted pressure, which respond to that pressure (Tempel, Walgenbach, 2007). When there is no pressure, managers accept only some elements of CSR or they ignore the whole concept (Campbell, 2007).

The institutional theory (Wilson, 1989) comes as an important source of explanation how to understand various attitudes and management practice in the social context. The research on economic results of social responsibility and a significant growth of interest presented by theoreticians and practitioners in “neo-institutional” concepts referring to the opinion that in their decision making and functioning, managers are affected not only by rationalism but they also consider moral arguments and “economic psyche”, let us state that there has been some sudden invigoration in the discussion over the concepts rooted in institutionalism. The discussion participants analyse macro-institutional pressure exerted on enterprises to make them involved into activities fostering social responsibility. The analysis also refers to the relations between neo-institutional concepts and social responsibility and sustainable development (Aguilera, Rupp, Williams, Ganapathi, 2007). There have been also some research studies which refer to the question whether organisations operating exclusively in one place (e.g. one country) have to meet expectations of people, whereas organisations operating globally have to meet global expectations (Newson, Deegan).

### **Reasons for accepting CSR**

The reasons for applying CSR are explained by political economy and by concepts referring to relations with shareholders. Relevant explanations are also presented in terms of categories pertaining to social agreement, or as an element of marketing strategies (Lu, CB Bhattacharya).

Considering the strategic perspectives, the reasons for accepting CSR by media organisations can be found in:

- Competitive pressure/hiper-competition,
- Commodisation of media products and media services,
- Tendency to retain the loyalty of current customers,
- Increase in market awareness/orientation of customers/users,
- Development of consumerism, an institutional and civic movement pursuing the increase in the rights and representation of consumers to sellers,
- Pressure and expectations of non-government organisations.

Considering the perspectives of strategic management, CSR may result in measurable benefits, including, first of all, the increase in share value, lower costs and the increase in sales. There may be also some indirect benefits resulting from the increase in brand awareness and brand loyalty, or generally improved efficiency of operation.

## CSR and Polish media

Media organisations also implement CSR standards. However, considering basic social functions, aims and mission of media and treating media as “social good”, it seems to be a disputable practice.

Hence, the acceptance and implementation of the CSR concept may be understood as a marketing exercise which is to result in an increase in the market value of a media organisation. It mainly refers to public media. A survey on the Polish media market carried out among the CEOs of regional radio stations suggests that most commercial organisations announce the implementation of the CSR standards, however such announcements are rarely made by public media and by public radio stations in particular. Among seventeen regional radio stations which have participated in the survey, only one has implemented the CSR standards.

As most European media systems, in Poland media organisations perform social and commercial functions simultaneously. As public media, they act to realise “the mission of public media”, which is defined as programme differentiation, impartiality, independence, innovativeness and integrity of the message (The Sejm of the Republic of Poland, 1992). In such a form, the media mission is therefore a canon of obligations which are analogical to those which result from the CSR concept. Hence, CSR multiplies entries which constitute the mission.

The limited scope of CSR implemented by public media organisations can be explained by seeing media as social good. That way of understanding media is presented by US Federal Communication Commission FCC. The theory referring to social responsibility of media is described in such a context as:

- Responsibility of media towards society; the ownership of media is the good entrusted to their owners by the society;
- Media providing news should be truthful, reliable, honest, objective and adequate;
- Media should be free but they should undergo the process of self-regulation;
- Media should follow the established codes of ethics and good professional practice;
- In certain circumstances, government may interfere in order to protect public interest.

Perceived as social good, media are assigned with public tasks. In accordance with such an interpretation, they are entrusted to some chosen people to make them perform an auxiliary role for the society. Various programme boards are supposed to supervise the performance of organisations.

The performance of the discussed role takes place on the market in which media organisations pursue their business objectives. Considering commercial media, the objectives refer mainly to the wealth of shareholders, the market share and net profit. Considering public media, the objectives refer to an “economic result” expected by the State Treasury because public media are companies of the State Treasury.

The specific character of media, their unique social obligations sprout from their social influence. Among numerous research approaches, the problem pertaining to that influence is presented in the most comprehensive way by functionalistic synthesis, which provides a description of functions performed by media in a society.

The functions should be referred to the broadcaster and the receiver and to the message itself. They can be divided into the following categories:

- functions intended by the broadcaster, who selects appropriate means to achieve them and establishes organisational regulations;
- functions assigned by the particular content, form and presentation of the message;
- functions performed, that is namely: the real influence of the message on the receivers.

According to H. Lasswell, who has provided the first analysis of that kind, the contribution of mass media into social development are the following elements (Lasswell, 1948):

1. Observation of environment – media notice and report significant changes in natural environment. Significant changes are those which can turn into a threat or come as a threat to people, institutions or the whole society.
2. Correlation of reaction to environment – media provide patterns for action to individuals, groups or institutions which aim at fighting threats or taking best advantage of the provided chances. Media also support models of social organisations. Hence, they also support social balance and stability.
3. Heritage transmission – media transmit the most important elements of legacy, especially those ones which are related with overcoming threats and taking best advantage of opportunities. They transmit behavioural patterns which fully determine identity of individuals and groups. Hence, they affect the social structure (educational and socializing function).

Responsibility of media can be also observed in the current approach towards the tasks assigned to media, such as (Goban-Klas, 2000):

- Information – events referring to the society, the country and the world, the situation in politics;
- Correlation – commentaries on the events and information, presentation of influential authorities and standards, support provided to social actions, social consensus, creation of authorities and determination of their social status.
- Continuation – the expression of a dominating culture and sub-cultures, creation and maintenance of community values.

According to D McQuail (1987), social responsibility of media can be also observed in the functions of media message:

- Information – looking for advice concerning current problems, satisfying curiosity and general interests, learning;
- Personal identification – behavioural patterns, reinforcement of personal values, identification with values of other people;
- Integration (social communication) – the basis of social conversation, a substitute of real social contact, assistance in performing social roles;
- Entertainment – emotional relaxation, pleasure, sexual excitement.

Among some previous research studies, the analysis provided by P.F. Lazarsfeld and R.K. Merton deserves our particular attention (1950). The authors have contributed to the theory, focusing on the results of media activities and listing possibilities of dysfunction. They present the difference between latent and overt functions. Such a differentiation allows the authors to separate functions which were intended by the authors of the message from functions which are actually performed by the message itself. Functions are treated as factors contributing to the adaptation of the system. The new term of “dysfunctions” refers to the factors which hamper the process. According to P.F. Lazarsfeld and R.K. Merton, functions counteract dysfunctions and prevent the system from crisis. The authors also present a division of functions into overt functions (understood and desired by the system participants) and latent functions (which are neither understood nor desired as such). The system is assessed in terms of interaction between functions and dysfunctions, in the context of its balance and its distortions, stability and instability. (Mattelart, Mattelart, 1998).

According to P.F. Lazarsfeld and R.K. Merton, media dysfunctions are:

- Narcotising dysfunction – makes users addicted to media which become more and more time-consuming. Media users replace real contact with other people with media. Thus, they become socially passive and apathetic. Looking for news, people focus their attention on media and delude themselves that they really participate in social life. In fact, they only improve their mood, and they make solving problems more difficult as well.
- Assigning status – focuses social attention and imparts significance to political, social and economic issues and to people. Hence, media strengthen an irrational but popular belief, that “if media are interested in someone (something), it means that person (thing) is important and must appear in media.” In this way, media legitimize the status of such a person, a group, an organisation, an institution, etc.
- Reinforcing social standards – some social standards may not be fully accepted by individuals, who tend to abandon such standards. After a longer period of time, a gap may appear between private and public morality. However, if media assess and criticise such deviations, people must assume explicit conformist or non-conformist attitudes towards the violated standard. Considering large social

groups, it usually means acceptance, and media decrease the distance between private and public morality, reinforcing its basic values.

## Summary

Applying the CSR standards in media organisations may be interpreted as a consequence of imbalance between market and social objectives. In Polish organisations, which are statutorily obliged to follow a so called social mission, applying the CSR standards is understood as the unnecessary multiplication of mission assumptions. Therefore, the CSR standards are rarely announced by this group.

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