

# The usage of the CSR concept and its communication in Slovak companies in the process of globalization

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**Abstract.** The socially responsible communication is focused on the visibility of the social, economic and environmental responsible activities of the company through a variety of communication tools. In the reason of the gradual globalization that brings many changes whit the impact on the business and the environment including the growing importance of socially responsible corporate behaviour, the paper is aimed on the usage of the CSR concept in Slovak companies and the determination of their communication in the process of globalization. This includes providing the theoretical background and analysis of the corporate social responsibility and its communication from the viewpoint of Slovak and foreign authors. The important source for secondary data was scientific researches, statistical databases, published professional publications. In order to determine the level of usage, the CSR concept and its communication in companies in Slovak Republic, a questionnaire survey was conducted among Slovak consumers. Based on the analysis and results of the questionnaire survey, benefits of the efficient socially responsible company's communication are highlighted such as gaining competitive advantage, increasing the brand value, improving customers loyalty and relationships with stakeholders.

**Keywords:** corporate social responsibility (CSR), socially responsible company, socially responsible communication, stakeholders, sustainability, globalization, company

## 1 Introduction

Globalization and internationalization have brought about changes that have affected the business and the environment. At present, the process of globalization and internationalization continues and affects all areas of social life. In these changed conditions the importance of socially responsible corporate behaviour is growing [1].

Thus, it is obvious, that the issue of corporate social responsibility is currently very topical and is becoming the focus of attention of companies, consumers, media and the whole society as well. Companies are expected to use their power and financial resources to influence the surrounding environment [2]. Companies that are referred to as socially responsible therefore

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strive not only to meet traditional economic goals, but also to meet the social and environmental aspects of their activities, which in practice manifests itself by voluntarily setting high ethical standards, avoiding corruption, minimizing the negative impacts of their business to the environment, effort to be a good employer, support the region in which they operate [3]. They strive to stand on the three basic pillars in the long run and as firmly as possible – economic efficiency, environmental responsibility and social commitment. CSR is thus becoming not only an important means for companies to be competitive in the long run, but also for communities and society to develop successfully on a lasting basis [4, 5].

The concept of CSR was developed mainly in countries with stable market economies such as USA, Canada and Western Europe, where it became part of the management of many companies [6, 7]. In the beginning, companies focused mainly on corporate philanthropy, social security for their employees, as well as assistance to local governments and sponsorship.

The situation in Slovak Republic as a country of post-communist Eastern Europe was different due to political and economic influences. It was paid less attention to the corporate social responsibility in contrary to developed countries. Despite this fact, the concept of social responsibility has gradually begun to spread to companies, especially on their own initiative with minimal support from civil society, media and public authorities. Later, after the reform in Slovak economy, the country opened up to the world and thus the inflow of foreign investment was increased from large investors who have brought CSR principles from their home countries into business strategies in Slovak conditions.

Currently in Slovak Republic, CSR principles are applied not only in global companies but increasingly in the home businesses. However, when implementing CSR principles in Slovak Republic, it is necessary to take into account its specific conditions that are different than in developed countries. The Slovak Republic is unique, it has the distinctive culture and history. Thus, the implementation of CSR principles is different than in other countries. The reason is especially the level of national economy as well as overall social system of the Slovak Republic.

According to Lewicka-Strzalecka, this concerns the phenomenon of rationality asymmetry when rational procedures are developed by the institution for a market with different characteristics and historical experience introduced in post-communist countries. It means, that when some of the mentioned countries try to implement effective solutions transferred from developed economies, this will not be successful, but on the contrary, poverty as well as social differences will increase. Thus, the promotion and implementation of CSR activities should be adapted to the country's specific conditions [8].

For many companies, CSR is an important part of their corporate strategy and represents a tool to improve image, competitive advantage or the way to differentiation. CSR contributes to the creation of the company value as well as the brand and builds customer loyalty and post-purchase behaviour. According to Hansen, the reward for the company is to influence the customer's positive awareness of the company and their shopping behaviour. The customer is the central determinant of who will be "rewarded" and who will be "punished". Through its purchasing decisions, it influences the profits of companies competing in the market and, indirectly, the direction in which the economy is heading. Not only companies benefit from CSR. Other stakeholders also become profiteers [9].

In particular, several authors highlight the following most important practical benefits for companies implementing the principles of the CSR concept in their corporate strategy [3, 10]:

- CSR contributes to creating a good business environment
- CSR increases the attractiveness for investors
- CSR builds the trust and reputation of the company as well as the brand in the eyes of the public

- CSR allows to gain a competitive advantage and increases customer loyalty
- CSR reduces costs
- CSR increases profits in the long run
- CSR improves risk management and reduces risk management costs
- CSR can attract new partners
- CSR enables the achievement of the status of "preferred supplier"
- CSR makes it possible to increase the efficiency of supplier-customer relationships.
- CSR increases the value of intangible assets, such as company reputation, brand value, human capital or relationships of trust and partnership

As mentioned before, nowadays many companies in Slovak Republic deal with the topic of social responsibility. They try to invest part of their profits in meaningful projects that will help a good cause. However, in order for a company's CSR activities to be valuable to customers, they must first be informed about them. For companies, therefore, the communication of socially responsible activities is as important as its own implementation. In this context, the paper is focused on the usage of the CSR concept in Slovak companies and the determination of their communication in the process of globalization.

Already when creating a CSR strategy, it is necessary to deal with communication of the company's socially responsible activities, because this can significantly contribute to the streamlining of CSR corporate policy. The appropriate communication with target groups represents the key factor of the socially responsible company success [11]. Without efficient and properly targeted communication of socially responsible activities, the company cannot achieve its goals. The socially responsible communication is also necessary when creating a corporate identity, reputation and image improvement. Thus, the CSR philosophy needs to be incorporated directly into the company's mission, vision and strategy. By communicating its CSR efforts, the company provides people with information about the company's values as well as its product portfolio. In addition, thus, it offers a positive example for other companies. Thus, socially responsible communication means for the company to clearly define its values and formulate a statement that will concisely summarize its approach to socially responsible business. This step gives the company an opportunity to think about what is important and beneficial for it and for the whole society. Currently, there is enormous influence of the digital marketing on the way customers communicate and receive information about companies [12, 13]. In this reason, appropriate and well targeted socially responsible communication focused on digital media represents a great opportunity to revive and specialize traditional communication.

Recently, many domestic and foreign authors have dealt with the issue of corporate social responsibility and its communication.

According to several authors, socially responsible communication is an important part of company success [14-15] with many benefits such as creation the desired reputation effects [17]. Also, it is necessary to mention opinions of scholars which emphasize the impact of stakeholders in long-term value creation of the socially responsible company [18-20].

Luo and Bhattacharya highlighted the right timing of CSR communication and the way it affects the customer loyalty, brand value and its reputation, increase the sales performance and stakeholder identification [21].

A survey by Focus Agency shows that awareness of the concept of corporate social responsibility by companies in Slovakia was relatively low recently. However, companies have been interested in this information, especially through the Internet. The main motives for which the companies implemented the concept are, in particular, keeping up with the competition, attracting and retaining quality employees, as well as improving the reputation [22].

According to a survey by NMS Market Research, currently, most of the companies (85%) use their websites to promote their socially responsible activities, even though they are mostly

convinced that it will bring only little benefit for the resulting marketing communication. On the other hand, the social media represents the greatest potential in the way of socially responsible communication activities for the majority of companies (56%). Their share is expected to gradually increase and thus overtake the dominant position of the website. However, the traditional PR remains to be actual and an important tool of company's CSR communication, especially the media relations. It is realized by up to 70% companies and supported by most of the business managers who see the considerable potential in this communication tool [23].

Based on the mentioned above, we can claim, that the aim of socially responsible communication is to make the social, economic and environmental responsible activities of the company visible through a variety of communication tools.

## 2 Methodology

The paper is aimed on the on the usage of the CSR concept in Slovak companies and the determination of their communication in the process of globalization. This includes providing the theoretical background and analysis of the corporate social responsibility and its communication from the viewpoint of Slovak and foreign authors. Based on the analysis and results of the questionnaire survey, benefits of the efficient socially responsible company's communication are highlighted such as gaining competitive advantage, increasing the brand value, improving customer's loyalty and relationships with stakeholders.

The important source for secondary data was scientific researches, statistical databases, published professional publications. In order to determine the level of usage of the CSR concept and its communication in companies in Slovak Republic, a questionnaire survey was conducted among Slovak consumers.

The questionnaire survey was aimed at finding out the level of usage the CSR concept and its communication in companies in Slovak Republic, and was divided into three parts. The first part was devoted on a general profile of the company. The second part was focused on finding out the perception of the CSR concept. In the third part we determined the communication of company's CSR activities.

In the survey, the size of the population was determined based on data obtained from the organizational statistics of the Statistical Office of the Slovak Republic. The population consists of economic units, and the size of the base population was 596.042 companies (December 2019). As 532 companies participated in the marketing survey, the minimum sample size 384 was met. The confidence interval 5% was determined, and confidence level 95%, thus the error rate 5 % was admitted. The survey took the form of questionnaire method through e-mail communication during January - March 2020.

General scientific methods were used for data processing, as well as mathematical and statistical methods in the evaluation of data from the survey.

In order to achieve the main goal of the paper, based on the theoretical background and survey results, following research questions and hypotheses are formulated:

- *Research question 1:* Is the majority of companies in the Slovak Republic socially responsible?  
**Hypothesis 1:** More than 50% companies in the Slovak Republic are socially responsible.
- *Research question 2:* Are the socially responsible companies in the Slovak Republic aware of the importance of its communication?  
**Hypothesis 2:** More than 50% of companies in the Slovak Republic communicate information about their CSR activities towards their stakeholders.
- *Research question 3:* Do the socially responsible companies in the Slovak Republic prefer its communication through digital media?

**Hypothesis 3:** More than 50% of companies in the Slovak Republic prefer socially responsible communication focused on company websites.

**Hypothesis 4:** More than 50% of companies in the Slovak Republic prefer socially responsible communication focused on social media.

The marginal rate 50% used in hypotheses was set as the expression of the simple majority [24].

Statistical hypotheses testing is defined as a statement of the assumption of unknown parameters in the basic set, which is formulated as a statistical hypothesis and its validity is verified by statistical procedures based on selection characteristics. The role of statistical hypotheses testing is to decide whether to accept or reject the hypothesis regarding the basic set in accordance to the information from the available choice. In verification of the hypotheses, the methodology of statistical hypothesis testing consisting of the following steps was met [25]:

1. Formulation of the null hypothesis ( $H_0$ ).
2. Formulation of the alternative hypothesis ( $H_1$ ).
3. Determining the level of significance ( $\alpha$ ).
4. Calculation of test statistics and probability.
5. Decision.

The test statistic for hypotheses 1 – 4 we calculated by using the method testing a single proportion by one-tailed testing because it is commonly used [26, 27]. Significance level  $\alpha$  was determined at 0.05.

## 3 Results

### 3.1 Results of questionnaire survey focused on the level of usage the CSR concept and its communication in companies in Slovak Republic

Of the 532 respondents in the sample set, 63.2% were micro-enterprises, 25% small enterprise, 7.3% medium-sized enterprises and 4.5% large enterprises. Due to the fact that in Slovak Republic predominate micro enterprises, these numbers are sufficient. The results of the questionnaire survey show that 79.5% respondents belong to the commercial companies. Most of the respondents operate in retail and wholesale (21.7%), communication (15.3%) and industrial production (11.5%).

Based on the survey results, 83.4% respondents know the CSR concept, and 75.2% state that they implement the principles of CSR concept in their corporate strategy and 71.5% respondents consider that the involvement in social responsibility should be as a necessary part of their corporate strategy. According respondents, the most important benefits of implementation CSR in their corporate strategy includes good reputation and image of the company (72.4%), customer's loyalty (68.1%), improving relationships with stakeholders (55.2%) and increasing competitive advantage (46.8%). From the survey results, it is clear, that 40.4% respondent's identity the most important area of CSR as achieving profits in an honest and ethical manner, next it is caring for employees (21.7%) and compliance with legal standards and the payment of taxes (12%).

53.9% respondents inform about company's CSR activities with the external environment, mainly stakeholders. They mostly communicate due company websites (74.5%), social media (62.9%), annual company reports (44.1%), CSR reports (40.3%) and newsletters (38%).

### 3.2 Answering research questions and verification of statistical hypotheses

To verify the statistical hypotheses, we used the method testing a single proportion. The hypothesis testing for a single proportion includes the following steps:

1. Determination of the null hypothesis:

$$H_0: \pi = \pi_0 \tag{1}$$

2. Determination of the alternative hypothesis:

$$H_1: \pi > \pi_0 \tag{2}$$

3. Selection of the significance level

$$\alpha = 0,05 \tag{3}$$

4. Calculation of the sample proportion:

$$p = \frac{m}{n} \tag{4}$$

where  $m$  is the number of respondents which indicate the particular option and  $n$  is the total number of respondents.

5. Satisfaction of the condition

$$n * \pi_0 * (1 - \pi_0) > 5 \tag{5}$$

Application of the test criteria:

$$T = \frac{p - \pi_0}{\sqrt{\frac{\pi_0 * (1 - \pi_0)}{n}}} \tag{6}$$

6. Critical field of the test:

Use the tables of the normalized normal distribution to find the critical value for the right-tailed test  $z_{2\alpha}$ .

$$T > z_{2\alpha} \tag{7}$$

7. Decision on the test result:

If the inequality does not apply, do not reject the hypothesis  $H_0$ .

If the inequality applies, reject hypothesis  $H_0$ , i.e. accept the alternative hypothesis  $H_1$ .

Results of verification of statistical hypotheses are shown in Table 1.

**Table 1.** Verification of statistical hypotheses

Calculation of the sample proportion: $p = \frac{m}{n}$	Satisfaction of the condition $n * \pi_0 * (1 - \pi_0) > 5$	Test criteria	Critical field	Inequality	Acceptance or rejection of the hypothesis
<i>Hypothesis 1:</i> H <sub>0</sub> : 50% companies in the Slovak Republic are socially responsible. H <sub>1</sub> : More than 50% companies in the Slovak Republic are socially responsible.					
p = 0.752	133 > 5	11.625	1.645	11.625 > 1,645	H <sub>0</sub> rejected
<i>Hypothesis 2:</i> H <sub>0</sub> : 50% of companies in the Slovak Republic communicate information about their CSR activities towards their stakeholders. H <sub>1</sub> : More than 50% of companies in the Slovak Republic communicate information about their CSR activities towards their stakeholders.					
p = 0,539	133 > 5	1.799	1.645	1.799 > 1.645	H <sub>0</sub> rejected
<i>Hypothesis 3:</i> H <sub>0</sub> : 50% of companies in the Slovak Republic prefer socially responsible communication focused on company websites. H <sub>1</sub> : More than 50% of companies in the Slovak Republic prefer socially responsible communication focused on company websites.					
p = 0.745	133 > 5	11.302	1.645	11.302 > 1.645	H <sub>0</sub> rejected
<i>Hypothesis 4:</i>					

Ho: 50% of companies in the Slovak Republic prefer socially responsible communication focused on social media.					
H1: More than 50% of companies in the Slovak Republic prefer socially responsible communication focused on social media.					
p = 0.629	133 > 5	5.951	1.645	5.951 > 1.645	H0 rejected

Source: Own processing.

As is obvious from Table 1, in all cases, the inequality applies, so we reject the hypothesis H<sub>0</sub>, we accept the alternative hypothesis H<sub>1</sub>.

To answer the first research question, we asked the respondents whether they are socially responsible. The survey results show, that 75.2% are socially responsible (implement the principles of CSR concept in their corporate strategy). Subsequently, we used the primary data from this question to test the statistical hypothesis 1. The results are shown in Table 1. Therefore, we can say that more than 50% companies in the Slovak Republic are socially responsible.

To answer the second research question, we asked the respondents whether they are aware of the importance of its CSR communication. The survey results show, that 53.9% respondents inform about company's CSR activities with the external environment, mainly stakeholders. Subsequently, we used the primary data from this question to test the statistical hypothesis 2 (Table 1). Therefore, we can say that more than 50% of companies in the Slovak Republic communicate information about their CSR activities towards their stakeholders.

To answer the third research question, we asked the respondents whether they prefer the CSR communication through digital media. The survey results show, that 74.5% respondents inform about company's CSR activities through company website and 62.9% respondents through social media. Subsequently, we used the primary data from this question to test the statistical hypotheses 3 and 4 (Table 1). Therefore, we can say that more than 50% of companies in the Slovak Republic prefer socially responsible communication focused on company websites as well as more than 50% of companies in the Slovak Republic prefer socially responsible communication focused on social media.

## 4 Discussion

Based on the mentioned above, it is obvious, that the majority of companies in Slovak Republic want to be socially responsible, thus they implement the CSR concept in their corporate strategy. They see the most important benefits of implementation CSR in their corporate strategy in the good reputation and image of the company, customer's loyalty, improvement of relationships with stakeholders and increase of competitive advantage. These results are quite similar that advantages highlighted in surveys by several scholars mentioned before [17-21].

More than half of companies in Slovak Republic are aware of the importance of CSR communications, especially with stakeholders who represent their target groups. Same as results realized by the NMS Market Research [23], they prefer company website for CSR communication as well as social media. In contrary, PR activities are not so important for Slovak companies as on a global scale.

We can claim, that creating an effective CSR communication within CSR strategy is a very crucial step, the implementation of which should be addressed by the company's management. The creation of the CSR strategy is based on the analysis of corporate stakeholders and their comparison with the development intentions and company's goals. Thus, the CSR communication may be focus on the dialogue with stakeholders, and it means to find out their expectations from the socially responsible company, improve the interrelationship and gain their loyalty. Individual stakeholders may have very specific

demands and requirements. If the company wants to stay in the market for a long time and function smoothly, it should respect and adequately satisfy these interests of stakeholder groups. Its CSR communication has to be appropriate and well targeted on stakeholders, focused on modern forms of communication such as digital media. Next, it needs to address which stakeholders' expectations are not being met and try to find a possible solution. After identifying and analysing stakeholders, it is necessary to identify key areas of CSR and create structures for the long-term integration of CSR values across all levels of the company, including CSR communication.

## 5 Conclusion

In the gradual globalization, competition in the market is constantly deepening, which means that the company's reputation and its image have become vulnerable, and therefore the protection of companies is becoming a priority. The growing impact of CSR on corporate reputation has been reflected in the increasing importance of social communication effort. CSR communication can even help a company build a reputation that protects its image from negative publicity, as well as increase public interest. If a company wants to succeed in today's competitive market, it is no longer enough to offer high-quality products at the desired price, but it should respond to the emerging sensitivity of stakeholders to environmental and social issues and communicate success in these areas.

As is obvious from the outcomes of the research, the implementation of CSR does not in itself lead to successful results, but the communication of these activities with stakeholders is essential for success. The most visible benefits of implementation CSR concept and its efficient communication in Slovak companies includes gaining competitive advantage, increasing the brand value, improving customer's loyalty and relationships with stakeholders. The survey results can have a significant application in practice, especially in appropriate managing and targeting of socially responsible communication on stakeholders in Slovak companies. However, there are some barriers in CSR implementation, including the increase of the number in CSR scandals over the years, which has caused public scepticism. Growing mistrust and scepticism have put pressure on businesses to show that they are doing good and to communicate their CSR commitments. CSR communication thus has a significant effect on reducing scepticism.

Based on the above mentioned, the main managerial recommendation is to focus on the appropriate and well targeted communication of the socially responsible companies in the Slovak Republic aimed on the digital marketing such as company website, social media and so on. This includes customizing the communication according to preferences of the individual stakeholders to increase their attention and loyalty.

It follows from the above, that the issue of CSR and its communication in Slovak companies has the great potential for deeper research in the future. There is also a space for further discussions on socially responsible companies and their communication in relation to individual stakeholders and so on.

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