

TRADITIONAL MEDIA AND NEW MEDIA IN COMMUNICATING ABOUT PUBLIC BENEFIT IN POLAND

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Abstract

Because of the fact that it has been possible to donate 1 per cent of income tax to public benefit organisations since 2003, these organisations must communicate with the environment if they want to obtain money from tax deduction. The popularity of taking advantage of one per cent allocations in Poland (in 2013, 44 per cent of taxpayers did it), created competition among organisations trying to obtain the declared amounts. Communication with the environment by organisations requires both the right choice of information channels – the division into traditional and new media has been accounted for, as well as formulating messages in such a way as to reach taxpayers as efficiently as possible and persuade them to support aims the organisation achieves.

The paper will present the results of research into how effectively these organisations communicate with the use of traditional and new media.

Key words: *public benefit organisations, social media, mass media, one percent of tax in Poland*

INTRODUCTION

Public benefit organisations were created in Poland in 2003, which coincided with the introduction of the mechanism of financing their activity with one per cent of tax declared directly by the citizens on filing their annual tax returns. The right to apply for one per cent of tax in Poland is only given to organisations with public benefit status granted by the court of registration, achieving their statutory goals in the area defined by legal regulations. One of the most important assumptions of introducing regulations about the one percent allocation in Poland was support for non-governmental organisations, promoting attitudes of philanthropy (understood as sharing private money - one percent is only the taxpayer's right to allocate money that belongs to the state), systemic participation of citizens in decision-making and at the same time taking responsibility for the distribution of the declared amounts. Organisations in Poland may collect funds from 1 per cent of tax in two ways; to the organisation's account, without specifying the goal by the donor or to individual accounts created for beneficiaries of organisations - particular people or institutions, the latter being rather rare in practice. The possibility of creating individual accounts distinguishes the Polish solutions from the ones implemented e.g. in Slovakia, Lithuania or Hungary (Polish solutions concerning public benefit are based on the Hungarian ones). Many people allocate their one percent to about a dozen organisations that are most efficient in competing for this money. Research revealed that Poles are often not careful enough in choosing the organisation or in analysing what the organisation spends the money from one percent for and if it accounts for the obtained amounts – Piechota (2010). No changes have also been noted in the attitudes of Poles to their participation in non-governmental organisations, volunteering for them or supporting their activities with donations - in the last ten years there was no increase in the amounts spent for private philanthropy. Also organisations emphasise that lower amounts have been donated, claiming that donations have been successfully replaced in the minds of Poles by the one percent allocation, which is in fact treated as a donation.¹

1 Representatives of some organisations promote the opinion about diminishing amounts of donations that are replaced with amounts from one percent of tax. But considering the fact that in Poland the changes in the way of allocating one percent coincided with the economic crisis lasting since 2008, this opinion may not be based on facts.

The amounts received annually by the organisations have been steadily rising. In 2004 it was about 2.5 million euro, in 2013 already 114.3 million euro. When public benefit organisations got the possibility to get tax deductions from Poles, they faced the necessity to communicate about their activity but also to choose such tools and channels with which the process of communication will be effective and bring the intended financial effects. This text contains the results of research carried out in 2013 among selected public benefit organisations in Poland that noted a marked increase and drop of sums obtained from one per cent of tax in the years 2010-2012. This course of research was justified with the intention of pinpointing these tools and communication channels used by organisations in the carried out campaigns that influence the effectiveness of obtaining one per cent of tax. The following presentation of research results contains the division into traditional media (with campaigns using marketing messages – social advertising and public relations tools) and new media – the analysis encompassed the activity of organisations on Facebook. Qualitative research was carried out with the use of no standardised interviews with leaders of organisations or people responsible for campaigns aimed at obtaining one per cent of tax in organisations. Research was financed from a grant for statutory research awarded in 2013 at the Andrzej Frycz Modrzewski Krakow University.

1. TRADITIONAL MEDIA IN THE COMMUNICATION OF ORGANISATIONS DURING THE CAMPAIGN OF 1 PERCENT OF TAX

Participation of traditional media in campaigns carried out by public benefit organisations may be analysed in two aspects: as paid advertising of the organisation in the media and as cooperation of the organisation with journalists, participation of the organisation's leaders as experts in journalist materials or finally, media presentation of the effects of the organisation's activity.² Research carried out in 2013, concerning organisations that had the highest growth in amounts obtained from one percent of income tax in the period 2010-2012 and in 2012 were among the ones with the income in the amount of at least 240 thousand EURO (over 1 million PLN), revealed that these organisations practically did not use paid social advertising in traditional media.

In addition, research results were reinforced by the analysis of the campaigns carried out by the organisations which used paid social advertising in traditional media and based their campaigns on advertising messages. These organisations obtained much lower amounts in the period 2010-2012.

It should also be emphasised that organisations mainly use press advertisements in the campaign of 1 percent of tax. The organisations that can afford to place commercials on TV channels are either the ones with the largest sums available for promotional activities or the ones organisationally connected with the media: TVN's foundation "Nie jesteś sam" (You are not alone) and Polsat foundation. Both foundations are organisations active within the framework of Corporate Social Responsibility created by the owners of the main commercial TV channels in Poland. CSR activity, which is used for building the image of a company or corporation and its reputation should be financed from the company's own funds, from its profit and not from public money – one percent allocations. Lower effectiveness in obtaining one percent of tax has also been noted by a foundation connected with a popular national radio station. This organisation uses radio messages in communicating with the environment and on the basis of barter agreements advertises its activities in other media, mainly the press. In the study period this organisation noted a systematic drop in amounts obtained from 1 percent of tax.

The situation is different in the case of implementation of public relations activities by organisations, consisting in building relations with the traditional media, inclusion of journalists in the carried out campaigns, not only directly aimed at obtaining one percent of tax but also aimed at carrying out other projects. Organisations that in the period of 2010 to 2012 obtained higher amounts from 1 percent of

² The study differentiates between marketing and PR communication, with the distinction based on the tools used in these two types of communication. This differentiation is important to present if it is necessary to bear costs of communication, particularly in the case of using marketing tools in connection with the effectiveness of obtaining one per cent of tax.

tax are mainly the organisations that are "present in the media" and whose leaders are recognizable, i.e. participate in journalist materials as experts. Also the activities of the organisation are presented in the media as necessary, important and meeting societal expectations (e.g. projects like "Szlachetna Paczka" (Noble Box) and "Kup indeks" (Fund a student's record book) implemented by Stowarzyszenie Wiosna from Krakow, projects of laughter therapy by dr Clown's foundation, or activities for children with cancer by Fundacja Iskierka). Each of these organisations has been gradually strengthening its image and recognizability using media relations, what translated into its effectiveness in obtaining one percent of tax. But as the speakers said during interviews, building relations with the media influences shaping the desirable image of an organisation and its recognisability, but it does not have a direct impact on obtaining one percent of tax. In this respect it is more important to perceive the importance of objectives that the organisation follows and their societal approval, a clear definition of aims for which the organisation wants to allocate one percent of tax and communicating how the one percent has been used. The last element can be done also with the use of traditional media which provide information to the environment, at the same time presenting how the organisation works. Organizations that have obtained significantly higher amounts from one percent also pointed to the engagement of journalists in their activities, and including the representatives of the media in actions and campaigns. Thus the organisations obtained tangible effects, such as the journalists' interest but also used the image of sometimes famous and recognisable people for supporting their activities and reinforcing credibility in the environment.

To sum up, cooperation with the traditional media using marketing tools is not a solution that gives satisfying results when treated as the main message to the environment. Research revealed that using advertisements as the main tool of communicating with the environment during the one percent of tax campaigns does not bring tangible effects and organisations which used to effectively build their image in this way and obtain one percent of tax, currently obtain lower amounts from one percent of tax. Al and Laura Ries (2004, p. 9) wrote about decreased effectiveness of marketing messages and increasing role of building relations with the environment by using public relations tools, pointing that advertising has no reliability and PR creates positive impressions.

2. SOCIAL MEDIA IN THE ONE PERCENT OF TAX CAMPAIGN

Emphasising the importance of social media in communication processes of organisations trying to obtain one percent of tax, attention should be paid to the dual role of these media: communication and building a community around the organisation. Analysing the processes of communication of organisations in the most popular social medium in Poland – Facebook, a few regularities may be noticed that were established during the analysis of communication of organisations that obtain the highest amounts from one percent of tax.³ In 2012, 64 organisations obtained amounts of at least PLN 1 million (about 240 thousand euro). 58 of them had fan pages on Facebook (including one created in February 2013). Analysing the activity of organisations on their fan pages, some regularities have been established. The analysis encompassed posts and reactions to them in two periods: in October 2012 and April 2013. The choice of months when the analysis was carried out was not accidental. Every year in late September/early October amounts from one percent of tax are transferred from tax offices to organisations' accounts and April is the last month of filing annual tax returns and also campaigns connected with competing for one percent of tax. Thus the analysis of fan page contents in October was aimed at establishing whether organisations accounted for the received amounts and in April - whether they carried out campaigns to get one percent of tax.

The analysis of posts published in October 2012 pointed both to different content of posts and different activity of organisations in publishing posts, ranging from a few (2-3) to almost 70. The messages published in posts concerned: current activity of the organisation, information addressed to volunteers, invitations to participate in events – parties, meetings, facts from the life of beneficiaries of

³ The number of Facebook users in Poland in 2013 exceeded 11 million. In comparison, Twitter has about 300 thousand users in Poland. More about the communication of NGOs on Facebook can be found at: <http://www.sotrender.pl/fanpage-trends-category/201301/ngo#> - access date 20 August 2013.

the organisation. Only 3 organisations posted clear messages about the amounts obtained from one percent of tax and how they allocated it.

On the other hand, the analysis of posts added in April 2013 also points to various activity levels of organisations in communicating through their fan pages and a different content of posts. On 35 fan pages of organisations (out of 58) the campaign of one percent of tax was carried out – organisations placed posts connected with accounting for the funds obtained from 1 percent of tax in previous years, and what they allocated the one percent money to. 29 organisations had a higher number of posts in April as compared to October 2012 on their fan pages. A conclusion may thus be drawn that organisations purposefully used their fan pages to communicate with the environment during campaigns, not only intensifying communication but also posting messages directly concerning one percent of tax.

In both months under study a tendency can be noticed that organisations' posts are more often shared on fans' own walls than commented. This tendency has been established regardless of the type of organisation and its objectives.

Among organisations that noted the highest increase in the amounts obtained from one percent of tax in the years 2010-2012 and that have Facebook fan pages, there are ecological organisations – global (Greenpeace, WWF), national (Centaurus, Towarzystwo Opieki nad Zwierzętami, OTOZ Animals, Ruch VIVA) and local (Krakowskie Towarzystwo Opieki nad Zwierzętami). Most of these organisations communicate quite intensively through their fan pages, concentrating in particular on publishing photos with comments. These photos are often shared by users on their profiles, what may mean that they regard these messages as important and worth sharing but it is also possible that some of these photos are shared because of their perfect quality, regardless of the content corresponding to them. Attention should also be paid to the content of the photos – in the case of organisations that save animals the photos sometimes show evidence of cruelty towards animals. Sharing posts of organisations by users makes the organisation and its activity more popular and propagates emotional messages that follow from the pictures that the organisations use on their fan pages. Such messages have the characteristics of visual propaganda Dobek- Ostrowska writes about (2012, p. 227).

It is difficult to answer the question how effective the organisations are in building virtual communities around their activities. As Bailey, Cammaerts and Carpentier emphasise (2012, p. 10) communities are formed not only in spaces that are distinguished geographically but also in cyberspace. These communities exist online and are called virtual communities. Undoubtedly, an important issue in the process of communication on Facebook is sharing content between users or participation in a discussion after publishing the posts. While it is noticeable that organisations share information on user profiles, commenting the content of posts and participation in discussions is not that obvious. According to Castells (2010), thanks to communication on the Internet, horizontal communication is possible - among citizens who can exchange thoughts and opinions and contrast their viewpoints. Considering the rather low level of engagement into discussions under posts published by organisations it should be stated that fan pages of organisations on Facebook are not places where intensive horizontal communication takes place. But according to the leaders of organisations who were interviewed, the existence of individuals in the virtual space of organisations is important, mainly in the process of mobilising such people to taking actions in situations when the organisation or its certain beneficiaries need support.

SUMMARY

The analysis of how public benefit organisations that obtained the highest amounts from one percent of tax communicate through traditional media and the most popular social website in Poland - Facebook, shows a few regularities.

1. An organisation, through building relations with the traditional media, the engagement of journalists in its activities, participation of its representatives in journalist materials, e.g. the leader of the organisation in the role of an expert, organising events addressed to various groups from the

organisation's environment that are reported by the media, emphasises its desired image and increases recognisability in the environment that is important during the one percent campaign. The role of media relations and publicity increases and of social advertising decreases.

2. An organisation that explicitly informs about the objectives that it attains and aims for which it spends the amounts obtained from one percent of tax is perceived by the public opinion as more reliable – among the studied organisations a systematic drop in amounts from 1 percent was also noted by these organisations that did not have a clear aim for which they collect one percent of tax.
3. Organisations that use traditional media only for marketing activities, as channels for broadcasting social advertisements, noted a systematic drop in amounts obtained from one percent of tax in the study period. The drop particularly concerned these organisations that use press advertisements. It is also connected with the objective factor - a drop in readership of press.
4. An organisation that carries out information activities concerning its activity only in the period of campaign connected with obtaining one percent of tax (January – April), is less efficient in obtaining one percent of tax.
5. Organisations do not use communication on Facebook fan pages to account for amounts obtained from 1 percent of tax before the community (only 3 organisations informed about it in April 2013 and in October 2012 there was scarce information about the level of one percent income obtained the same year and expression of thanks to those allocating their one percent, there was no saying to what purposes the money would be allocated).
6. When organisations collect money on individual accounts of beneficiaries, the burden of carrying out the campaign aimed at obtaining 1 per cent of tax is usually moved from the organisation to people for whom the money is collected. People connected with beneficiaries are engaged in such campaigns – their families and friends. In such cases the role of social websites (mainly Facebook) rises, as channels for passing on information and trying to gain support for the person with the 1 per cent of tax. The circle of virtual friends is used for gathering funds for a particular person.

It should be emphasised that part of the declared amounts of one percent of tax goes to the accounts of organisations by accident. This is often the result of the fact that taxpayers use computer programs for tax returns that are downloaded from the Internet or provided with newspapers or magazines. Piechota (2010) writes that Poles are often not careful enough in choosing the organisation which they dedicated one percent of tax. Organisations that finance issuing these programs put their details there as default information. If the taxpayer using the software does not make changes in the organisation's name, the amounts from one percent go to the account of a default organisation. This way of obtaining 1 percent of tax has been deemed efficient by some organisations that had the highest growth of amounts in the years 2010-2012. Another element connected with the campaign of one percent of tax is using sub-accounts, in which case the one percent campaign is not carried out by the organisation but by people who compete for money for individual sub-accounts.⁴ In this case the campaign is usually based on direct communication between sub-account holders and other people or

⁴ A phenomenon which is not present in other countries with a similar tax allocation tool, i.e. Hungary, Lithuania and Slovakia, are sub-accounts distorting the idea of public benefit for a few reasons. First, an activity carried out for public benefit can only be activity that leads to the creation of common good. Secondly, the notion of public benefit rules out individualism understood as addressing the needs not only of certain people but also of certain closed circles. Thirdly, sub-accounts free organisations from the responsibility for taking decisions about spending amounts that are provided by taxpayers as part of the one-percent allocation to the organisations' accounts. The role of an organisation is basically restricted only to managing the sub-accounts system, for which the organisation collects various fees. The existence of the possibility of creating sub-accounts in the Polish legal system turns public benefit into private benefit and a significant portion of money provided as part of one percent allocation goes into sub-accounts. This means that Poles eagerly support organisations that declare collections to accounts for individuals, thus supporting private benefit and in fact treating one percent as a donation.

mediated communication with the use of social media, particularly Facebook. In the case of sub-accounts, communication with the use of traditional media is rather rare.

To sum up the above considerations about communication processes used by public benefit organisations in campaigns connected with obtaining one percent of tax, it should be emphasised that the role of traditional media in the marketing context of the one percent campaign is becoming relatively smaller. As the representatives of organisations responsible for campaigns pointed out, the importance of Internet tools in communication processes is rising, not only of social media (Facebook) but also of search engines that enable positioning of e.g. websites of organisations or programs for tax returns which bought by organisations have default information about the benefiting organisation for the taxpayer using the program. As another, extremely important element of the campaign, the representatives of organisations quoted volunteers and other people who cooperate with or contact the organisation. Propagating positive information about an organisation and its activities in direct communication is extremely important - people cooperating with the organisation become its ambassadors. The role of traditional media is important not really in the one percent campaign but in the process of shaping the image of an organisation and spreading information about the organisation. But as the research revealed, cooperation with the traditional media is not necessary for the organisation to be effective in obtaining one percent of tax, with amounts exceeding 1 million PLN.

In the case of environmental organisations - the explanation behind the increasing number of environmental organisations in the group of those that collect considerable funds as well as increasing amounts that are provided to these organisations should be sought in the popularisation of environmental issues in Poland. Castells (2013, p. 299) writes about the phenomenon of „greening of the media” emphasising that since 1970s, first in the US and then also in other countries, environmental awareness has been rising and the role of environmental messages has been increasing. For a few years, traditional media have taken part in the process of communicating about environmental issues and the role of the new media has been growing, making social campaigns devoted to environmental issues go global. On the other hand, celebrities engaged in environmental projects appear in messages using traditional media, often implementing global projects with the support of environmental organisations – in 2012 a series of programmes "SOS dla świata" (SOS for the world) was made by TVN and WWF in Poland, devoted to the most important environmental problems of the contemporary world. Twelve Polish celebrities took part in this programme.⁵ The projects of environmental organisations usually have a clear aim for which funds are gathered. So reaching this aim is a measure of the organisation's reliability and efficiency for its environment.

The above considerations about the role of the media in the communication of organisations during gathering funds from one percent of tax point to the diminishing importance of traditional media and a growing role of new media, in particular social media, that enable unrestricted propagation of content and building a community around a certain goal. There are also growing communication challenges for organisations in the campaign of one percent of tax, mainly resulting from the need of creative and purposeful formulation of messages to effectively reach the recipients. And the most important issue in the process of communication seems to be clear formulation of the objective that the organisation wants to achieve with the participation of the environment and later also communication that this goal has been reached and distribution of success between all subjects that took part in achieving this goal.

⁵ More information about the project can be found at:
http://www.wwfpl.panda.org/co_robimy/sos_dla_swiate/ - access date 25 August 2013.

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