ORIGINAL ARTICLE

DOI: 10.51480/1899-5101.15.3(32).4

# Changes in Crisis Management PR and Digital PR Caused by the COVID-19 Pandemic

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**Abstract:** This article aims to show to what extent and in which areas the COVID-19 pandemic changed the services available on the public relations (PR) market. In particular, the paper focuses on crisis management and digital PR. The article was based on data obtained from 242 PR specialists. The research was carried out using the CAWI technique in the period April-May 2020, during the largest lockdown restrictions that were recorded in Poland in connection with the coronavirus pandemic. The collected data enabled the verification of a hypotheses stating that during the COVID-19 pandemic in Poland, the role of those two PR task spheres was strengthened.

**Keywords:** public relations, digital PR, crisis management, media, COVID-19

## INTRODUCTION

The changes that have been taking place recently in many areas of the economy, especially those related to the COVID-19 pandemic particularly affect the area of communication. The pandemic had an impact on communication processes but also on the involvement of institutions and organizations (Kim & Kreps, 2020). As a result, public relations (PR) departments had to react to the unprecedented situation of the pandemic. During the first wave of COVID-19, companies informed employees about operational changes and new working conditions, their rules on holidays, working time, free time, overtime, etc. (Camilleri, 2020). Communication has become a priority, a key element supporting management processes in companies and organizations. Undoubtedly, the pandemic can be considered a turning point for communication in terms of relations with various social groups, ethical dialogue and responsibility in the face of a threat, which should be examined in terms of its complexity or disturbance (Lovari et al., 2020).

Widely published research reports show that changes in the use of digital media are particularly visible in connection with the pandemic. This is mainly due to the constraints caused by the closing down of economies. Lockdown, restriction of mobility, the need to work from home, have all contributed to changes in the growth of the interest and use of social media for communication (Kothgasser, 2020; Madianou, 2020; Cellini et al., 2020).

The proliferation of videoconferencing applications and programs has also become unprecedented. Research conducted in the USA shows that the significant increase in digital communication was a natural phenomenon. Text messages sent by respondents rose by 43%. In just a few months, there was an increase in the number of voice calls (36%), social networking (35%) and video calls (30%) compared to the period before the pandemic. Almost a quarter of respondents used an e-mail communication more often (24%), and slightly more than a fifth played online games more frequently (22%).

Overall, 46% of respondents increased their commitment to digital communication without reducing the use of any of the methods (Nguyen et al., 2020). These changes were visible not only in the USA market, but also in other countries affected by the pandemic. Changes affect not only people, but also companies and several other institutions from almost every sector of the economy, including those related to communication (Bârgăoanu & Durach, 2020).

At the same time, the professions that are related to the creation and distribution of messages to specific groups of the internal and external environment have been growing significantly (Sévigny & Lamonica, 2020). Thus, for the above-mentioned reasons, PR is one of the most widespread and developing professions in the world. Various organizations, whether service or commercial, public or private, political, non-profit, tourist or sports, need communication employees, practitioners and PR specialists (Kamil, 2020).

The practice of PR is a link between the organization and its audience in order to achieve a mutual full understanding: this is how two-way delivery and reception of messages and information is ensured (Gawroński & Jakubowski, 2018). It is also worth mentioning that PR comprise multidisciplinary activities (Kamil, 2020; Gawroński 2016). Specifically, in order to reach and influence the audience of an organization, a PR practitioner must use social sciences, of psychology, sociology, and communication.

This paper aims to exploring to what extent and in which areas the COVID-19 pandemic has changed the services on the PR market in Poland. In particular, the paper focuses on crisis management and digital PR.

## LITERATURE OVERVIEW

The literature shows there are no other similar studies on the transformation of the PR industry because of COVID-19. A group of authors observed the changing tasks and activities for PR-managers (Islam et al., 2022; Mio et al., 2022; Ridzuan et al. 2021), but these are not publications that allow comparative results with those presented in this article. There are also popular science publications containing the voices of the PR community on the evolution of communication management, which is taking place because of the pandemic conditions (Morley, 2021; Oleary, 2021; Samways, 2021; Mahler 2022).

Considering all the types of crises, the economic one related to COVID-19 is very complex and can be considered on many levels. This particular crisis affects all economic spheres and covers a number of areas related to both economic and typically image-related issues. Furthermore, the economic crisis is considered both on a macro and micro scale. The image crisis, on the other hand, is a phenomenon illustrating changes in a organisation, disrupting the normal rhythm of its functioning, having a significant impact on the entirety of the processes taking place in it (Tworzydło, 2017, p. 77).

Crisis situations usually have negative consequences, although when dealt with properly, they can strengthen the affected entity. On the other hand, any successful transition through the socio-health-economic crisis of the pandemic may be the consequence of preparatory and educational activities and the creation of a comprehensive immune system within the business, which will include such elements as cyclical training or a crisis manual (Tworzydło, 2019, p. 129). Bearing this in mind, however, it is important to be aware that preparation in the context of creating an organization's immune system does not guarantee complete protection.

The crisis we experienced in the context of the SARS-COV-2 virus pandemic created enormous social and economic problems at all levels. Therefore, we observed not only social phobia (Arpaci et al., 2021), but also changes in macroeconomic indicators such as unemployment, inflation and supply chain disruptions, unfavourable changes in the stock markets, economic blockade and deglobulisation (Alves et al., 2020).

Enterprises are generally unable to stop a crisis, even with procedures in place and a properly prepared immune system. However, if they can detect a crisis in time, they can apply an appropriate response strategy while reducing its negative effects (Obrenovic et al., 2020). Pre-crisis planning is „the art of removing much of the risk and uncertainty that promotes greater control" (Fink, 1986, p. 15). Thus, the entire system of preparedness in the event of a crisis should be considered and while it is supportive, it is certainly neither a guarantee nor an offer of full security.

Crises are becoming more common. They are the result of both actions and omissions. One of the important factors that influence their formation and dissemination is the development of information technologies and tools that are used in PR. Therefore, digital media is used increasingly for ongoing communication within the environment, but also in crisis situations (Trishchuk et al., 2020).

This means that institutions and organizations are taking advantage of the opportunity to include digital and social media in their communication and crisis management plans. This enables them to engage in credible and transparent communication based on the principle of dialogue with the various stakeholders in a better way (Camilleri, 2020). Good communication can be supportive even in difficult situations, especially those that may threaten the reputation of the subject concerned.

The coronavirus pandemic has had an impact on all economic and social events. The pandemic changed political and socio-economic structures and influenced communication processes and has also as Kakonge (2020) argues affected the involvement of institutions and organizations. As a result, their communication and PR departments had to react to the unprecedented pandemic situation.

Businesses are expected to communicate clearly and simply as often as possible, especially about their social and financial activities (Camilleri, 2020). Therefore, COVID-19 forced several changes in the area of communication methods and techniques, but also accelerated a few processes that were taking place. Nevertheless, the pandemic did force an immediate adaptation to the new reality, such as in the context of online working, home-to-office and video communication.

## THE STUDY

The aim of this study was to verify a hypothesis stating that the roles of crisis management PR and digital PR were strengthened during the COVID-19 pandemic in Poland. The aim of the research was also to define PR strategies undertaken by the Polish enterprises during the pandemic.

In order to achieve that aim, we used data obtained during the implementation of a research project aimed at understanding the impact of the coronavirus pandemic on the PR industry and gathering opinions on the future of the industry after the COVID-19 situation has been dealt with. The conducted research aimed to show the changes that have been taking place in companies' demand for particular types of activity on the part of PR agencies.

The survey was conducted with the use of the CAWI technique (Computer-Assisted Web Interview, which consisted of a computer-assisted interview on a website, using an electronic survey form). The selection of the sample was deliberate and was based on the snowball technique. Statistical inference was based on the frequency analysis and correlation analysis based on demonstrating statistically significant relationships with the use the Spearman's rho correlation.

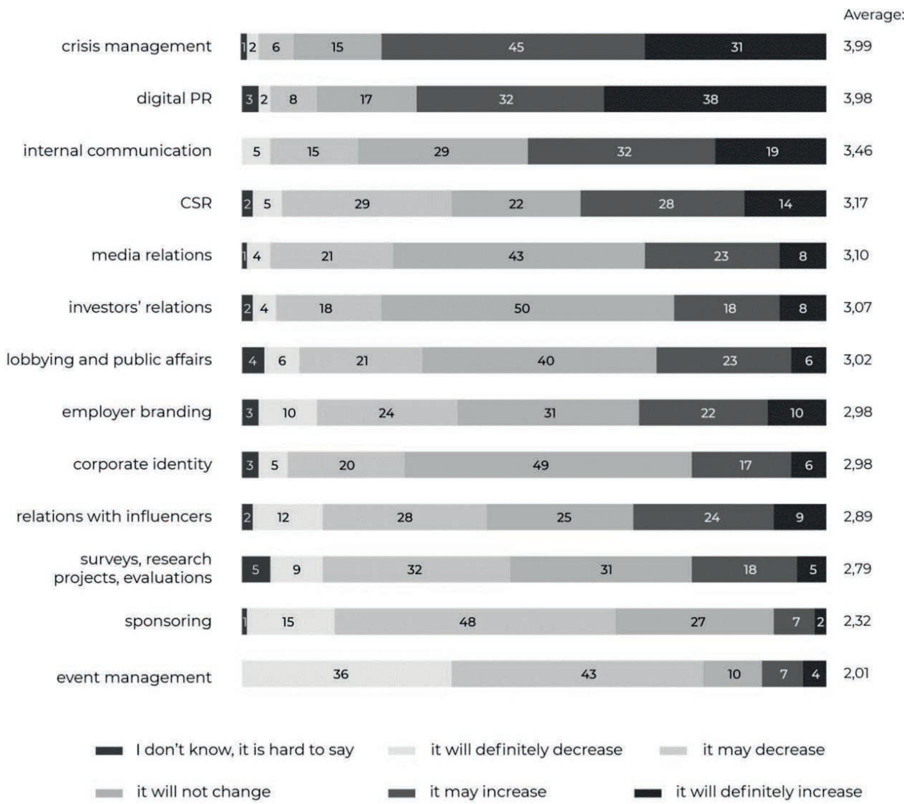
Data was collected in the period April-May 2020, i.e. in the period of the strictest restrictions recorded in Poland in connection with the coronavirus pandemic. Ultimately, the project involved 242 PR specialists, dealing with PR both in private enterprises (26% of the research sample), state-owned (14%) and NGOs (3%), as well as freelancers (9%), scientists from universities (13%) and PR agency employees (35%). Most of the research sample were women (58.7%) compared to men (41.3%). The average length of respondents' employment in the PR industry was 11.5 years. Membership in the PR industry was not verified and was based only on the declarations of the respondents. It must also be noted that since the size of the general population is unknown, the research sample is not representative. Consequently, it does not allow us to do any extrapolation.

## FINDINGS

The PR industry specialists participating in the study were asked to indicate what, in their opinion, the demand for various areas of PR activities after the end of the coronavirus pandemic would be.

As Figure 1 shows, more than three-quarters of respondents (76%) believed that after the pandemic, the demand for crisis management PR activities may increase or it will increase significantly. Seven out of ten respondents said it would be possible to increase the demand for digital PR. Excluding the answers „I don't know, hard to say", on a scale from 1 to 5, these measures were average at the level of 3.99 and 3.98, respectively, significantly different from the rest of the listed ones.

**Figure 1. Changes in companies' demand for individual areas of PR activities after the COVID-19 pandemic, N = 242 (%)**




Source: Authors.

In comparison, an increase in the demand for the third activity, which is internal communication, was declared by slightly more than half of the respondents (51%). It is also worth noting here that the largest drop in demand, according to the respondents, should be related to sponsorship and event organization, which was indicated by 63% and 79% of respondents respectively.

The demand for PR activities presented in Table 1 has been juxtaposed, detailing the issues related to crisis management PR and digital PR. While generating the list of activities, a model of the division of PR activities into „task spheres" was based, considering their description and characteristics (Tworzydło et al. 2003).

**Table 1. Correlations related to changes in the demand for areas of individual PR activities after the COVID-19 pandemic**

| | Crisis management PR | | Digital PR | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| | rho | p | rho | p |
| Crisis management PR | – | – | 0.346 | 0.000 |
| digital PR | 0.346 | 0.000 | – | – |
| media relations | 0.340 | 0.000 | 0.244 | 0.000 |
| Internal communication | 0.471 | 0.000 | 0.375 | 0.000 |
| corporate identity | 0.270 | 0.000 | 0.319 | 0.000 |
| event management | 0.036 | 0.580 | 0.146 | 0.024 |
| investors' relations | 0.200 | 0.002 | 0.267 | 0.000 |
| surveys, research programmes, evaluations | 0.184 | 0.005 | 0.200 | 0.003 |
| CSR | 0.263 | 0.000 | 0.214 | 0.001 |
| lobbing and public affairs | 0.176 | 0.008 | 0.238 | 0.000 |
| Sponsoring | 0.129 | 0.047 | 0.054 | 0.416 |
| relations with influencers | 0.194 | 0.003 | 0.369 | 0.000 |
| employer branding | 0.235 | 0.000 | 0.078 | 0.242 |

Source: Authors

Data analysis revealed a correlation between the declared changes in the demand for crisis management PR and the need to change industries caused by the COVID-19 pandemic. It turns out that over one fifth of people declaring an increase in demand for crisis management PR (20.1%) turned out to believe they would definitely not be forced to look for a job in a sector other than PR. In the case of the respondents indicating a decrease in the demand for crisis management PR, the percentage of such people was 5.6%. The analysis of Spearman's correlation showed that the more often the respondents indicated a possible increase in the demand for activities covered by the term crisis management PR, the less often they were inclined to change the sector in connection with the COVID-19 pandemic (Spearman's rho = – 0.197, p = 0.002).

In the following part of the analyses, various statements regarding work in the PR industry in the time of the COVID-19 pandemic were compared with the declared changes in the demand for crisis management PR and digital PR.

**Table 2. The need to change industries in terms of changes in the demand for crisis management PR activities after the end of the COVID-19 pandemic[1] (data in%)**

| | | Demand for crisis management | | | In total |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | | It will decrease | It will not change | It will increase | |
| I will be forced to look for employment in a different branch than PR ( a need to change qualifications) | Definitely not | 5.6 | 18.4 | 20.1 | 18.8 |
| | Rather not | 27.8 | 34.2 | 41.8 | 39.6 |
| | It is hard to say | 44.4 | 31.6 | 27.7 | 29.6 |
| | Rather yes | 16.7 | 15.8 | 7.6 | 9.6 |
| | Definitely yes | 5.6 | 0.0 | 2.7 | 2.5 |
| **In total** | | **100.0** | **100.0** | **100.0** | **100.0** |

Chi-square = 9.491, Cramer V = 0.141
Source: Authors

Data analysis revealed a correlation between the declared changes in the demand for crisis management PR and the need to change industries caused by the COVID-19 pandemic. It turns out that over one fifth of people declaring an increase in demand for crisis management PR (20.1%) turned out to believe they would definitely not be forced to look for a job in a sector other than PR. In the case of the respondents indicating a decrease in the demand for crisis management PR, the percentage of such people was 5.6%. The analysis of Spearman's correlation showed that the more often the respondents indicated a possible increase in the demand for activities covered by the term crisis management PR, the less often they were inclined to change the sector in connection with the COVID-19 pandemic (Spearman's rho = – 0.197, p = 0.002).

The declared changes in the demand for crisis management PR also correlated with the assessment of business opportunities for PR agencies after the end of the COVID-19 pandemic (see Table 3).

**1** Excluding the answer "I don't know, it's hard to say".

**Table 3. Assessment of business opportunities for PR agencies in relation to changes in the demand for crisis management PR activities after the end of the COVID-19 pandemic[2] (%)**

| | | Demand for crisis management | | | In total |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | | It will decrease | It will not change | It will increase | |
| The current situation is more a business opportunity than a threat for a PR agency | Definitely not | 16.7 | 5.3 | 6.5 | 7.1 |
| | Rather not | 33.3 | 23.7 | 22.3 | 23.3 |
| | It is hard to say | 33.3 | 23.7 | 26.6 | 26.7 |
| | Rather yes | 16.7 | 36.8 | 34.8 | 33.8 |
| | Definitely yes | 0.0 | 10.5 | 9.8 | 9.2 |
| **In total** | | **100.0** | **100.0** | **100.0** | **100.0** |

Chi-square = 7.406, Cramer V = 0.124
Source: Authors

Subsequent analyses showed that almost every tenth PR specialist participating in the survey, who indicated an increase in the demand for crisis management PR (9.8%), firmly agreed with the opinion that the current situation is more a business opportunity for a PR agency than a threat for them. In comparison, none of the respondents indicating a decrease in the demand for crisis management PR, agreed with the opinion that the current situation is a business opportunity for PR agencies rather than a threat.

The analysis of Spearman's correlation additionally showed the presence of statistically significant relationships between the variables. It turns out that the more often the respondents indicated the forecasted increase in the demand for crisis management PR, the more often they agreed with the statement that the current situation is more a business opportunity for PR agencies than a threat to them (Spearman's rho = 0.152, p = 0.018).

The assessment of the future of the PR industry after the control of the COVID-19 pandemic in relation to the state before the declaration of the pandemic is also an interesting topic raised in our research (see Table 4).

2 Excluding the answer "It is hard to say".

**Table 4. Assessment of the future of the PR industry in relation to changes in the demand for activities related to digital PR after the end of the COVID-19 pandemic[3] (%)**

| | | Demand for digital PR | | | In total |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | | It will decrease | It will not change | It will increase | |
| The future of the PR industry after pandemic in comparison to the condition before the COVID-19 pandemic | Much worse | 29.2 | 11.6 | 8.9 | 11.4 |
| | Rather worse | 29.2 | 32.6 | 24.9 | 26.7 |
| | It is hard to say | 33.3 | 34.9 | 39.1 | 37.7 |
| | Rather better | 8.3 | 18.6 | 24.3 | 21.6 |
| | Much better | 0.0 | 2.3 | 3.0 | 2.5 |
| In total | | 100.0 | 100.0 | 100.0 | 100.0 |

Chi-square = 12.102, Cramer V = 0.160
Source: Authors

The issue of changes in the demand for digital PR activities after the end of the coronavirus pandemic significantly correlated with the assessment of the future of the PR industry. More than a quarter of respondents declaring an increase in demand for digital PR believe that the future of the PR industry after the coronavirus pandemic has been brought under control will look rather or better than the state before the pandemic was announced (27.3%).

On the other hand, among the respondents leaning towards a decline in demand for digital PR, the percentage of people assessing the future of the industry in a rather or positive way fluctuated at the level of 8.3%. It can therefore be presumed that the respondents accept this direction as a positive and expected change that may take place in the PR industry. As mentioned, the differences in the respondents' answers turned out to be statistically significant. The applied Spearman correlation test showed that the more often the respondents indicated an increase in demand for digital PR, the better they assessed the future of the PR industry after the COVID-19 pandemic was brought under control (Spearman's rho = 0.153, p = 0.019).

Another important piece of information from the survey was noted in connection with the need to look for a job in a sector other than PR in the context of changes in the demand for digital PR activities (see Table 5).

3 Excluding the answer "It is hard to say".

**Table 5. The need to change industries in terms of the demand for activities related to digital PR after the end of the COVID-19 pandemic[4] (data in%)**

| | | Demand for digital PR | | | In total |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | | It will decrease | It will not change | It will increase | |
| I will be forced to look for employment in a different branch than PR ( a need to change qualifications) | Definitely not | 4.2 | 2.3 | 24.9 | 18,6 |
| | Rather not | 45.8 | 32.6 | 39.6 | 39,0 |
| | It is hard to say | 33.3 | 39.5 | 27.2 | 30,1 |
| | Rather yes | 12.5 | 25.6 | 5.9 | 10,2 |
| | Definitely yes | 4.2 | 0.0 | 2.4 | 2,1 |
| **In total** | | **100,0** | **100.0** | **100.0** | **100.0** |

Chi-square = 29.530, Cramer V = 0.250
Source: Authors

As was the case with the need for crisis management PR, the need to change the sector significantly correlated with the demand for digital PR activities declared by the respondents, after the end of the COVID-19 pandemic. It turns out that almost a quarter of the respondents declaring an increase in demand for such activities (24.9%) strongly disagree with the opinion that they will be forced to look for a job in a sector other than PR. For comparison, among people forecasting a decrease in demand for digital PR after the end of the coronavirus pandemic, the percentage of such indications was only 4.2%. As indicated, the differences in the respondents' answers were statistically significant. The Spearman correlation test showed that the more often the respondents indicated an increase in the demand for digital PR activities after the end of the pandemic, the less often they agreed with the opinion that they would be forced to look for a job in a sector other than PR (Spearman's rho = – 0.313, p = 0.000).

The impact of the pandemic on the activities of the PR industry in Poland is also reflected in the relationship between the assessment of business opportunities for PR agencies and changes in the demand for activities related to digital PR (see Table 6).

4 Excluding the answer "It is hard to say".

**Table 6. Assessment of business opportunities for PR agencies in relation to changes in the demand for digital PR activities after the end of the COVID-19 pandemic[5] (%)**

| | | Demand for digital PR | | | In total |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | | It will decrease | It will not change | It will increase | |
| The current situation is more a business opportunity for PR agencies than a threat to them | Definitely not | 25.0 | 9.3 | 4.1 | 7,2 |
| | Rather not | 37.5 | 25.6 | 21.3 | 23,7 |
| | It is hard to say | 20.8 | 30.2 | 26.0 | 26,3 |
| | Rather yes | 12.5 | 32.6 | 37.3 | 33,9 |
| | Definitely yes | 4.2 | 2.3 | 11.2 | 8,9 |
| **In total** | | **100,0** | **100.0** | **100.0** | **100.0** |

Chi-square = 23.514, Cramer V = 0.223
Source: Authors

The issue of the need for digital PR activities also significantly correlated with the business opportunities that PR agencies face after the end of the COVID-19 pandemic. Almost half of the respondents indicating a possible increase in demand for digital PR activities, rather or agreed with the opinion that the current situation is more a business opportunity for PR agencies than a threat to them (48.5%). In the case of respondents inclined to a decrease in demand for such activities, the percentage of such responses was at the level of 16.7%. The analysis of the Spearman correlation showed the occurrence of statistically significant relationships between the variables. Namely, the more often the respondents indicated an increase in demand for digital PR, the more often they agreed with the statement that the current situation is more a business opportunity for PR agencies than a threat to them (Spearman's rho = 0.268, p = 0.000). The declared changes in the demand for activities related to crisis management PR and digital PR were also compared with the metric questions relating to the length of service of the respondents in the PR industry, their gender and place of employment (Table 7).

**Table 7. Correlations related to changes in the demand for crisis management PR and digital PR in relation to seniority in the PR industry**

| | Demand for crisis management PR | | Demand for digital PR | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| | rho | p | rho | p |
| Work experience in the PR industry | -0.141 | 0.030 | 0.136 | 0.037 |

Source: Authors

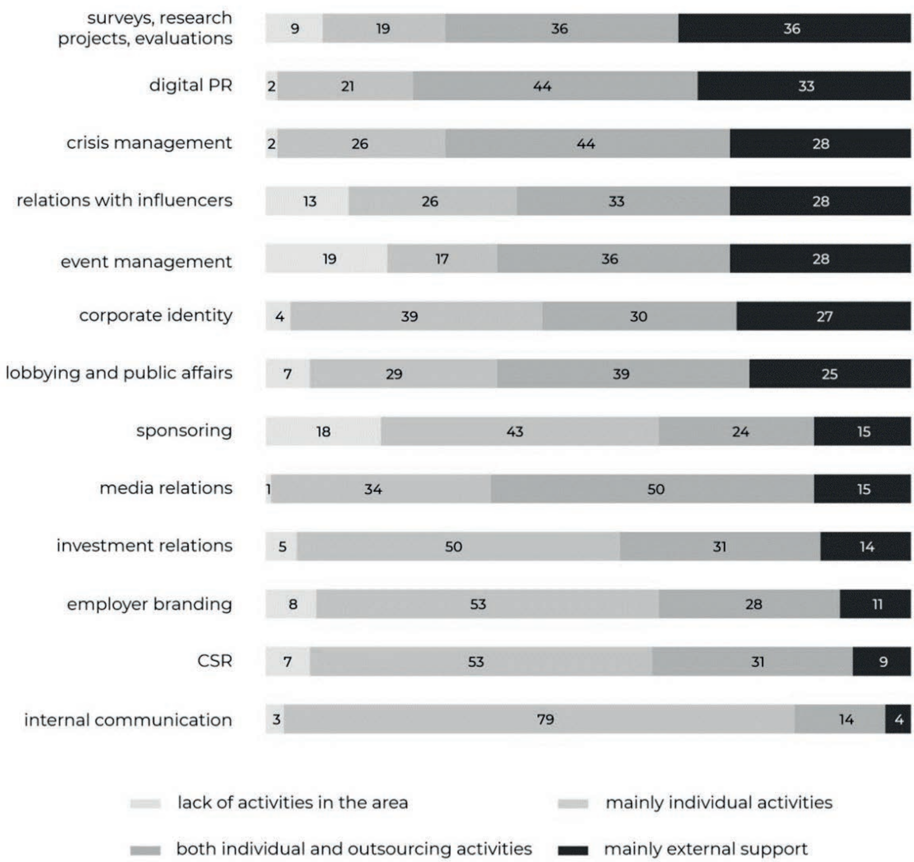
5 Excluding the answer "It is hard to say".

The only variable regarding the profile of respondents, which statistically significantly differentiated the issues related to the demand for crisis management PR and digital PR, turned out to be seniority in the PR industry. It turns out that the longer the length of work experience in the PR industry, the more often the respondents indicated an increase in demand for digital PR and a possible decrease in demand for crisis management PR activities after the end of the COVID-19 pandemic.

In the next question, the respondents were asked to define, based on their observations, what strategies companies would choose after the coronavirus pandemic (see Figure 2). When analysing the responses related to the subject of this article, just over one fifth of the respondents stated that digital PR activities will be carried out by companies on their own (21%). Using mainly external support in this aspect was indicated by 33% of respondents, while combining both forms – 44%. Moreover, 2% of the respondents turned out to believe companies will not undertake any activities related to digital PR.

Considering the activities related to crisis management PR, 26% of the respondents indicated that tasks were mainly performed on their own. More than every fourth respondent (28%) stated that these activities would be implemented mainly with the help of external support, while 44% of people opted to combine both their own activities and outsourcing. Moreover, 2% of PR specialists participating in the survey indicated no action in this area. It is also worth noting that, according to a very significant part of the respondents, companies will carry out activities related to internal communication (79%) on their own, and they will mainly use external support in terms of research, research projects and evaluation (36%). Combining your own activities with outsourcing will mainly concern media relations (50%), while the lack of acting will be mostly related to the organization of events (19%).

**Figure 2. Strategies of PR activities adopted by companies after the COVID-19 pandemic? N = 242 (data in%)**




Source: Authors

The strategies for PR activities that can be adopted by companies after the end of the coronavirus pandemic presented in Figure 2 have also been compared with statements regarding the assessment of the PR industry in the pandemic era.

An interesting relationship is provided by the list of changes in the reduction of employment in the PR industry in the context of the strategy of actions related to crisis management PR (see Table 8).

**Table 8. Changes in the reduction of employment in the PR industry in relation to the action strategies adopted by companies in terms of crisis management PR[6] (%)**

| | | Action strategies related to crisis management | | | In total |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | | Mainly individual activities | Both individual activities and outsourcing | Mainly external support | |
| There will be a significant reduction in employment in the PR industry | Definitely not | 1.6 | 1.9 | 1.5 | 1,7 |
| | Rather not | 14.3 | 18.7 | 31.3 | 21,1 |
| | It is hard to say | 27.0 | 16.8 | 17.9 | 19,8 |
| | Rather yes | 42.9 | 53.3 | 46.3 | 48,5 |
| | Definitely not | 14.3 | 9.3 | 3.0 | 8,9 |
| **In total** | | **100,0** | **100.0** | **100.0** | **100.0** |

Chi-square = 13.007, Cramer V = 0.166
Source: Authors

It is worth noting that 14.3% of respondents, who turned out to believe companies after the pandemic will conduct crisis management PR activities mainly on their own, strongly agreed with the statement that there will be a significant reduction in employment in the PR industry. It should also be noted that among people who indicate that activities are carried out both with their own and external resources, the percentage of such indications was 9.3%, while among respondents inclining to use mainly external support in crisis management PR; it reached the level of only 3%.

Due to the use of the Spearman correlation, the above relationships were found statistically significant. It seems that the greater the scope of external activities undertaken by companies in carrying out tasks related to crisis management PR, the less frequently was it in agreement with the statement that after the end of the COVID-19 pandemic, there will be a significant reduction in employment in the PR industry (Spearman's rho = – 0.132, p = 0.043).

The conducted analyses allowed the authors to observe another statistically significant correlation relating to the assessment of the crisis in the PR industry caused by the COVID-19 pandemic (Table 9).

6 Excluding the answer "It is hard to say".

**Table 9. Assessment of the crisis in the PR industry caused by the pandemic in relation to the action strategies adopted by companies in terms of digital PR[7] (%)**

| | | Action strategies related to digital PR | | | In total |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | | **Mainly individual activities** | **Both individual activities and outsourcing** | **Mainly external support** | |
| The current pandemic is the most serious crisis the PR industry in Poland has ever had to deal with | Definitely not | 14.0 | 2.8 | 7.6 | 6.8 |
| | Rather not | 16.0 | 14.8 | 15.2 | 15.2 |
| | It is hard to say | 22.0 | 25.0 | 13.9 | 20.7 |
| | Rather yes | 34.0 | 33.3 | 31.6 | 32,9 |
| | Definitely yes | 14.0 | 24.1 | 31.6 | 24,5 |
| In total | | 100,0 | 100.0 | 100.0 | 100.0 |

Chi-square = 13.264, Cramer V = 0.167
Source: Authors

Almost one-third of respondents who indicated that companies mainly use external support during digital PR activities (31.6%) strongly agreed with the statement that the current pandemic is the most serious crisis the PR industry in Poland has ever had to deal with. In the case of the respondents leaning towards their own activities and outsourcing, the percentage of people strongly agreeing with this thesis amounted to 24.1%, while among the respondents indicating mainly their own activities, it oscillated at only 14%. As mentioned above, the differences in responses turned out to be statistically significant. Thus, the greater the scope of external activities the respondents assigned to digital PR strategies, the more often they declared that the current pandemic is the most serious crisis the PR industry in Poland has ever had to deal with (Spearman's rho = 0.133, p = 0.041).

## CONCLUSIONS

The conducted research has shown that the areas of activities related to PR, for which the greatest increase in demand will occur after the coronavirus pandemic, turned out to be crisis management PR and digital PR. Their significant or moderate growth after the pandemic is forecast by 76% and 70% of respondents, respectively. It is worth emphasizing that the more often the respondents indicated the forecasted increase in the demand for crisis management PR, the more often they agreed with the statement that the current situation is more a business opportunity for PR agencies than a threat to them, and they were less likely

7 Excluding the answer "It is hard to say".

to have to change related to the COVID-19 pandemic. In turn, the more often the respondents leaned towards a potential increase in demand for digital PR activities, the better they assessed the future of the PR industry after the pandemic was brought under control, and more often agreed with the statement that the current situation is more a business opportunity for PR agencies than a threat to them, and less frequently agreed with the opinion that they would be forced to look for a job in a sector other than PR.

Considering the strategies of actions that will be taken by companies after the coronavirus pandemic, the largest percentage of respondents inclined to combine their own activities and external support – 44% of responses in both digital PR and crisis management PR. Conducting activities related to digital PR mainly on their own was declared by every fifth respondent, while 33% of respondents opted for outsourcing in this respect. On the other hand, carrying out tasks related to crisis management PR on their own was declared by every fourth respondent, while 28% of respondents indicated that they mainly used external support. It is also worth noting that in both analysed areas, only 2% of respondents said that after the end of the COVID-19 pandemic, companies would not take any action. Two interesting statistically significant relationships were also observed.

According to the respondents, the greater the scope of external activities in the conduct of crisis management PR activities will be, the less frequently did they agree that after the end of the pandemic a significant reduction in employment in the PR industry should be expected. On the other hand, the greater the scope of external activities the respondents attributed to the expected changes in digital PR, the more often did they declare that the current pandemic is the most serious crisis that the PR industry in Poland has ever had to deal with. The main manifestations of this crisis (similarly to many other countries) were real or forecasted: reduced revenues, declining profits of the industry, reduction of expenditure on social communication management by market entities (Sudhaman, 2020, 2021; Kroliczek 2020). Summing up the considerations presented in this article, it should be noted that PR professionals agree that after the pandemic is over, the demand for crisis management PR (76%) and digital PR (70%) will increase. The organization of events and sponsorship, where a decrease in demand is forecast by 79% and 63% of respondents, respectively are place at the other end of hierarchy in this respect.

The demand analysis was supplemented with additional information about the outsourcing potential of individual services. PR industry specialists indicated the tasks to be carried out mainly with the external support: research and evaluation (36%), digital PR (33%), relations with influencers (28%), organization of events (28%) and crisis management PR (28%).

When interpreting these responses, it should be noted that research and evaluation, as well as the organization of events, which are highly rated in terms of outsourcing, could be facing a decline (forecast by specialists). On the other hand, digital PR and crisis management PR discussed in detail in this article are the areas where high outsourcing potential is combined with the forecasted increase in demand for services. Due to the lack of similar research in other countries, it is difficult to relate the diagnosis of the opinion of the PR community in Poland to similar groups and industries in the world. Possible comparative studies will emerge along with the potential diagnosis of similar issues in other countries.

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