

**A Demand for Corporate Social Responsibility during COVID-19 Pandemic. The Case
of Poland**

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ABSTRACT

This thesis aims to describe how CSR adapted during the COVID-19 pandemic within the Polish market. This aim is pursued by taking a closer look at the demand side for CSR initiatives of Polish customers as well as by analyzing how companies communicate their CSR activities in times of crisis and which CSR initiatives they engaged in. The Polish case represents a fascinating and relevant CSR study as for the last 20+ the country has been trying to become more like other European countries in the sphere of sustainability and social initiatives and make up for the period of transformation from the state-controlled market. As such, the study of the Polish market has great relevance and can be duplicated on other former socialist states that also joined European Union. Mixed method research has been implemented in the study to address the research questions. The research of both the perception of CSR by the Polish citizens and companies' communication strategies has been studied with the help of an online survey, interview, and the analysis of the 21 press releases. The part of the study that focuses on how companies communicated their CSR practices during the time of crisis is based on the case of the Polish company - LPP. LPP is a Polish clothing company that owns five brands – Reserved, Mohito, Sinsay, House, and Cropp. Since 2014 they have been included in the WIG20 index on the Polish stock market, which includes the 20 largest companies in the country. The results show that in the times of the COVID-19 pandemic, customers express the demand for CSR initiatives, and they expect the companies to engage in them. Furthermore, examining LPP's press releases and interviewing the company's representatives revealed the types of CSR initiatives the company engaged with during the COVID-19 pandemic. The interview also shed light on the communication channels and strategies used by the company. During the COVID-19 pandemic company mostly used online communication channels to share different CSR messages. The literature review highlighted gaps presented in studies, gaps that this thesis aimed to fill. The thesis delivered new knowledge and based on the findings it also gives direction for future research.

KEYWORDS: Corporate Social Responsibility, COVID-19 Pandemic, Poland, CSR Communication, perception of CSR

Table of Contents

Abstract and Keywords

Chapter 1 Introduction 1

Chapter 2 Theoretical Framework and Literature Review, Corporate Social Responsibility and COVID-19 pandemic..... 5

2.1 COVID-19 pandemic..... 5

2.2 Corporate Social Responsibility 6

2.3 CSR Communication..... 10

2.4 CSR in times of crisis 13

2.5 The demand for CSR initiatives 15

Chapter 3 Methodology..... 18

3.1 Research Design 18

3.2 Sample, Participants and Questionnaire 20

3.3 Operationalization 22

3.4 Ethical Concerns..... 24

3.5 Data Analysis..... 24

3.5.1 Thematic Analysis 24

3.5.2 SPSS Analyses 27

3.6 Validity and Reliability 31

Chapter 4 Results 33

4.1 The communication strategy of companies during the pandemic 33

4.2 The demand for and perceptions of CSR actions in times of COVID-19 37

4.3 Other findings 40

Chapter 5 Discussion and Conclusion..... 42

5.1 Theoretical and Social Implications 42

5.2 Conclusion	43
5.3 Limitations and Future Study	45
References	46
Appendix A: Table of Figures.....	52
Appendix B: Survey Questionnaire in Polish	53
Appendix C: Survey Questionnaire in English	57
Appendix D: Coding Frame – Thematic Analyses	61

Chapter 1 Introduction

COVID-19 was declared a global pandemic on the 11th of March 2020 by World Health Organization. COVID-19 has first started in 2019 in Wuhan, China, and then spread all over the world. The pandemic has influenced how people function, for example, by forcing some to switch from working in the office to doing it in their own homes. Countries all over Europe had felt the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic. Lockdowns, travel restrictions, and safety measures have been implemented to lower the new disease's spread.

As a result, measures taken to limit the spread of COVID-19 brought about various consequences for countries and businesses. In their operations, companies rely on the different stakeholders as their businesses without those individuals would not have been possible. Companies deliver goods and services to stakeholders, but customers buy and create the demand for specific products or services. Therefore, one can say that customers, suppliers, investors, employees, etc., are crucial for every organization. The mutual dependency between stakeholders and enterprises is why organizations should aid individuals in times of crisis, whether it is profitable for the business or not. This can be seen in the results obtained in the Trust Barometer special report: Brands trust and the Coronavirus pandemic¹. It shows that 71% of respondents claimed that they would lose trust in the brand if it puts profit over people (Edelman, 2020). COVID-19 pandemic can be considered as such a crisis. According to Manuel and Herron (2020), companies that fail to see the need to respond to the COVID-19 pandemic expose themselves to the risk of losing stakeholders, suppliers, and customers. Therefore, any actions taken by businesses during the COVID-19 pandemic should be communicated with their environment. Companies' need to communicate their Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) activities with the audience is now more prominent than ever (Manuel & Herron, 2020).

CSR, according to World Business Council for Sustainable Development, is "the continuing commitment by business to behave ethically and contribute to economic development while improving the quality of life of the workforce and their families as well as of the local community and society at large" (GAEA, n.d.). With my thesis, I aim to look at

¹ Study conducted in Brazil, Canada, China, France, Germany, India, Italy, Japan, South Africa, South Korea, the UK and U.S. with 12.000 participants.

CSR practices in the pandemic and perception of CSR among customers in the Polish context. The thesis aims to study how CSR strategies adapted during the pandemic and whether there is a demand for those types of initiatives among Polish citizens.

As of the 20th March 2021, there have been 2,036,700 confirmed cases of COVID-19 and 49,159 deaths related to it in Poland. According to the first statistics of Główny Urząd Skarbowy (Statistics Poland), the gross domestic product (GDP) is predicted to decrease by 2.8% in 2020 comparing to 2019 (Główny Urząd Statystyczny, 2021). The unemployment index also increased and equaled 6.2% in December 2020. The general business climate indicator for manufacturing in December 2020 equaled -14.8 and was worst to the one at the end of 2019, which equaled -4.9 (Główny Urząd Statystyczny, n.d.)). In the statistics, it is possible to notice the effect that the COVID-19 pandemic had on a country. To limit the spread of the new disease, the Polish government has implemented various measures. For example, closure of schools and universities and transformation to online schooling, closure of hotels, restaurants, etc., and general lockdowns of the country with travel restrictions (KPMG, 2020). Research has been done when it comes to CSR and how it adapted on the Polish market from the business's point of view. For example, the study conducted on 75 companies by CCIFP showed that more than 90% of companies engage in fighting the pandemic (CCI France Pologne, n.d.). But there is a gap when it comes to studying the adaptation of CSR in Poland from the point of view of both customers and companies.

The last 20+ years have been a time of CSR growth for Poland as it has been trying to make up for a lost time before transformation and become similar to other European countries in the sphere of CSR and sustainability (Witek-Crabb, 2019). Having joined the European Union (EU) in 2004 together with seven other Eastern Bloc countries – Bulgaria, Czechia, Estonia, Lithuania, Latvia, Slovakia, and Slovenia – Poland presents a unique and understudied case. Research in the context of Polish CRS can be applicable to other post-socialistic countries in the EU. The study of the adaptation of CSR in the Polish context will be beneficial for companies and customers. On the one hand, the thesis will highlight the needs and perceptions of customers in the CSR sphere, but on the other hand, it will also deliver new knowledge about CSR to the customers. My thesis will also provide new knowledge about CSR topics during the COVID-19 crisis, which is extremely important as further studies are essential during the crisis to better understand it.

The thesis aims to not only study the perception of CSR activities by the Polish customers it also seeks to research the adaptation of CSR activities in the times of the

COVID-19 pandemic by companies. Most precisely, with my thesis, I aim to see the types of CSR initiatives that companies have widely used and how they have been communicated with their business environment, which consists of both external and internal stakeholders. This part of the research has been based on Polish company LPP, one of the biggest Polish fashion corporations. The history of this Polish retailer can be traced back to 1991 when the company *Mistral SP. ZOO* has been created and then transformed and rebranded into what is now known as LPP in 1995. Now the company's brands are present in approximately 40 markets worldwide. Their portfolio has five brands: Reserved, House, Cropp, Sinsey, and Mohito. Since 2014 they are included in the WIG20 index on the Polish stock market, which comprises the 20 most fluid companies in the country (LPP, n.d.). In 2017 the company established its foundation that in 2020 has donated over 9 million PLN to nearly 500 non-governmental organizations, medical and non-medical institutions, and foundations in Poland. Furthermore, when it comes to the COVID-19 pandemic, LPP supported over 300 branches as part of the #LPPpomaga campaign, allocating nearly 7 million PLN for this purpose. For example, in March 2020, to help health services fight the pandemic, LPP donated masks, other protective gear, and 10% of the sales made from their collection Joyful #EcoAware (LPP, 2020).

Based on the case of Poland and the study of LPP, the thesis aims to address the following:

RQ1: How did Corporate Social Responsibility in Poland adapt to the COVID-19 pandemic?

SQ1: How did companies communicate CSR practices in the times of the COVID-19 pandemic in Poland?

SQ2: How did Polish customers perceive CSR actions during the COVID-19 pandemic?

In order to answer the questions presented above, I have implemented a mixed-method research design in my thesis. To better understand how companies in Poland communicate their CSR initiatives and the types of initiatives they engage in, I have conducted an interview with LPP representatives and took a closer look at 21 CSR and the COVID-19 related press releases of the company. Furthermore, to study the perception of CSR of Polish customers during the COVID-19 pandemic, I have conducted an online survey with 172 participants. Together the two separate studies aid in answering the main research question of how Polish CSR adapted in the times of the COVID-19 pandemic.

My thesis is divided into parts, each with its own purpose. After the introduction, chapter two of the thesis will introduce the theoretical background of the CSR, CSR communication, and COVID-19 pandemic. It will also look at CSR in times of crisis and the demand/need for CSR initiatives. Chapter three will focus on introducing methodology. It will provide the research design, operationalization, information about sampling and participants, as well as data analyses. In chapter three, ethical considerations, reliability and validity will also be addressed. Chapter four will cover the results of the conducted study. It will show observations that I made while conducting the research and also go back and address the literature. Lastly, in chapter five, I will discuss the obtained results and provide the reader with the conclusion to the main research question as well as sub-questions together with the summary of the study. Limitations of the study as well as future research proposal will also be included at the end of chapter four.

Chapter 2 Theoretical Framework and Literature Review, Corporate Social Responsibility and COVID-19 pandemic

The second chapter is focused on the theoretical framework and literature review of the topics covered in my thesis. It will introduce the topics of CSR, CSR communication, and CSR in times of crisis. Literature could have been found on the topic of CSR communication, but when it comes to CSR and CSR communication in times of crisis, the theory is scarce. For this reason, the study focuses on available data and research done in the times of the COVID-19 pandemic.

2.1 COVID-19 pandemic

On March 11th, 2020 World Health Organization (WHO) has declared the COVID-19 virus outbreak as a case of the pandemic. During the media briefing concerning the new disease on March 11th, 2020, WHO representatives highlighted that they have never seen a pandemic caused by a coronavirus; the COVID-19 pandemic is the first pandemic of its kind (WHO, 2020). The pandemic outbreak can be labeled as a black swan event, an event that has tremendous effects on global economies, healthcare systems, and human lives as we know them (Nicola et al., 2020).

United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) describes the COVID-19 pandemic as the "defining global health crisis of our time and the greatest challenge we have faced since World War Two" (United Nations Development Programme, n.d.). Furthermore, UNDP points out that the COVID-19 outbreak is much more than just a health crisis; it also impacts the socio-economic sphere. The severity of the impact varies from country to country as each of them is touched by the new virus differently. But as they highlight on their website, the development response and plan focused on the future are highly needed. European Union (EU) did recognize this need as on March 23rd, 2020, EU leaders decided to establish a recovery fund that would help fight and mitigate the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic. On July 21st, 2020, the overall budget of €1 824 billion had been put in place for the 2021-2027 time period. Lastly, in October 2020, the EU has set the priorities for the recovery. One of them is the return to a fully functioning single market to make EU companies/industries more

competitive worldwide (European Council, 2021).

As of May 25th, there have been 2,867,187 confirmed cases of COVID-19 with 73,096 related deaths in Poland. In order to limit the spread of the virus, the country has implemented various measurements. For example, multiple lockdowns, travel restrictions, closure of educational institutions and workplaces. Students and many employees had to adjust and continue their schooling and work from home. To aid those affected by the lockdowns and COVID-19 crisis, the government has also implemented numerous measurements. One of them is Anti-Crises Shield (KPMG, 2020). This Shield is a package of solutions prepared by the government. The aim of those solutions is to protect the Polish state and citizens from the crisis caused by the COVID-19 pandemic. It is based on five pillars: safety of employees and protection of workplaces, financing of entrepreneurs, health care, public investments, and strengthening of the financial system. The estimated total value of support under the Anti-Crisis Shield is PLN 212 billion, which equals around 10% of Polish GDP (czech, n.d.) As for the economic affects that the COVID-19 pandemic has on the country, Oxford Economics predicts that the Covid-19 pandemic will badly influence Poland, but the recession will be short-lasting as the economy is expected to rebound in 2021-2022 (Czech et al., 2020). Furthermore, the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic can also be seen in the first statistics of Główny Urząd Skarbowy (Statistics Poland). According to them, the gross domestic product (GDP) is predicted to decrease by 2.8% in 2020 as compared to 2019 (stat.gov.pl, n.d.).

COVID-19 pandemic is not over yet, and the data presented above show that it has changed lives as we know them from the first moment that the new disease outbreak has been declared. The data above also shows how the COVID-19 pandemic has affected economies and societies.

2.2 Corporate Social Responsibility

The concept of Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) is not a novel phenomenon and can be traced back to the 19th century. In that time, the concerns surrounding the welfare of the employees increased among the business owners. The impact that employees have on society was also noticed. During the period that covers the late 19th century, labor movements emerged; furthermore, the industrial revolution triggered the spread of the so-called slums.

Those factors pushed business owners to provide limited social welfare, for example, by building hospitals or providing food coupons. This new trend of social welfare of employees has only been strengthened in 1929 during the Great Depression. As it is possible to notice, the described period has been a rise for the CSR concept. However, the CSR concept as we know it emerged after World War II. Before, it was recognized as a form of charity, in a sense, philanthropy. But after the war, it has gone through changes and slowly transformed into a concept that we know and recognize today (Jhawar & Gupta, 2017).

Bowen (1953), in his publication, pointed out that the actions of big corporations have a significant impact on society, and therefore, the decisions should be taken with this impact in mind. Bowen was also a pioneer in the CSR area as he defined the principles that corporations should obey to fulfill their social responsibility. According to Bowen (1953), the decisions of businessmen influence stakeholders, customers, and employees. Furthermore, for him, the actions and decisions of corporations directly affected the quality of life of a whole society. Carroll (2008) points out that Bowen might have been ahead of his times with his revolutionary approach to management that improved the business by considering the impact that corporations have on society. Nevertheless, because his work was the first academic piece that focused directly on the social responsibility concept, Howard R. Bowen, by many, is considered the Father of Corporate Social Responsibility (Carroll, 1999).

After Howard Bowen, other scholars were also concern with the concept of corporate responsibility, behavior, and its response to social issues. The early explorations of CSR topics paved the way for a growing pool of scholars interested in corporate social responsibility to define CSR and discover its means. The increasing awareness in social movements and society in the 1960s was why the interest in CSR increased during this period. But as Agudelo et al. (2019) and Jhawar and Gupta (2017) point out in their papers, this growing interest could have been more visible in Western countries, particularly the United States of America. Another aspect worth noting is that the increasing social awareness in the 1960s led to low confidence in businesses in the 1970s. This time period in the CSR sphere has been defined by social movements and increasing legislation that gave a vast set of responsibilities that corporations had to fulfill. In the 1980's topics like pollution, discrimination, employee safety and health, quality of life, and sometimes even abusive practices seen in multinational corporations were discussed. That contributed to introducing concepts of stakeholders' management and business ethics into the business vocabulary. In the 1990s, the international approach to sustainable development combined with globalization

contributed to growing international interest in CSR. However, the 1990s also highlighted one issue: a gap between the globally accepted definition of corporate social responsibility. The 2000s first brought the recognition, expansion, and implementation of CSR and the strategic approach to the topic (Agudelo et al., 2019).

According to Craig Smith, CSR "refers to the firm's obligation to its stakeholders – people affected by corporate policies and practices. These obligations go beyond legal requirements and the firm's duties to its stakeholders. Fulfillment of these obligations is intended to minimize any harm and maximize the long-run beneficial impact of the firm on society" (Smith, 2001, p.142). Another definition states that CSR is an "organization's obligation to maximize its positive impact and minimize its negative effects in being a contributing member to society, with concern for society's long-run needs and wants. CSR means being a good steward of society's economics and human resource" (Lantos, 2001, p. 600). Both definitions talk about how important it is for business to impact society in the long run positively. Furthermore, according to World Business Council for Sustainable Development, CSR is "the continuing commitment by business to behave ethically and contribute to economic development while improving the quality of life of the workforce and their families as well as of the local community and society at large" (GAEA, n.d.). This definition also points out that CSR is a continuous effort by the company to influence the environment it operates in positively; CSR should not be an investment on a short-term basis; it should be part of the company's culture and identity. European Commission has also defined CSR; according to them, it is "the responsibility of enterprise for their impact on society. Therefore, it should be company lead" (European Commission, n.d). In *Understanding CSR- Its History and the Recent Developments*, the authors point out that today companies in their CSR embrace the concept called Triple Bottom Line (TBL). It considers 3P's – people, planet, and profit. This concept encourages businesses to take a more objective perspective on their impact on people and the earth, rather than focusing solely on profits. And more and more companies are starting to use it when addressing CSR. TBL encourages businesses to decide what they should do with obtained profit and look at how the profit was made and how it influenced various stakeholders (Jhawar & Gupta, 2017). By looking at the definitions presented above, it is possible to notice that in one way or another, they all emphasize the positive impact that businesses should have on society.

Implementing CSR in the business's strategy can bring benefits to society and the company. First, CSR can be an essential aspect worth looking at while building a brand's

image. If a company is living up to the set CSR policies, they show their authenticity. This authenticity then helps build the brand's and company's value. Businesses that are unethical in their practices and not legitimate in their strategies put themselves at risk of being boycotted by the customers (Książak, 2017). Furthermore, implementing CSR can also increase the company's goodwill as investors seek responsible companies that they can invest in. Moreover, including CSR in companies' strategy can increase the employees' morals and shape proper relations with stakeholders while showing that their needs and views are considered. Additionally, CSR also gives the company a competitive advantage as customers tend to choose brands known for their social responsibility (Książak, 2017).

For Poland, the road to becoming a country with strong CSR ties came after the fall of communism in the early 90s and becoming part of the European Union in 2004. At first, the implementation of sustainable development focused on ecological issues, which was understandable, given the dramatic state of the natural environment left by the previous system. What is worth noting is that transnational corporations (TNCs) had a significant impact and input in CSR development in Poland. With a strong company culture and know-how, those corporations were pioneering in CSR in Poland because they were transferring many of their sustainable solutions from abroad. Polish CSR development went through various stages. First, there was little to no interest in this concept. This period can be distinguished between 1997-2000. Then, most business leaders and economic journalists expressed their reluctance and even opposition to CSR (2000-2002). In stage three (2002-2004), many public declarations of recognition for the role of ethics and social responsibility as a foundation of any self-respecting company took place. In the 2004-2007 time period, one could observe the fourth stage of CSR growth in Poland. In this stage, the development of specific, though partial, projects covering selected, significant areas of business operations took place. Years 2008-2010 were the period of verification of the quality and effectiveness of the CSR strategies already implemented by the companies, while in 2010-2012, companies had started to engage in dialogue with their stakeholders concerning data reporting beyond financial matters. The next stage (2012-2014) was connected to searching for new measures of the effectiveness of CSR activities. Lastly, since 2014 it has been possible to observe the combination of CSR with social innovations and new economic phenomena that are taking place in Poland (Jastrzębska, 2016).

As one can see, CSR has a long history during which it became a more important aspect for companies worldwide. If done correctly, CSR can be beneficial for businesses that decide

to involve in it. The question that still needs to be tackled is whether CSR should be implemented in times of crisis and, if so, how.

2.3 CSR Communication

“Corporate communication can be defined as a total communication of the organization, and it integrates different messages of organizations under one banner” (Mohamad & Bakar, 2018, p. 240-241). In this, it differs from marketing or organization communication, which is targeted at customers or employees (Thøger Christensen, 2002). Within corporate communication, one can distinguish CSR communication that aims to deliver information about an organization’s CSR efforts to its stakeholders (Morsing, 2006).

Øyvind Ihlen et al. (2011) asked themselves in their book whether CSR communication is needed. With some believing that companies should focus solely on their operation, this question was and is still valid. Some may even consider the engagement in CSR initiatives as shallow, suspicious, and dictated by companies’ self-interest. But Forehand and Grier (2003) argued that stakeholders do not perceive CSR initiatives in a negative light; they only do so if the initiatives are tied with manipulative and unethical marketing strategies. Nevertheless, it is not a surprise that some believe that CSR communication is not always beneficial for corporations as it may raise suspicion about the reasoning behind social initiatives. However, CSR communication is needed as it may raise stakeholder participation and ethical practices within the business (Ihlen et al., 2011).

Figure 1 presents a CSR communication framework taken from *Maximizing Business Returns to Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR): The Role of CSR Communication (2010)*. As one can see, there are two main aspects that need to be taken into consideration while designing CSR communication, *message content* and *message channel*. The authors also distinguished two contingency factors that influence the communication – *stakeholder* and *company characteristics*. Lastly, *internal* and *external communication outcomes* have been pointed out. As one can see, CSR communication can internally influence awareness or trust. Externally it affects consumers, employees, or investors in multiple ways. If correctly done, CSR communication can positively influence the purchase intentions of clients or the loyalty of workers toward the employer.

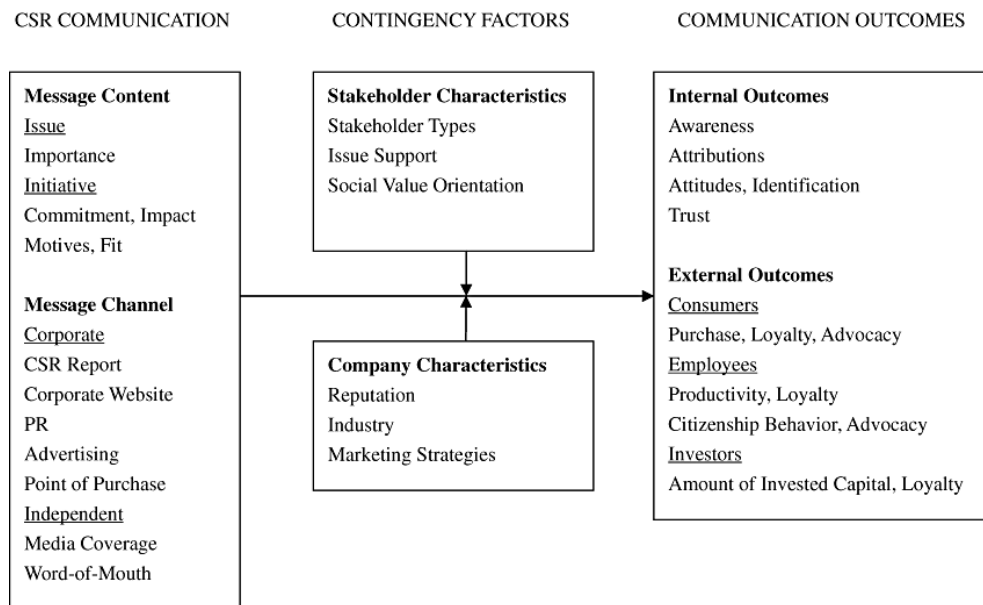


Figure 1 Communication Framework taken from *Maximizing Business Returns to Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR): The Role of CSR Communication* (2010)

Shuili Du et al. (2010) distinguish various CSR messages that can be communicated with a company's environment. First, businesses can communicate their commitment to the social cause, for example, the amount of donations made. Secondly, they can also share information about the CSR impact. In other words, instead of focusing on the commitment/input that the company had in the given cause, they can communicate the output of it. An example of it could be information about the benefits of the CSR initiatives undertaken by the organization. Other messages that can be communicated with the environment are CSR motives. Including this type of information in CSR communication is important as it may influence the skepticism around CSR initiatives of the company itself. Therefore, organizations should always be authentic and honest when they communicate the motives behind engagement in CSR and acknowledge the fact that such an engagement benefits both society and business. Lastly, a company can also communicate its CSR fit. In other words, the company can let its environment know what the correlation between business operations and the CSR cause is (Du et al., 2010). After creating the CSR message, the next step is to choose communication channels to distribute it.

Organizations can communicate through controlled or uncontrolled channels. Advertising, annual reports, newsletter, the company's website, and social media are channels that belong to controlled communication media. As a name suggests, the use of this type of

communication channels allows the organization to have control over shared information as they are the one that creates them. Uncontrolled channels compromise media like television, news, blogs, radio, etc. (Kim & Ferguson, 2014). In this sphere, the company has little control over what messages are communicated with the environment as they do not own the communication channels. But on the other hand, people tend to respond more positively to CSR communication if it came from neutral channels. Companies should therefore try to have good relations and cooperate with outside media in order to obtain positive coverage in media channels (Du et al., 2010).

An economic or financial crisis situation is said to have an effect on the purchase decisions of customers and their consumption habits. In challenging times companies had to cut their expenses, and usually, communication is one of the aspects that receive less funding. But in times of crisis, customer communication should stay on the same level or even increase with respect to the communication performed before the crisis (Tomse & Snoj, 2014). The company should communicate closely with its stakeholders to limit the negative effect of the crisis. Stakeholders and interested citizens may even put pressure on the businesses and demand information in a timely manner as news in a time of crisis is highly valued (van der Meer et al., 2017). COVID-19 pandemic is considered to be a global crisis, and as such, it also influenced the company's communication. According to He and Harris (2020), companies will have to re-evaluate their missions, visions, and objectives to consider the changes that took place with their customers or competitors after the pandemic. Companies are facing a challenge where they have to adapt to the new reality with COVID-19. Brands that will address the needs of their customers will not only survive but also might record a company's growth (Kisiołek, 2020). According to Artur Kisiołek (2020), the values that customers will look for the most are safety and health and savings and expenses. Companies had to consider those new needs and respond to them with their communication channels. According to Czajkowska (2020), companies' communication on social media differs in times of the COVID-19 pandemic from the messages shared before it. During the pandemic companies share information about the new disease and the steps that they take to limit its spread. She also pointed out that companies use hashtags to inform the audience about taken measurements and to create a positive brands image (Czajkowska, 2020). According to Eurocom Worldwide survey results, 80% of surveyed respondents admitted that they have partially or completely rethought the communication practices and messages in times of the COVID-19 pandemic (Radwan, 2020). In their paper, Reddy and Gupta (2020) created a

framework for effective communication during the pandemic. According to them, a well-organized communication system should include four elements - content, method, people, and partners. Content is situation-specific as it should ensure that communication precedes the community's response during different stages of the crisis. The method represents various platforms and tools used for communication purposes, such as social media, blogs, webinars, etc. People are the receivers of the communication messages, and partners represent organizations that are viewed as accurate and trustworthy during the crisis.

The crisis has the power to influence the market situation and customers' behavior and needs. Companies should think twice before reducing the funds meant for the communication department as in challenging times communication processes are extremely important. With stakeholders expecting the corporations to act in times of crisis, CSR actions should be properly addressed and distributed through communication channels.

2.4 CSR in times of crisis

The previous part of chapter two looked at the theory connected to the concept of CSR, its history, definitions, and the effect it can have on businesses. It also discussed CSR communication. In this part of my study, I will look at the theory behind CSR in times of crisis.

The 2007-2008 financial crisis showed that attitudes toward CSR could change rapidly. Before the economic crisis, companies invested significantly in CSR-connected initiatives. Transnational corporations (TNC) being the ones who spend the most considerable sums of money in the CSR sphere. But medium-sized enterprises were also invested in the CSR-related initiative as they realized the importance of those types of actions and benefits that were tied to them. After the crash, there has been a change in the CSR activities as many started to question the intentions behind each initiative, especially the ones taken by TNCs. Moreover, the commitment of TNCs toward their CSR initiatives was fluctuant after the hit of the economic crisis. And although, after the crash, TNCs reduced their budgets contributions to CSR, many corporations still carried on and got involved in CSR-related initiatives. In a way, by doing so, they wanted to show why they got involved in CSR practices in the first place. 2007-2008 financial crisis served as an example, but societies and corporations can face various crises. There are many challenges in front of corporations, legislations, development, implementation of strategies, or even entering a new market. And some have argued that

engagement in CSR initiatives can give the company a competitive advantage in times of crisis. One thing is sure, as highlighted in the *Corporate Social Responsibility in Times of Crisis. Practices and Cases from Europe, Africa, and the World*, corporations do engage in CSR initiatives during challenging times (Idowu et al., 2017). Dra. Belén Fernández-Feijóo Souto (2009), in her work based around the previously mentioned 2007-2008 financial crisis, also brought up a question of whether CSR in times of crisis is a threat or an opportunity. On the one hand, it is a risk as CSR initiatives generate costs that could be allocated somewhere else in the company in times of crisis. Furthermore, if businesses use CSR only as a marketing and PR tool, they also risk losing their image and positive attitude toward CSR actions. But on the other hand, CSR can also create opportunities in times of crisis. One example of it can be the fact that CSR engages stakeholders and gives them adequate treatment. By doing so, CSR can strengthen their attitude and positive image of the company. In the long run, businesses should treat CSR as an opportunity to help them overcome a time of crisis.

COVID-19 pandemic can be considered as a crisis with economic, social, and environmental consequences. It has an impact on sustainable development, and it also affects CSR initiatives. The Edelman Trust Barometer 2021² showed that people are concerned and fearful about job loss the most out of other things (Edelman, n.d.). People mentioned climate change and fear about contracting COVID-19 as other factors that they are highly concerned about. What is interesting is that business turned out to be the most trusted institution. People trust businesses more than NGOs, governments, or media. Furthermore, according to Edelman Trust Barometer, 2021, businesses are also the only institutions that are perceived as ethical and competent. But that trust also comes with responsibilities and expectations. As the 2021 annual Edelman survey showed, people do not only have more faith in businesses; they also expect them to fill the void that governments leave. CEOs are expected to step in and take the lead when governments are too slow to respond to societal issues. Moreover, the leaders of corporations are expected to hold themselves and their institutions accountable to the public and not only their stakeholders and boards of directors. 2020 Edelman Trust Barometer Spring Update showed that 67% of respondents indicated that donations made by businesses for hospitals, healthcare facilities, and educators would likely maintain or even increase their trust in corporations (Edelman, 2020). According to He and Harris (2020), one could observe

² Online survey in 28 countries with more than 33,000 respondents. The 2021 Edelman Trust Barometer has been conducted from October 19 to November 18, 2020

that there are many companies that have engaged in CSR initiatives during the COVID-19 pandemic. Especially the initiatives that offered aid and support in the fight with the new virus. They also point out that the COVID-19 pandemic may affect CSR in two ways. On the one hand, discourage companies from investing and engaging in CSR as they will have to focus on their core business operations. On the other hand, the pandemic can accelerate CSR development in the long run as businesses realize that their survival relies on achieving a balance between profitability and good relations with stakeholders. (He & Harris, 2020).

As COVID-19 is still an ongoing pandemic, there is still a gap and a need for new knowledge and literature about the topic. One can see from the theory presented above that the academic environment has studied the effect that the 2007-2008 financial crisis had on CSR. Recently, scholars had already expressed an interest in researching the influence that the COVID-19 pandemic has on CSR practices. The question remains whether the pandemic has influenced the CSR initiatives and, if so, then in what way.

2.5 The demand for CSR initiatives

In their paper, Giovanna Michelin and Michelle Rodrigue (2015) study the demand for CSR while looking at stakeholders' proposals. They focused on proposals submitted by stakeholders to U.S. corporations in the 1996-2009 period. The main finding from the research showed an increase in the proposals submitted during the chosen time frame. The most important topics for stakeholders included environmental issues, diversity, and governance. Stakeholders also put emphasis on improving transparency. According to a study conducted by Michelin and Rodrigue (2015), stakeholders were becoming more successful in influencing corporate activities and put pressure on them. But the majority of scholarly contributions in the sphere of demand for CSR take a management perspective with the sole focus on companies and investors. Literature usually puts emphasis on how companies can respond to the specific demand of chosen stakeholders, which CSR actions help enhance the performance of the company, or what are the motives behind companies' engagement in CSR in the first place (Öberseder et al., 2013). There is a gap and lack of literature that discusses the demand for CSR initiatives from the perspective of the customers.

By looking at CSR from only a management perspective, one neglects the needs of other stakeholders. Knowing that customers are playing a crucial role in the operations of any company and their central role in marketing, one should pay close attention to the views and

needs of customers in the sphere of CSR (Öberseder et al., 2013). During the COVID-19 pandemic, the trend of papers focusing on the management perspective of CSR is visible as well, also on the Polish market. In her work Czajkowska (2020) focused on studying how corporations responded to the pandemic. To do that, she analyzed the social media posts made by the companies. The research conducted by CCI France-Pologne also surveyed companies in Poland with little focus on the consumers' point of view. CSR and CSR communication are essential for companies, especially in times of crisis when the business environments of the organizations are waiting for valuable information on how the company is tackling the issues. Therefore, in my thesis, I will look at CSR initiatives during the crisis from the customers' point of view rather than the managerial one.

According to He and Harris (2020), the COVID-19 pandemic may increase people's expectations when it comes to the social responsibility of businesses. In those challenging times, consumers also became more ethical in their purchase decisions; this, on the other hand, will also probably influence and shift them to more responsible consumption. Those new needs and expectations will then be likely mirrored by organizations (He & Harris, 2020). Moreover, companies are expected to respond to the COVID-19 crisis and protect their employees and communities instead of focusing on the financial results (Manuel & Herron, 2020). The research done for CCIFP Barometer – *CSR w praktyce* (CSR in practice) also shows that there is a demand for CSR initiatives in the times of the COVID-19 pandemic. 41% of consumers that participated in the study believe that during the pandemic, companies should increase the amount of CSR initiatives that they engage in. Furthermore, 61% of consumers also agreed that companies should engage in initiatives that are supposed to support the fight with the pandemic and slow down its spread (CCI France Pologne, n.d). The global Edelman Trust Barometer³ also indicated that people expect companies to engage in CSR initiatives as 81% of participants claim that brand's involvement in CSR during the COVID-19 pandemic is a deciding factor in their purchase decisions (Huang & Liu, 2020). This data clearly shows that there is a need for companies to respond to the ongoing crisis.

Chapter two introduced the topic of the COVID-19 pandemic and addressed the theory behind CSR and CSR communication. It also highlighted the gaps in the literature. The next

³ The survey was conducted between 15.04.2020 and 23.04.2020 by Edelman Intelligence. It sampled more than 13.200 respondents in 11 markets.

chapter will present the methodological choices used in this study to answer the sub-questions and, in the end, the main research question of the thesis.

Chapter 3 Methodology

Chapter three focuses on the methodology of my study. First, it discusses the research design implemented in my thesis, followed by the sampling method used in the study and the design of the survey questionnaire. After that, it moves on to the operationalization of the study and ethical concerns. Chapter three includes data analysis of the 21 press releases and the survey. Lastly, it also addresses the validity and reliability of the research.

3.1 Research Design

With my thesis, I aimed to research the demand for CSR actions during the COVID-19 pandemic and how companies communicated their CSR actions with their stakeholders. As I touch upon two issues, the customer demand side and corporate communication side, the best way to approach the research was by implementing a mixed-methods design. Namely, the thesis relies on a customer survey, textual analysis of corporate statements, and an interview with company representatives. Data was collected and analyzed simultaneously but with no interaction between each other. The findings complemented one another in the interpretation stage, which will help respond to the main and supporting research questions.

The customers' perception of CSR activities during the COVID-19 pandemic had to be researched with the help of an online survey, given the current restrictions preventing any in-person data-gathering. This method was used to describe and observe a phenomenon based on a larger sample of participants, a fraction of the population, in this case, Polish citizens (Scheuren, 2004). Furthermore, according to Matthews and Ross (2010), survey research allows the researchers to obtain data to gather knowledge about the opinions and attitudes of the participants towards the topic. Therefore, the survey fit my study as I aimed to understand the demand that Polish citizens had for CSR initiatives and their perception of them during the COVID-19 pandemic. This part of the research has been conducted with the help of the SPSS program. The aim was to study participants' responses by using graphs, tables, and other options available in the SPSS (Buckley & King-Hele, 2015). After obtaining the quantitative data and uploading it to the program, I have performed a qualitative interpretation of it.

Additionally, the company's view and CSR actions have been analyzed by looking at 21 press releases of LPP published between March 2020 and March 2021. The first press release came from the period straight after the pandemic outbreak, while the last included text

discussed the 2020 charity help given by LPP. In order to analyze the obtained data from press releases I have performed a thematic analysis. Thematic analysis is a research method that helps identify, organize and notice patterns across the given database. It allows the researcher to find what topics are most commonly discussed and then make sense of them. However, just because something is common does not mean that it is relevant to the study. The thematic analysis allows the researcher to identify data that is indeed important in his or her research. Additionally, this research method is very flexible and can be conducted in a number of different ways. In my research I have taken an inductive approach to data coding and analysis. In this approach, the researcher derives codes and themes from the data itself (Braun & Clarke, 2012).

Throughout the analysis presented within this thesis I have done open, axial, and selective coding. During each of those stages I have constantly interacted with the dataset, compare it, and apply data reduction. As the data analysis process moved forward it allowed me to recognize themes and code them appropriately (Williams & Moser, 2019). The analysis allowed me to study what information was shared and find patterns in the range of texts made by LPP. The thematic analyses ultimately contributed to understanding how the company responded to the COVID-19 crisis. It allowed me to recognize the initiatives that LPP included in their CSR during the pandemic. In addition, an interview with two LPP representatives has also been conducted to study their CSR communication strategy during the COVID-19 pandemic. According to Johnson (2011), in-depth interviews involve social interactions. This method, to be effective, builds on intimacy but differs from the day-to-day conversation. The obtained information is for another purpose, usually as a base for future study. In-depth interviews are used by the researcher when they seek 'deep' information and knowledge (Johnson, 2011). I aimed to research how the company engages in and communicates CSR activities during the pandemic. I am seeking more in-depth information than the survey would enable me to obtain; therefore, I decided to conduct in-depth interviews. Furthermore, direct contact with the company allowed me to get information that I could gather only directly from the LPP representatives. An example of it could be data about internal communication of CSR initiatives. Without direct contact with the company I would only be able to look at external CSR communication, and as a result, internal communication with the employees and CSR initiatives that have not been shared would remain unknown. Analysis of the press releases aid in understanding the range and type of initiatives that LPP

engaged into, but the interview complemented it by delivering information about the communication strategy of those CSR initiatives to the public and internal environment.

The survey and the interview were both conducted in Polish as I am a native Polish speaker. The knowledge of the native language of the market where I conducted my research was a strength during the study. It allowed me to reach the survey respondents and the company representatives in their mother tongue, which then contributed to the lack of language barrier between the participants and me. Furthermore, analyzed press releases were also in Polish. Same as before, the ability to speak and understand Polish allowed me to study the data accurately.

A mixed-methods research design was used to study the chosen phenomena from different perspectives accurately. It allowed me to gather necessary data that will be further analyzed in chapter four. The next part of chapter three will focus on the sampling method that has been used in my research.

3.2 Sample, Participants, and Questionnaire

I have based my research on the mixed-methods research design; therefore, the samples for each method that has been used differ from each other. This part of chapter three will focus on participants and sampling methods used in my study.

In the first part of my study, which is based on the online survey, I have used the non-probability sampling methods, convenience, and snowball sampling to be more specific. Convenience sampling fit perfectly into my study as it allowed me to locate and recruit potential participants with ease (Sarstedt et al., 2017). The survey has been distributed to the Polish citizens in the age group 18-40 with the help of social media platforms such as Facebook, Twitter, and LinkedIn. I have used social media platforms to post the link to the survey on, for example, public groups where the potential participants were also asked to pass on the survey to other people. By using snowball sampling in the research, I have avoided bias as people with whom I have no connection also participated in the study. The survey has been created and then published with the help of the online tool provided for students by the Erasmus University Rotterdam – Qualtrics. Qualtrics Research Suite is online survey software that helps collect and analyze and relevant data. My thesis survey was published online on May 4th, 2021 and closed on May 17th, 2021. I have gathered 192 respondents in total, but

because some questionnaires were not complete, after clearing the data, I received 172 valid and finished survey responses.

Based on the data from *The Deloitte Global Millennial Survey 2020*⁴ survey, I have chosen a target group for my study. I have focused on people aged 18 to 40 in the Generation Z and Millennials group. According to the Deloitte survey, the COVID-19 pandemic increased people's desires in the mentioned generations to positively change their communities. Furthermore, 76% of surveyed Millennials and 74% of Gen Zs admitted that the pandemic increased their sensitivity to other people's needs (Deloitte, n.d.).

Additionally to the press releases analyses, one 30 minutes in-depth interview with two representatives of LPP has been conducted to study the company's strategy and CSR communication during the COVID-19 pandemic. The participants have selected based on a purposive sampling method as they had to fall into a specific category. I have managed to reach out to the LPP's Director of CSR and Communication and schedule an interview in which the Director of LPP's Foundation also took part in it. This interview is a great addition to the textual analyses of the press releases. It fills the gaps and helps me better understand the communication strategy of LPP's CSR activities. While the analyses of the press release aid in distinguishing the CSR initiatives of LPP during the COVID-19 pandemic, the interview contributed to gathering knowledge about the company's external and internal CSR communication strategy during these challenging times. While external communication strategy could have been studied while looking at the company's website and social media, internal communication would remain excluded. The interview with the LPP representatives shined a light on this otherwise hidden part of knowledge.

The survey and interview have been conducted in Polish. The questionnaire design and its English translation can be found in the appendix of this thesis. The survey participants had to be between 18-40 age range and citizens of Poland. The questionnaire consisted of several parts. First, questions were connected to the demographics background of the participants; then, they have been asked about their knowledge of CSR. Then the questions

⁴ The report is based on two sets of surveys. The initial survey has been conducted on 13.715 Millennials from 43 countries and 4.711 Gen Zs participants from 20 countries. In the subsequent survey participated 5.501 Millennials and 3.601 Ge Zs from 13 markets affected by COVID-19 pandemic. In total there were 27.500 participants.

focused on the CSR actions during the COVID-19 pandemic. Lastly, two questions were asked to see whether participants are familiar with LPP and whether they notice their CSR actions during the pandemic. The answers to nine questions directly tied to the demand for CSR actions perception and shopping behavior of participants during the pandemic were based on the 5-point Likert scale. The scale allows the respondents to what degree they agree or disagree with the given statement.

Demographics

The demographic part of the survey questionnaire consisted of three questions. Participants were asked about their age, gender, and place of residence. These questions allowed me to understand the sample of participants better and obtained data. The demographic part has been placed at the beginning of the questionnaire. Teclaw et al. (2011) found out in their research that placing the demographic questions at the beginning of the questionnaire might increase the response rate for demographics items with no effect on the non-demographic questions.

Shopping Habits and Awareness

After the demographic part of the questionnaire, the participants were asked about their CSR knowledge, their awareness of shopping habits during the pandemic.

This part of the survey has been developed while looking at data obtained from the CCI France-Pologne Barometer survey and Edelman Trust Barometer. Both studies showed that customers expect corporations to engage in CSR initiatives during the pandemic. Moreover, obtained data also indicates that customers expect companies to act in times of the COVID-19 crisis. The engagement in those types of practices can also influence the future buying decisions of customers, as pointed out in the Edelman Trust Barometer. The survey also included questions that connected to the awareness and sensitivity of the participants for the needs of others during the COVID-19 crisis. This part has been based on the results obtained from The Deloitte Global Millennial Survey 2020 that indicated that pandemic has increased participants' sensitivity to the needs of others and their desire to create a positive change in their communities.

3.3 Operationalization

This part of chapter three will focus on the operationalization of the study. I will discuss how each research method helped answer sub-questions and, ultimately, the main research question.

First, I will focus on the quantitative method used in my thesis, the online survey. As described previously, the questionnaire has been divided into several parts, each with its purpose. The inclusion of demographic questions, especially the age, allowed me to collect data from participants that came from my target group. The next part of the questionnaire focused on CSR-connected questions. This was the most significant part of the study as responses from this part allowed me to study the demand and perception of CSR initiatives of Polish citizens that participated in the study. The survey contributed to gathering data from a greater number of participants than the interviews would. Furthermore, the use of an online survey helped answer the sub-question and main research question. It allowed me to reach out to citizens from most Polish regions and gather information about their perspective on CSR during the COVID-19 pandemic. This was crucial for my study as I aimed to study the view of Polish citizens from Poland and not only one region of the country.

In my thesis, I have also implemented the use of qualitative research methods. First, I will discuss the thematic analyses of the press releases. The thematic analysis allows the researcher to identify important patterns in relation to their study (Braun & Clarke, 2012). COVID-19 pandemic has influenced the CSR initiatives taken by the companies. They responded to the ongoing crisis and focused on the actions that can aid those in need (He & Harris, 2020). The analyses of the LPP press release aid in answering the sub-question and main research question as it allowed me to gather data about CSR initiatives of the Polish company and better understand how CSR was adopted in the times of the COVID-19 pandemic. Furthermore, another qualitative research method used in my thesis is an online interview with LPP representatives. In my study, I aimed to research how companies communicate their CSR initiatives during the pandemic. And while analyzing available data online would have allowed me to examine the external communication, the internal communication would remain excluded. Conducted interview with LPP representatives aid in answering the sub and main research questions as it shined a light on previously hidden data that could not have been obtained without direct contact with the company.

The analyses of the survey, press releases, and online interview aid in answering the sub-questions that ultimately lead to answering the main research question. Should one of the research methods be excluded, part of the valuable knowledge would stay hidden.

3.4 Ethical Concerns

Ethical concerns are one of the most important part of any research. They should be appropriately addressed in order to ensure that the study is ethical and does not violate, for example, the privacy or dignity of participants. I will address the measures connected to ethical concerns that have been included in my thesis.

First and foremost, the study brought no harm to the participants and did not violate their dignity in any way. In the case of both the survey and the interview participants, their full consent to participate in the study has been obtained. Survey respondents had been informed at the beginning that by filling out the questionnaire, they give their consent to participate in the research, while interview participants had been given consent forms that they have signed and sent back to me before the interview. The privacy and confidentiality of the respondents have been ensured by not collecting any personal data that could link them to specific answers. When it comes to the interview, participants could choose whether they wish to remain anonymous or whether they allow me to reveal their identity. At the beginning of the interview, I have also made sure to ask whether they allow me to record it for transcription purposes. Before participating in the study, the participants had been informed about the purpose and objectives of the research; there has been no misleading information. I am not employed by LPP, nor do I have any close connection with the organization; therefore there has been no conflict of interest.

Those measures have been implemented in the study in order to properly address the ethical concerns connected with the research.

3.5 Data Analysis

3.5.1 Thematic Analysis

The thesis aimed to not only look at the demand and perception of companies' CSR actions during the COVID-19 pandemic, but it also sought to take a closer look at what type of content is shared by corporations. To do that, I analyzed 21 LPP press releases available on their website. This part of three is focused on the analysis conducted on the material. First, 21

chosen press releases tied directly to CSR of the LPP have been put into word documents. The documents have then been uploaded into Atlas.Ti program for further analyses. The results of the analyses can be found below.

Atlas.Ti is software for the qualitative analyses that have been shared with students by the Erasmus University Rotterdam. It is software that allows researchers to analyze large data sets. It offers a variety of tools that aid in the analysis process. The researcher can code the data sets, link them to their findings, and visualize results and interpretations. After uploading the documents into Atlas.Ti program, I have first created a word cloud (figure 2) to see which words were primarily found in the chosen press releases.



Figure 2 Word Cloud from Atlas.Ti, it presents the most used words among 21 studied press releases of LPP

One can see the word - na (on) has been used more often (265 times). Furthermore, terms like lpp (183 times), dla (for) (92 times), ponad (above) (67 times) can also be found. Although those words were most frequently used in the range of 21 press releases, they do not signify what topics were covered in the data set. When I took a closer look at the data, I noticed that variations of the exact words could also be found. For example, *szpitali*, *szpital*, *szpitala*, *szpitalom*, *szpitale*, which are all variations of the Polish word for hospital, which in total could be found 89 times in the range of texts. Although important, the words themselves did not give away the topics communicated through the range of texts. To better understand how the terms were used, I have then analyzed the most prominent cases to see what messages were communicated through chosen press releases.

After initial study of the 21 LPP press releases with the help of the word cloud option in Atlas.Ti, I have proceeded with the thematic analysis. The first step was the open coding process. Open coding can be defined as "the process of 'breaking down, examining, comparing, conceptualizing, and categorizing data'" (Strauss and Corbin, 1990, p.61). Here seven main codes emerged. There are as follows: brands, medical support, non-medical support, monetary donations, LPP, LPP Foundation, and needs of the society. 'Brands' category is tied to parts that mention LPP brands (Mohito, Reserved, Sinsay, House, or Cropp). An example of it can be found in the press release *LPP Wsparło ponad 300 placówek* (LPP supported over 300 organizations), where one can read that LPP manages five clothing brands. Another example of it can be found in the press release *LPP wspiera pomorskie szpitalnictwo* (LPP supports hospitals in the Pomeranian region). Here one can read that Cropp and Reserved brands have contributed to the overall support given by the LPP in the times of the COVID-19 pandemic. The next code, medical support, ties with fragments that closely discuss the support of medical facilities provided by LPP. An example of it can be found in the *LPP przekazało już 100 tysięcy masek ochronnych* (LPP has already donated 100 thousand protective facemasks) where it is said that LPP, in order to support medical facilities, has already donated 100 thousand facemasks. Elements touching upon the subject of non-medical support, for example part from *LPP wspiera walkę z Koronawirusem – w tym maseczki za 1 mln złotych* press release (LPP supports the fight with the Coronavirus – including facemasks for 1 million PLN) that mentions that children from child care homes in Kraków and Gdańsk will receive computers to help them with remote education. When the fragment was discussing the amount of monetary donations made by LPP it has been coded as 'monetary support.' The frequent use of LPP is not surprising as it is the name of the company. An example of the name's use in the press releases can be the sentence speaking about how LPP decided to file a lawsuit against the Newsweek publishing house that published misleading and false information (taken from *LPP pomogło Chinom z maseczkami teraz one odwzajemniają pomoc* press release). Any fragment that spoke about LPP itself has been coded under the 'LPP' category. 'LPP Foundation' ties with fragments that discuss initiatives conducted by the Foundation, like for example, imitative #LPPomaga, or when the President of the Foundation has been making a statement in the press release. Lastly, fragments that address the needs of society during the COVID-19 pandemic received the code 'needs of society'. An example of it can be seen in press release *LPP przeznaczyło 5,4 miliona złotych na wsparcie placówek zdrowia w ramach akcji #LPPomaga* (LPP has

contributed 5,4 million PLN on support for medical facilities within #LPPPomaga) where the company informs that LPP receives questions and requests about support due to the tremendous needs connected to COVID-19 pandemic.

After the open coding process and assigning fragments to the codes, I have moved on to axial coding. In this part, I was looking for reoccurring themes in the research and whether I can combine some of the codes that emerged in the process of open coding. First, I noticed that whenever the press release would cover topics of monetary support, medical or non-medical support, and LPP Foundation, they would all discuss topics related to CSR initiatives of LPP during the COVID-19 pandemic. Therefore, those four codes have been placed in the same category – CSR of LPP during the COVID-19 pandemic. Another significant theme that reoccurred in the range of texts has been the topic of LPP itself. The codes ‘brands’ and ‘LPP’ have been merged and created the category of ‘LPP’ as I noticed that both of them cover the similar topic of the company itself. Lastly, the previous code of ‘needs of society’ has not been merged with any other codes, and it has created its own category with the same name.

Lastly, I took one more look at the data in the process of selective coding, where I reread the data. Here I have noticed one reoccurring theme. I have noticed that whenever LPP’s name or brands would be discussed, it was in most cases in correlation to the CSR initiatives that the company engaged in. The same can be said about the category ‘needs of society’. Whenever the press release would highlight the growing need for the support of organizations, government, or other communities, it would be connected to the CSR initiatives of LPP. The one theme that could have been noticed in 21 LPP press releases is one of the CSR initiatives that the company engaged in during the COVID-19 pandemic outbreak.

This thematic analysis helped me better understand the meaning behind chosen press releases of LPP's CSR actions during the COVID-19 pandemic. The results of the analysis will be presented in the next chapter, together with findings from other research methods. The coding frame created for the purpose of the thematic analysis can be found in the appendix to this thesis (see appendix D).

3.5.2 SPSS Analyses

In order to better understand the perception of CSR initiatives during the COVID-19 pandemic I have conducted an online survey. It has been conducted with the help of an online

tool - Qualtrics Research Suite. After I have obtained a sufficient amount of responses, I have then exported the data to the SPSS program. SPSS is a statistical software platform developed by IBM. It allows the researcher to analyze and better understand their data sets with the help of a variety of tools available to the user. The obtained results are going to be presented below.

The first three questions of the survey concerned demographic information of participants, their age, gender, and place of origin. From 172 collected responses, one can see that majority of respondents, 62.8%, were in the 18-24 age group (figure 3).

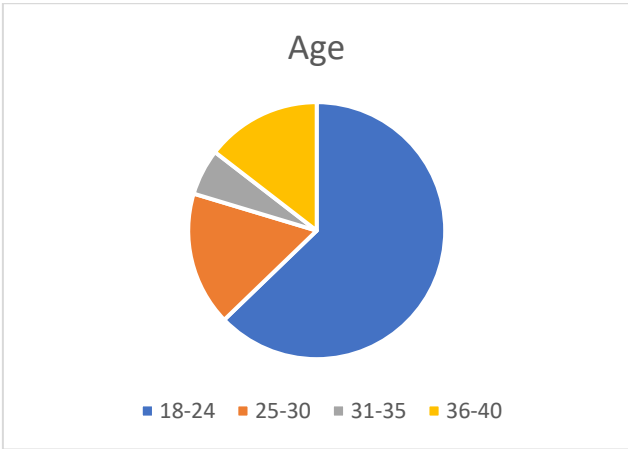


Figure 3 Age graph, presents the distribution of participants among different age groups (self-made)

Additionally, 88.4% of participants were females, while 10.5% were men, and 1.2% identify as other gender. Participants came from fourteen out of sixteen Polish regions. When we look at the demographics of the respondents, the greatest number of them, 47.7%, came from Pomeranian voivodship. 9.9% came from Mazowieckie, the same number – 7.6%, came from Kujawsko-Pomorskie and Malopolskie voivodships and 6.4% were from Śląskie region. A comprehensive look at the obtained data can be seen in the graph presenting the place of residence that can be found below (figure 4).

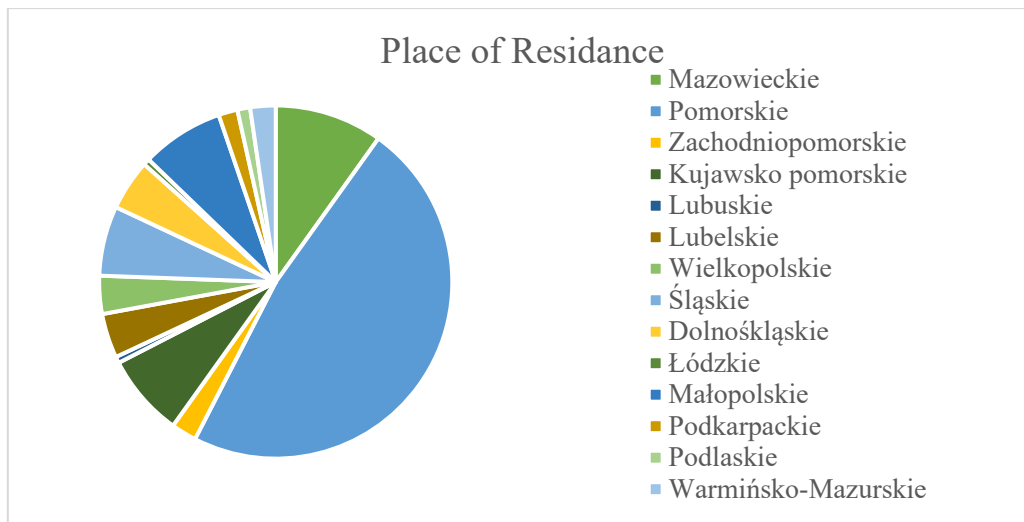


Figure 4 Place of Residence, graph presents the origin of survey participants, Polish regions they came from (self-made)

After demographic questions, the participants were asked whether they are familiar with the concept of CSR. Here, the participants' responses were almost equally distributed between yes and no, with slightly more participants having no prior knowledge about CSR. 42.4% of participants were familiar with the CSR concept before taking the survey. In comparison, 57.6% had no previous knowledge of it. The next part of the questionnaire concerned the shopping habits of participants and their awareness and sensitivity during the pandemic. The majority of participants, 69,2%, strongly agreed or somehow agreed that their buying habits changed during the COVID-19 crisis. 30,8% of respondents had no opinion about the subject or claimed that their buying habits did not change. In addition, more participants admitted that they buy less during the pandemic rather than more. 54.6% of respondents somehow agreed or agreed that they buy less than they used to, while 22.7% responded that they buy more. The majority of participants, 51.8%, also admitted that they became more sensitive to the needs of others after and during the outbreak of the pandemic.

The participants were also asked whether they pay more attention to the CSR initiatives during the pandemic. 41,3% of people that filled out the survey had no opinion whether they are paying more attention to the CSR initiatives during the pandemic. 27.7% somehow disagreed or strongly disagreed with the presented statement, while 32% somehow agreed or strongly agreed that they are paying more attention to CSR actions in the times of the COVID-19 pandemic. On the other hand, the majority of participants, 62.2%, strongly agreed

or somehow agreed that companies should engage in CSR initiatives during the COVID-19 pandemic. 7% answered the contrary, and 30.8% had no opinion about the topic. Similarly, 76.2% of respondents admitted that in their opinion, during the pandemic, companies should support organizations and communities in need. The participants were also asked whether companies' involvement in CSR initiatives during the pandemic influenced their buying habits. 48.6% of respondents strongly or somehow agreed that it is more probable that they will buy from the company that engages in CSR in the times of the pandemic rather than from the one that does not. 27.3% had no opinion, while 23,8 strongly or somehow disagreed with the presented statement. There were no apparent differences between answers regarding the willingness of participants to spend more on products and services of companies that engage in CSR in the times of the COVID-19 pandemic, as the participants were more or less equally split in their opinions. 34.9% of participants somehow or strongly agreed, 27.3% had no opinion, and 37.8% somehow or strongly disagreed with the given question.

Participants were also asked to point out CSR initiatives they have come across during the pandemic and where they have heard about them. Results are as follows: most participants selected that they have come across companies supporting hospitals and donating protective equipment. Among the CSR initiatives that the participants came across most often were also money donations. The graph below (figure 5) shows the illustration of participants' responses with the amount of participants that came across given CSR initiative.

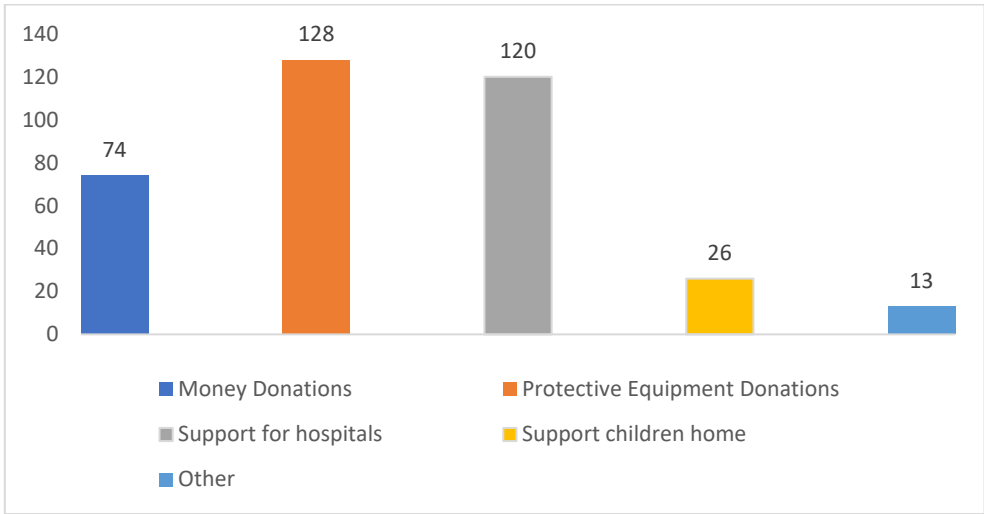


Figure 5 Knowledge about CSR initiatives during COVID-19 pandemic, graph presents the CSR initiatives that participants have come across in times of COVID-19 pandemic

The next question concerns communication channels, more precisely, how participants heard about CSR initiatives (figure 6). The data shows that the majority of participants found out about CSR actions on social media platforms, with 116 respondents choosing Facebook, 63 – Instagram, and 23 – LinkedIn. People learned about CSR initiatives from news and companies' websites as well. Part of the participants pointed out that they have not come across CSR initiatives.

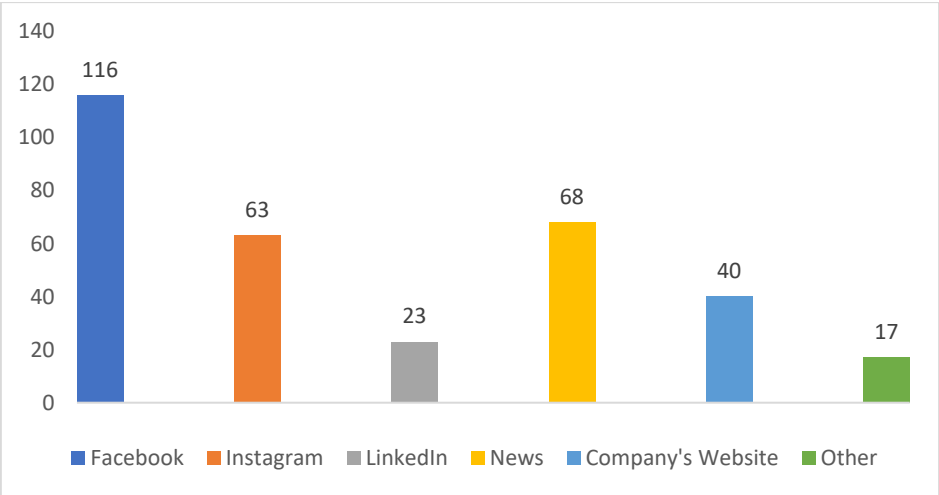


Figure 6 CSR communication channels, graph present from which communication channels participants learned about CSR initiatives during COVID-19 pandemic (self-made)

Lastly, participants were asked whether they are familiar with LPP and their CSR initiatives. 97.1% of respondents were familiar with LPP ad their brands, but only 18% of them came across the communication about the company’s CSR actions. Out of this 18%, most participants found out about LPP CSR actions through Facebook and LPP’s website. Some pointed to LinkedIn, News, and Instagram as other communication channels where they learned about LPP’s CSR initiatives during the pandemic.

The survey allowed me to gather knowledge about the perception of CSR initiatives by the participants. The next chapter will focus on presenting the results found in the analyses when I will perform a qualitative interpretation of the quantitative data.

3.6 Validity and Reliability

During the research process, I have considered certain measurements in order to

ensure the reliability and validity of my study. Reliability can be defined as "the extent to which results are consistent over time and an accurate representation of the total population" (Golafshani, 2003, p. 598). Additionally, he also highlights that the research is reliable if it can be reproduced under a similar methodology. When it comes to the qualitative part of the study, I have first ensured that all used press releases were directly or indirectly tied with the CSR initiatives of LPP during the COVID-19 pandemic. Furthermore, purposive sampling helped ensure that representatives chosen for the interview had a close connection and background in CSR and communication. When it comes to the quantitative part of the study, the survey, I enhanced the reliability of the research by using the same questionnaire for each participant. This allowed them to obtain a variety of results on the same topic. The purposive sampling allowed me to obtain viewpoints of Polish citizens with different backgrounds from different parts of the country.

On the other hand, validity is considered a measure that can determine whether the researcher measured what they wanted to measure in their study and how truthfully the obtained results are (Golafshani, 2003). In both qualitative and quantitative parts of the study, the sampling played a significant role in ensuring the study's validity. The survey could have been filled only by people in the 18-40 age range, which aid in obtaining the data from the target group. The deletion of not completed surveys from the data set also contributed to stronger validity as it cleared the data. By basing the research on the previous studies, the validity of the study has also been enhanced. During the data collection process for the qualitative part of the study, I made sure to pick press releases that touched upon the subject of CSR, which allowed me to make sure that I measure and study the material that is relevant for my study. Lastly, by recruiting interviewees with CSR and communication background, I also made sure to speak with representatives that could answer the questions that help me obtain data necessary for the study.

Chapter 4 Results

4.1 The communication strategy of companies during the pandemic

The results of the analyses of the press releases, together with the interview and survey, complement each other. Together those three research methods aid in answering the main research question and sub-question number one - *How did companies communicate CSR practices in the times of the COVID-19 pandemic in Poland*. Press releases helped better understand the scope of CSR messages communicated by LPP. The interview added more information to that and highlighted communication strategies implemented by LPP during the COVID-19 pandemic. Lastly, the survey helped distinguished what communication channels Polish citizens found information about CSR initiatives.

The survey showed that the majority of participants came across actions connected to supporting hospitals during the COVID-19 pandemic, as well as protective equipment and money donations. This indicates that companies' communication and CSR initiatives primarily focused on monetary support for those in need, equipment donations, and aiding medical facilities in the fight against the pandemic. This complements the results obtained from the analysis of 21 press releases of LPP. From looking at them, one can see that during the COVID-19 pandemic, LPP's CSR initiatives mainly focused on support for healthcare and organizations in need, whether it was donating masks, personal protection equipment, everyday clothes, money, or even computers for children. LPP representatives also distinguished those types of CSR initiatives in the interview where one of them stated that:

The first step of our action was to donate 250 thousand masks. We started to donate them on the 20th of March, and they spread at such pace, and the demand [for them] has been so big that we basically, still in March, made the decision to order another 750 thousand facemasks.

The presence of those types of CSR initiatives is not surprising as, first and foremost, during the pandemic and the crisis, medical facilities are on the front line of the fight with the new virus outbreak and therefore need more support.

As the 2020 Edelman Trust Barometer Spring Update showed, 67% of participants claimed that donations and support of businesses for medical/health facilities and educators would increase their trust in the corporations. Therefore, it is not a surprise that these types of initiatives were mainly communicated and found in companies' portfolios and noticed by customers. Furthermore, according to Czajkowska (2020), brands' messages on social media differed in times of the COVID-19 pandemic from those before it. Companies share information about the new disease and the steps that they take to limit its spread. The study showed that in times of the pandemic, companies indeed focused their CSR and CSR communication on initiatives connected with the fight against the new disease.

When it comes to CSR communication of organizations during the COVID-19 pandemic, we have to distinguish both external and internal communication channels. Regarding external communication, one can see that social media platforms and companies' websites have been the most frequently used channels. This can be seen in both survey results and the interview with LPP representatives. After being asked about external communication practices, the company's representative pointed out that during the COVID-19 pandemic, they focused on delivering their CSR communication through online channels like social media platforms. As the representative of LPP said, "First of all, we focused on social media because they really allow you to deliver current information quickly." LPP, in their external communication, used sites like Facebook, Instagram, or LinkedIn. What is worth pointing out is that there has rarely been an integration of the communicated messages. Only in some cases, the same information has been shared through various company platforms. As the representative pointed out, LPP had so much different data to share that they had to "juggle" with them on multiple social media accounts. An example of information shared through all communication channels could be the support given to medical facilities or a tutorial meant for the company's followers, which teaches them how to make sanitizer in their own homes. Furthermore, sometimes the CSR-connected messages were not shared by the LPP itself. Representatives during the interview pointed out that occasionally organizations and individuals that received support from them shared the information on their social media platforms. For example, some organizations posted pictures from receiving mask donations, and because of that, one could spontaneously find out about the #LPPpomaga

initiative.

When looking at communication from the citizens' point of view, the survey showed that the majority of respondents learned about CSR initiatives through social media platforms. Most of the participants pointed to Facebook as a platform where they came across CSR-related content. It shows that during the pandemic, companies mostly delivered CSR messages to customers with the help of online communication channels. Other highly scored communication channels were news and companies' websites. It shows that although social media platforms have been most frequently used, messages communicated through different communication channels also reached a significant number of participants. The fact that news has served as one of the CSR communication means can also be seen in the case of LPP. The company's representative in the interview pointed out that journalists reached out to them.

Journalists were also interested in our CSR initiatives, but these were more questions – How business in Pomerania is able to get involved. Well, I do not hide that the ‘Jesteśmy razem, pomagamy’ initiative of the previously mentioned Drutex made journalists asked us why we joined this action. [...] Journalists also received information from us as a summary of the first spring action by LPP pomaga in the second autumn version, which we have run on the basis of financial and material support connected to protective clothing.

While interviewing LPP representatives, I have also touched upon the subject of internal communication, as it is also a very important aspect of a company's communication strategy. In this case, the company used an internal communication platform, Yammer, which has a very similar interface to well-known Facebook. On this platform, the company informed employees about any initiatives that have been taken during the COVID-19 pandemic. As representatives of LPP pointed out, the pandemic has been a very challenging period for them. Representatives pointed out that although the switch from office work to home office did not make a massive change for people working back office, as they can perform their work anywhere, the change has been challenging for employees who work with patterns and fabrics. Another problematic aspect of the home office was the fact that many employees had little kids that needed their attention and helped with, for example, online schooling. As

representatives said, there very many internal measures taken by many departments to make sure that the transition to the home office comes smoothly. On their internal communication channel, the company “was showing how to cope with the new reality” (as pointed out by the LPP representative) while also making sure that employees receive all the help they need.

According to He and Harris (2020), due to the COVID-10 pandemic, communication between companies and customers changes as the use of online communicators, including social media marketing, increased drastically. The study conducted for this thesis confirms that observation as it shows that when it comes to CSR communication channels used by organizations during the COVID-19 pandemic, social media platforms together with companies’ websites have been the most frequently used ones. This finding can be seen in both survey results and the interview with LPP representatives. In the survey, the respondents distinguished social media as a communication channel through which they learned about CSR initiatives most often. In the interview, LPP representatives also pointed out that social media channels and the company’s website were mostly used to deliver CSR messages to the stakeholders. The results obtained from Eurocom Worldwide Survey 2020 suggest that the COVID-19 pandemic accelerated the digital transformation with the shift towards digital and content marketing practices (Radwan, 2020). This acceleration and shift towards the digital realm can be seen in the results obtained during the study of the Polish case. Companies in their CSR communication during COVID-19 focused on online channels, and therefore it would explain the high response rate of survey participants for those platforms. Kim and Ferguson (2014) pointed out that organizations can communicate through controlled and uncontrolled channels. The study of the Polish case showed that during the COVID-19 pandemic, companies communicated their CSR through controlled channels as well as those where they have little control over shared information.

The pandemic has been a challenging period for many companies. LPP and LPP Foundation had to put some of their CSR initiatives aside in favor of those that were most needed during the crisis. But now, medical facilities in Poland need what companies cannot give them, and that is well-trained staff to aid in the fight against the pandemic. Slowly the company is shifting its focus to their previous initiatives while also helping whenever and wherever they can.

4.2 The demand for and perceptions of CSR actions in times of COVID-19

To address the main research question and sub-question number two - *How did Polish customers perceive CSR actions during the COVID-19 pandemic*, I have again looked at the analyses of an online survey, press releases, and the interview with LPP representatives. Each of those pieces of research delivered valuable insight into how Polish citizens perceive CSR initiatives during the COVID-19 pandemic. The interview with LPP representatives, together with analysis of press releases, highlighted the need for aid initiatives, while the survey with Polish citizens shone a light on how society perceives CSR in times of the pandemic and their expectations towards companies.

First, one can notice that above half of the participants were not familiar with the CSR concept before taking part in the study. This shows that although CSR is becoming more important for companies, Polish citizens still do not have a broad knowledge of this business sphere.

COVID-19 pandemic has been a challenging time for many citizens. The research indicated that in Poland, the needs of the citizens and organizations shifted as many of them needed help to cope with the new reality. First, in 21 chosen press releases, LPP pointed out that with their CSR initiatives they address the needs of society in those challenging times. An example of it can be found in *LPP wspiera walkę z koronawirusem – w tym maseczki za 1 mln złotych* (LPP supports the fight with coronavirus – including facemask for 1 million PLN) press release. First, the company pointed out that “taking into consideration urgent needs of our health care, the Pomeranian corporation has made the decision to donate one million PLN to infectious diseases hospitals for purchase of protective facemasks.” Furthermore, in the same press release, it is also stated that

Besides the support of medical facilities and their employees, who do their best every day to prevent the spread and treat those infected with COVID-19, the company is also aware of the impact of the situation on the whole society. It also responds to the pressing needs of people for whom a difficult situation takes its toll.

Here, the company distinguished support that they delivered to child care homes and elderly people. Furthermore, in the press release that addressed the record LPP charity aid in 2020 worth over PLN 9 million, the company also states that while addressing various

needs of different organizations, they supported each of them financially and through material support. Interview with LPP representatives also showed the increase and shift in the needs of the society. The representative pointed out that they could “see that the scale of needs was tremendous and in principle, wherever you called, whoever you talked to, everyone needed help.” The representatives also mentioned that they received so many e-mails and questions about possible support that they had to start segregating what they had in their magazines in order to see what support can be delivered. What is interesting is that LPP not only engaged in initiatives that aid Polish citizens, the company has also been asked for help by the Polish government organizations. As the representative pointed out

In parallel to what is now [...], we as a leader on the clothing market were also asked by governmental organizations for support. First of all, we have a good knowledge of the market, so we were able to import facemasks. We also acted as an intermediary in the action of sewing masks by Polish sewing factories. And finally, we took part in the campaign of activation of entrepreneurs that have been initiated by Drutex. We joined this action to persuade other companies, in this difficult time for business, to really help those in need.

Furthermore, the survey revealed that society not only expressed the increased need for aid initiatives. It showed that Polish citizens paid more attention to the needs of others, with 51.8% admitting that they became more sensitive to the needs of others during the COVID-19 pandemic. This would indicate that because of this increase in sensitivity, people also pay attention to initiatives that address the needs of citizens and expect companies to engage in CSR initiatives. And the survey showed that while 32% of participants pay more attention to CSR initiatives, the majority of them (62.2%) believe that companies should engage in CSR during the COVID-19 pandemic. Furthermore, 76.2% of respondents also indicated that, in their opinion, companies should support organizations and communities in need during the COVID-19 crisis. This shows that Polish citizens express the demand for CSR initiatives in times of crisis. The results obtained from the online survey showed that companies should not remain passive towards the needs of citizens and their stakeholders. On the contrary, they should address them by including aid initiatives in their strategies during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Moreover, what is worth noting is that the pandemic also influenced the purchase habits of Polish citizens. The majority of survey participants indicated that during the COVID-19 crisis, their buying habits have changed. 54.6% of respondents admitted that they spend less than they did before, while 22.7% stated that they buy more. The results show that people became more cautious regarding their expenditures. This would suggest that companies have to engage in initiatives and market themselves in order to attract customers that are now more carefully making their shopping decisions. Furthermore, 48.6% of survey respondents indicated that they would rather purchase goods and services from the company that engages in CSR than from the one that does not include aid initiatives in its strategy during times of COVID-19 pandemic. Companies should also notice that, even though it is not a majority of participants, 34.9% of respondents are willing to spend more on the goods and services if the company behind them is involved in CSR initiatives during the COVID-19 pandemic. So companies, by engaging in CSR, can not only improve their image and show their company values but also gain a competitive advantage over their competition and attract more potential customers that are willing to spend more money on their goods.

People are expecting companies and brands to support those in need during the pandemic. This finding is similar to the results obtained in the CCI France-Pologne Barometer survey, where 61% of surveyed consumers indicated that they expect businesses to support society in the fight with the COVID-19 pandemic (CCI France Pologne, n.d.). Therefore, one can say that Polish citizens perceive CSR initiatives as a necessity during the pandemic. Furthermore, people not only expect corporations to be involved in CSR; they also admit that decisions taken by brands and their engagement in CSR during the COVID-19 pandemic might influence their future purchase decisions of where they shop and how much they spend. This shows similarity to results obtained in the Global Edelman Trust Barometer report that showed that brand's involvement in CSR during the COVID-19 pandemic was a deciding factor for 81% of respondents in their purchase decisions, and 65% of participants claimed that the brand's response to the crisis could impact their future brands' choices (Huang & Liu, 2020). The similarity may also be found in the work of He and Harris (2020) when they point out that during the COVID-19 pandemic, consumers are becoming more ethical in their purchase decisions.

4.3 Other findings

First, from the interview, one can see that LPP, with its strong values and history of CSR initiatives, drove employee engagement and the need to create a positive change during the COVID-19 pandemic. As said by the representatives in the interview, sometimes the initiative to help those in need during the pandemic was coming straight from the employees. An example of it can be support that has been delivered to elderly people in Gdańsk. This initiative has been proposed by the employee of LPP. Furthermore, as the representative stated, employees spontaneously got involved and “started sewing masks, producing all kinds of tutorials, and commenting in their social media about our (LPP’s) aid initiatives.” This shows that the knowledge and education of stakeholders can create a positive company image and drive a positive change.

The interview with LPP representatives showed that organizations that work closely with the company, as well as those who reached out to LPP for support, knew about CSR initiatives of the Polish retailer during the COVID-19 pandemic. It is not surprising as they were the ones who received it. On the other hand, the survey showed that participants had little knowledge of LPP’s CSR initiatives. At the end of the questionnaire, participants were asked two questions directly tied to LPP and their CSR initiatives. And although 97.1% of respondents were familiar with the company and its brands, only 18% had knowledge of their CSR initiatives. That indicates that even though the company is well known, Polish citizens are not familiar with LPP’s CSR initiatives. This might show that the communication of the CSR strategy and actions of the company is not reaching all types of stakeholders. If the company aims to communicate its initiatives effectively, it might have to consider making some changes. But to determine that, another study should be conducted.

During the interview I also asked LPP representatives whether they felt pressured by their business environment to engage in CSR initiatives during the COVID-19 pandemic. Representatives stated that the company did not feel pressured in any way. As the interviewee pointed out that

In principle, we did not feel pressured because, as a family company, we first reacted to the situation in Asia. First, at the end of January, we started aid initiatives for our offices in China for the owners of the factories; and this was an

initiative connected with the outbreak of COVID-19. And then, when the pandemic came to Europe and Poland in March 2020, we have quickly made a decision to start aid initiatives.

Furthermore, the representatives of LPP also informed me that instead of the pressure from its stakeholders to support more organizations, the company felt a great understanding and solidarity with them. The example that the LPP representative described was the situation and relationship the company has with foundations that, in total, take care of approximately two hundred children. Every year LPP would donate money for vacation trips for those children. However, in 2020 no organizations made contact with LPP in regards to this support. After contacting the organizations, the representative found out that the foundations did not want to additionally burden LPP since most of the company's businesses were closed due to lockdown. This shows that knowing one's stakeholders and being in good relations with them can turn out to be a decisive factor in hard times.

According to Manuel and Herron (2020), in times of the COVID-19 crisis, companies had to respond to changing environment because otherwise, they risk losing clients and other important stakeholders. Companies are expected to respond to the crisis and protect their employees and communities first, instead of focusing on the financial interest (Manuel & Herron, 2020). These expectations and the possibility of losing stakeholders might have put pressure on companies to engage in CSR and respond to the ongoing pandemic. The case of LPP showed that good cooperation and relations with stakeholders had allowed them to respond to the outbreak of the new virus fast. The company delivered well-thought-through and much-needed support to those in need.

Chapter 5 Discussion and Conclusion

This part of the thesis will first discuss the theoretical and social implications of the research. Then it will provide the conclusion and answers for set research question and sub-questions. Lastly, I will discuss the limitations and possibilities for future research connected to the CSR sphere in times of crisis.

5.1 Theoretical and Social Implications

The use of a mixed-method research design allowed me to study the phenomena from different angles. My thesis is unique as it implements the use of three separate and different research methods that then complemented each other to answer the research question. While the survey allowed me to obtain data to study how society perceives CSR initiatives during the COVID-19 pandemic, the analysis of the press releases aid in studying the company's communication strategy during the pandemic. The interview delivered knowledge about both CSR communication of the company and the demand of stakeholders for CSR initiatives in these challenging times. Therefore, it complemented findings from other research methods. The study about the adaptation of CSR on the Polish market shined a light on the understudied field. My thesis, therefore, has theoretical, academic, and societal implications.

First, in my thesis, I studied the perception of CSR initiatives from a societal point of view rather than managerial. In this perspective, the study goes along with the theory presented by Öberseder et al. (2013) that states that by looking at CSR from only a managerial perspective, one neglects other stakeholders. The thesis adds to this point of view and demonstrates the changing relationship between companies and customers. The relation when customers had an impact on the CSR initiatives taken by the corporations. It also resembles and adds to data obtained in the 2021 Edelman Trust Barometer or Deloitte Millennial Survey. My thesis showed that Polish citizens are sensitive to the needs of others and expect companies to engage in CSR initiatives during the crisis. The results obtained from studying the communication strategy of LPP during the COVID-19 show similar findings to those obtained by Małgorzata Adamska (2018). In her study, she found out that companies mostly communicated with the help of e-mails or websites. In times of the pandemic, LPP also decided to use online CSR communication tools.

Looking at CSR in times of crisis aid in better understanding how society responds to CSR initiatives in challenging times. Furthermore, COVID-19 is still an ongoing pandemic, and there is still a gap in the literature created about CSR during these challenging times. My thesis provides knowledge that can be a base of the study conducted post-crisis. And as such, it has theoretical and social implications.

5.2 Conclusion

COVID-19 pandemic influenced the lives of many people around the world. Hogwei He and Lloyd Harris (2020) pointed out in their work that the COVID-19 pandemic can be one of the most significant environmental changes in the history of modern marketing. As such, the pandemic can potentially have an impact on CSR and consumers ethics. As the thesis shows, the CSR had gone through changes to adapt to COVID-19 reality. In this part of chapter five, I will deliver the conclusion to both sub-questions as well as the main research question. First, I will provide an answer to how companies communicated their CSR initiatives during the COVID-19 pandemic, then I will present the findings in regards to how Polish citizens perceived CSR initiatives in times of the pandemic, and lastly, I will present how CSR adapted in times of COVID-19 pandemic based on my research.

CSR is still a growing sphere in Poland. However, one has to remember that Polish CSR does not have a long history yet due to political changes that took place after the fall of communism. As such, the Polish case presented a unique research opportunity. As research indicated, more than half of the survey participants had no previous knowledge of the CSR concept. This result shows that there is still potential for CSR growth when it comes to Polish society. What is worth noting is that after being presented with CSR definition, the majority of participants claimed that companies should engage in CSR initiatives during the pandemic. This result shows that participants viewed CSR as a necessity during the COVID-19 pandemic.

First, companies during the COVID-19 pandemic engaged in various CSR initiatives. Among them we can distinguish monetary donations, support for medical facilities, or donations of protective gear equipment. Each of those actions was tailored to help those in need and limit the spread of the COVID-19 disease. Companies also communicated their

engagement in CSR initiatives through various communication channels. Social media like Instagram or Facebook, news, or companies' websites have been broadly used. In times of crisis, valuable information should be delivered to stakeholders in a timely manner. Therefore, it has not been a surprise that during the COVID-19 pandemic, companies opted to communicate their CSR-related messages mainly through online communication channels. The case of LPP also showed that the company did not integrate their messages on different platforms. The company had so much data related to CSR that it allowed them to differentiate information shared on each communication channel.

Secondly, Polish citizens also expressed interest and demand for CSR initiatives in times of the COVID-19 pandemic. First, the case of LPP showed that the company itself recorded a huge amount of questions connected to possible support in challenging times of the pandemic, which already indicated that there is a need for aid during those difficult times. Then this observation has also repeated in the results obtained from the online survey, where participants indicated that they expect companies to engage in CSR initiatives and support those in need during the COVID-19 pandemic. The case of Poland showed that Polish citizens perceive CSR initiatives during the COVID-19 pandemic as something given, something that is in their eyes a necessity and obligation of the companies. They expect organizations to respond to the crisis and aid those in need.

Lastly, to conclude the findings of this study and address the main research question of how CSR in Poland adapts to the COVID-19 pandemic. The study conducted for this thesis showed that Polish CSR adapted to the challenging times of the COVID-19 crisis. Citizens became more sensitive and expected companies to address the changing reality and include CSR initiatives in their strategies. Companies that recognized this trend include CSR in their portfolio during the COVID-19 pandemic and communicate them with their environment by using various communication channels. Interview and survey both indicated that online communicators were mostly used in CSR communication. The example of LPP has shown that companies had to put their previous CSR initiatives aside in order to adjust to the new reality of the pandemic and appropriately address the needs of society. Therefore, the study showed that the pandemic influences stakeholders' awareness in the sphere of CSR, the CSR actions that organizations engaged in, and their CSR communication. As one can see, each of these aspects adapted to the COVID-19 reality.

5.3 Limitations and Future Study

There have been some limitations in my study. Even though I used purposive and snowball sampling methods, most participants (47.7%) came from the Pomorskie region of Poland. Furthermore, respondents of the survey were also mainly were females. Therefore, for future study, I would advise including a bigger sample of participants and maybe consider different sampling methods to ensure better representation of the population that could enhance the reliability and validity of the study. Furthermore, for this study, representatives of only one company have been interviewed. But for future research, one can consider conducting interviews with representatives of multiple companies to see if the same communication practices and CSR initiatives can be noticed during the COVID-19 pandemic. As the survey showed, although the majority of respondents were familiar with LPP, only a small fraction of them came across the company's CSR initiatives during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Further research could be conducted on a broader scale to study whether stakeholders notice/ receive information about CSR initiatives taken by the companies. Due to the pandemic, interview and survey could only be conducted in the online environment. This has been a limitation as I could not interview LPP representatives in person, which as a result, created a less personal environment. Lastly, when it comes to limitations, the study has been conducted while the pandemic has still been an ongoing crisis. As companies are slowly starting to focus on their previous CSR actions, a study focused on adapting CSR initiatives after the pandemic will most likely shine a new light on the topic. My thesis delivered new knowledge about the CSR initiatives in times of the COVID-19 pandemic in the former socialist state that has joined the EU. Future studies can also be conducted by those who aspire to study the effect of the COVID-19 pandemic on other Eastern Bloc countries that joined the EU together with Poland (Bulgaria, Czechia, Estonia, Lithuania, Latvia, Slovakia, and Slovenia).

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Appendix A: Table of Figures

Figure 1 Communication Framework taken from Maximizing Business Returns to Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR): The Role of CSR Communication (2010) 11

Figure 2 Word Cloud from Atlas.Ti, it presents the most used words among 21 studied press releases of LPP 25

Figure 3 Age graph, presents the distribution of participants among different age groups (self-made)..... 28

Figure 4 Place of Residence, graph presents the origin of survey participants, Polish regions they came from (self-made) 29

Figure 5 Knowledge about CSR initiatives during COVID-19 pandemic, graph presents the CSR initiatives that participants have come across in times of COVID-19 pandemic 30

Figure 6 CSR communication channels, graph present from which communication channels participants learned about CSR initiatives during COVID-19 pandemic (self-made)..... 31

Appendix B: Survey Questionnaire in Polish

Szanowni Państwo!

Jestem studentką na Uniwersytecie Erazma w Rotterdamie. W ramach pisania pracy magisterskiej prowadzę badania dotyczące popytu na działania w zakresie Społecznej Odpowiedzialności Biznesu (CSR) w dobie pandemii COVID-19. Chciałbym serdecznie zachęcić Państwa do wypełnienia poniższej ankiety, dzięki której zgromadzę informacje niezbędne do napisania pracy magisterskiej.

Udział w badaniu jest dobrowolny oraz anonimowy. Wypełnienie ankiety zajmie Państwu nie więcej niż 5 minut. Nie ma poprawnych ani błędnych odpowiedzi, więc proszę odpowiadać zgodnie z prawdą. Wypełniając ankietę wyrażają Państwo zgodę na udział w badaniu.

W razie jakichkolwiek pytań proszę o kontakt mailowy pod adresem 584374wr@student.eur.nl

1. Ile masz lat?

- 18-25
- 25-30
- 30-35
- 35-40

2. Jaka jest twoja płeć?

- Kobieta
- Mężczyzna
- Inna

3. Jakie jest twoje miejsce zamieszkania?

- Mazowieckie

- Pomorskie
- Małopolskie
- Kujawsko-pomorskie
- Zachodniopomorskie
- Lubuskie
- Lubelskie
- Świętokrzyskie
- Wielkopolskie
- Warmińsko-Mazurskie
- Łódzkie
- Śląskie
- Opolskie
- Dolnośląskie
- Podkarpackie
- Podlaskie

4. Czy znasz koncepcję Corporate Social Responsibility (Społeczna Odpowiedzialność Biznesu)?

- Tak
- Nie

(Jeżeli Nie)

Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) to odpowiedzialność przedsiębiorstw za ich wpływ na społeczeństwo. Norma ISO 26000 "definiuje społeczną odpowiedzialność jako wpływ podejmowanych przez Organizację decyzji i działań na społeczeństwo i środowisko, poprzez przejrzyste i etyczne zachowanie w siedmiu obszarach - ład organizacyjny, prawa

człowieka, środowisko, praktyki z zakresu pracy, uczciwe praktyki operacyjne, zagadnienia konsumenckie, i zaangażowanie społeczne i rozwój społeczności lokalnej" (www.iso.org.pl)

Źródło: <https://www.iso.org.pl/uslugi-zarzadzania/wdrazanie-systemow/odpowiedzialnosc-spoeczna-csr/iso-26000/>

Określ w jakim stopniu zgadzasz się, lub nie zgadzasz się ze stwierdzeniami (odpowiedzi na poniższe pytania: zdecydowanie się zgadzam, zgadzam się, nie mam zdania, nie zgadzam się, zdecydowanie się nie zgadzam)

5. Pandemia uczyniła mnie bardziej wrażliwym na potrzeby innych.
6. Podczas pandemii zmieniły się moje nawyki zakupowe.
7. Kupuję więcej niż przed pandemią.
8. Kupuję mniej niż przed pandemią.
9. Uważam, że w czasie pandemii firmy powinny angażować się w praktyki CSR.
10. W czasie pandemii zwracam większą uwagę na działania CSR firm niż przed pandemią.
11. Firmy w okresie pandemii powinny wspierać organizacje i społeczności w potrzebie.
12. Bardziej prawdopodobne jest, że kupię od firmy, która wspiera i pomaga podczas pandemii COVID-19 niż od firmy, która zdecydowała się nie wspierać społeczności.
13. Jestem skłonny zapłacić więcej za towary, jeśli firma za nimi angażuje się w działania CSR podczas pandemii COVID-19.
14. Znam / natknąłem się na poniższe działania CSR podczas pandemii (zaznacz wszystkie pasujące odpowiedzi)
 - Darowizny pieniężne
 - Darowizny sprzętu ochronnego (np. maseczek)
 - Pomoc szpitalom
 - Pomoc domom dziecka

- Inne (jakie)

15. Gdzie natknąłeś/natknęłaś się na informacje o działaniach CSR w czasie pandemii?
(zaznacz wszystkie pasujące odpowiedzi)

- Facebook
- Instagram
- LinkedIn
- Wiadomości
- Strona internetowa firmy
- Inne (jakie)

16. Czy znasz firmę LPP? (Reserved, Mohito, Sinsey, House, Cropp)

- Tak
- Nie

17. Czy w czasie pandemii natknąłeś/natknęłaś się na działania CSR firmy LPP?

- Tak
- Nie

18. (Jeśli tak) Gdzie natknąłeś/natknęłaś się na informacje o działaniach CSR firmy LPP w czasie pandemii? (zaznacz wszystkie pasujące odpowiedzi)

- Facebook
- Instagram
- LinkedIn
- Wiadomości
- Strona internetowa firmy
- Inne (jakie)

Appendix C: Survey Questionnaire in English

Dear Sir or Madam!

I am a student at the Erasmus University in Rotterdam. As part of writing my master's thesis, I conduct research on the demand for activities in the field of Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) in the time of the COVID-19 pandemic. I would like to encourage you to complete the following questionnaire, thanks to which I will gather the information necessary to write my master's thesis.

Participation in the study is voluntary and anonymous. Filling out the questionnaire will take you no more than 5 minutes. There are no right or wrong answers, so please answer truthfully. By completing the survey, you consent to the participation in the survey.

If you have any questions, please contact me by email at 584374wr@student.eur.nl

1. What is your age?

- 18-25
- 25-30
- 30-35
- 35-40

2. What is your gender?

- Male
- Female
- other

3. What is your place of residence?

- Mazowieckie
- Pomorskie

- Małopolskie
- Kujawsko-pomorskie
- Zachodniopomorskie
- Lubuskie
- Lubelskie
- Świętokrzyskie
- Wielkopolskie
- Warmińsko-Mazurskie
- Łódzkie
- Śląskie
- Opolskie
- Dolnośląskie
- Podkarpackie
- Podlaskie

4. Are you familiar with CSR concept?

- Yes
- No

(If not)

Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) is the responsibility of enterprises for their impact on society. The ISO 26000 standard "defines social responsibility as the impact of the organization's decisions and actions on society and the environment through transparent and ethical behavior in seven areas - organizational governance, human rights, environment, work practices, fair operating practices, consumer issues, and community involvement and development of the local community "www.iso.org.pl)"

Source: <https://www.iso.org.pl/uslugi-zarzadzania/wdrazenie-systemow/odpowiedzialnosc-spoleczna-csr/iso-26000/>

To what extent do you agree with the following statements? (answers for following questions are: strongly agree, agree, no opinion, disagree, strongly disagree)

5. The pandemic made me more sensitive to the needs of others.
6. During the pandemic my shopping habits changed.
7. I purchase more goods than I did before the pandemic.
8. I believe that during the pandemic companies should engage in CSR practices.
9. During the pandemic I pay more attention to CSR activities of companies than I did before the pandemic.
10. Companies in the times of the pandemic should support organizations and communities in need.
11. I am more likely to buy from a company that supports and helps communities during the COVID-19 pandemic.
12. I am willing to pay more for goods if the company behind them engages in CSR practices during COVID-19 pandemic.
13. I am familiar/came across following CSR activated during the pandemic:
 - Money donations
 - Protective gear (like face masks) donations
 - Help for hospitals
 - Help for childcare homes
 - Other (please specify)
14. Where did you learn about those CSR activates?
 - Instagram
 - Facebook
 - LinkedIn
 - News
 - Company's website
15. Other (please specify)
16. Are you familiar with LPP Group? (Reserved, Mohito, Sinsay, House, Cropp)

- Yes
- No

17. Did you come across CSR actions of LPP?

- Yes
- No

18. If yes, then where?

- Instagram
- Facebook
- LinkedIn
- News
- Company's website
- Other (please specify)

Appendix D: Coding Frame – Thematic Analyses

Open Coding	Axial Coding	Selective Coding
LPP	LPP	CSR Initiatives of LPP during COVID-19 pandemic
Brands		
LPP Foundation	LPP CSR Initiatives	
Medical Support		
Non-medical Support		
Monetary Donations		
Needs of the Society	Needs of Society	