

## CORPORATE SOCIAL RESPONSIBILITY – FASHION OR NECESSITY

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**Abstract:** *Corporate social responsibility is becoming increasingly popular also among Polish companies. More and more often we hear about corporate responsibility addressed to customers, employees or local community. Companies are also involved in environmental issues. However, we can wonder whether these actions are the result of fashion or economically justification requirement of today's customers? How Polish consumers perceive of CSR activities? How do they evaluate the activity of companies in this area? The article presents the results of empirical research on the perception of CSR by Polish consumers.*

**Keywords:** *corporate social responsibility, CSR activities, company, research*

**JEL Classification:** *M14*

### 1. INTRODUCTION

Observing the behavior of economic entities operating in Poland still can be seen insufficient consideration of social and environmental protection in their daily decisions. The achievement of economic maturity means that many of positive actions are taken in a natural way. However, there are still areas where we cannot be proud of. An example is the equal rights in the recruitment and selection of staff. Despite this, many enterprises want to identify with the concept of corporate social responsibility (CSR). Companies have recognized the opportunity to distinguish themselves from competitors by conscious actions in the area of environmental protection and the broadly defined social responsibility. However, as show the results of research, Polish consumers do not know the concept of CSR and not take into account it in their purchases. This article presents a results of research conducted on a group of 800 consumers, whose aim was to investigate how the concept of CSR is recognized in Poland, the role of CSR in the market proceedings of consumer and how it is seen as a part of business.

### 2. CSR – THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

Corporate Social Responsibility also called the "corporate conscience", „corporate citizenship", "responsible sustainable business" or at the end of "responsible business" (Wood, 1991, pp. 691-718) is becoming more and more popular, also in Poland. This concept is not new. Its origins can see in the work of academic 80s and 90s of the last century [Preston and Post 1975, Ackerman and Bauer 1976, Frederick 1978, Carroll 1979, Freeman 1984, Wartick and Cochran 1985, Miles 1987]. This concept is also increasingly being studied by Polish authors [Rok 2001, Rybak 2004, Korpus 2006, Żemigala 2007, Geryk 2010, Bartkowiak 2011].

But, how is understood the CSR? The definitions presented in the literature draw attention to two aspects: the stakeholders of the company and a parallel interest in social and the environment issues. As defined by the European Commission, the CSR should be treated as a concept of doing business, whereby companies voluntarily

take account of social aspects and environmental protection in their policies and activities and in dealings with stakeholders (European Commission, 2001, pp. 9). T. Wołowiec - in turn - defines corporate social responsibility as philosophy of business, taking into account the building stable, transparent relationships with all stakeholders, thus leading to a competitive advantage for the company (Wołowiec, 2004, p. 3). Such an approach to the philosophy of doing business imposes on enterprises additional tasks. According to the CSR concept the corporation is seen as an organization serving the interests of a broad group of co-creating its entities (Post, Preston, Sachs, 2002, p. 11) and stakeholders – as partners who collaborate with the company in creating social and economic value (Halal, 2001, p. 27).

The stakeholders are: the company's clients, employees, suppliers, media, public administration and the local community. The role of the business does not consist solely on generating profits, but is a service within the meaning of the duties meet the expectations of the enterprise environment and balancing the interests of groups that operate in it. The company in addition to the realization of business objectives in its strategy should equally take into account social objectives and environmental protection. Only this allows to take responsibility for the consequences of the impact of industry on the environment and broadly defined social good. However, corporate social responsibility is not to remain in compliance with all applicable laws and regulations (or at least not only), but is included in the activity of companies that go beyond what is required. Refers to the additional costs that do not offer immediate financial benefits for the company, but are designed to promote positive social changes and in the area of environmental protection.

### 3. CSR IN THE LIGHT OF RESEARCH

#### 3.1 Method of research

Empirical studies were conducted in 2011-2013 on a sample of 800 consumers in form a survey research. The research was conducted in the Silesia and Malopolska provinces (the southern Polish region). Given the subject of the research used the convenient choice. After rejecting of

invalid responses, the basis for the calculation were: 502 questionnaires. The sample characteristic is presented in Table 1.

### 3.2 Results of research

Polish consumers do not know the concept of corporate social responsibility. As many as 68% answered that they had never met with this term. Despite this, to the question: How do you understand the social responsibility of business? majority answered properly, that it is a voluntary consideration of social and environmental aspects in policies and activities of companies (43%) and maintaining good relations with company's surroundings (42%). A part of the answers indicate that respondents associate CSR with activities to protect the environment. They replied, inter alia, that CSR is a proactive approach to the protection of environment (25%), undertaking initiatives to promote greater environmental responsibility (37%) and the development and diffusion of environmentally friendly technologies (35%). For the part of the respondents the CSR is also understood as supporting the social actions (36%), adherence to the principles of sustainable development (23%) and application of ethics in business (28%).

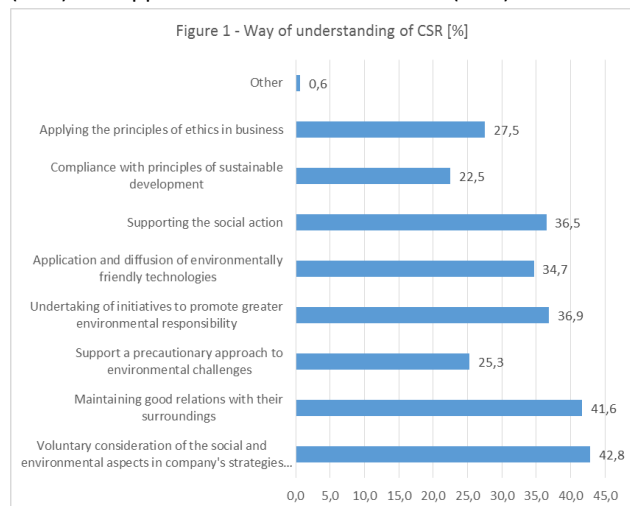


Figure 1

Source: Own study based on empirical research. N = 502.

Respondents could choose more than one answer.

Polish consumers have a high opinion on the application of the CSR in companies. As many as 61% of respondents believe that companies operating in Poland applying the principles of the CSR. When asked about the implementation of the specific rules are not so unanimous. The vast majority of respondents (66%) believe that

Table 1. The sample characteristic [%]

Sex	Male				
	41,2				
Age	Female	Male			
	57,4	41,2			
	To 25 years	From 26 to 35 years	From 36 to 45 years	From 46 to 55 years	Over. 56 years
	49,0	17,3	12,2	12,2	9,4
Education	Primary/Middle school	Vocational school	High school education	A university degree	
	2,4	9,8	53,6	32,7	
Place of residence	City of over 100 thousand. residents	City from 25 to 100 thousand. residents	City to 25 thousand. residents	Village	
	14,5	20,3	22,7	42,4	
Monthly net income per family member	To 500 zlotys	From 500 to 1500 zlotys	From 1500 to 2500 zlotys	Over 2500 zlotys	
	8,8	51,6	25,7	10,6	
Status	Student	A working person	An unemployed person	Pensioner	
	45,2	45,2	9,4	7,6	

companies support and respect the human rights adopted by the international community. However, only 35% believe that they eliminate any violations of those rights by organizations. As many as 65% believe that companies do not engage to this degree. The vast majority (60%) believe that companies respect the freedom of association. Unfortunately, the respondents perceive the existing solutions in the field of equal opportunities (discrimination) in employment in enterprises badly, indicating that most companies not follow the rules in force in this area (69% of responses). They are not satisfied with today's approach of enterprises operating in Poland for environmental matters either, indicating that companies do not present such an approach (57%). Respondents have positive attitude to engage of enterprises in initiatives to promote greater environmental responsibility (55%). They also well assessed the issue of the use and dissemination of environmentally friendly technologies by enterprises (52% of respondents think that such technologies are used and popularized by the company). The worst rated area is "corruption". As many as 76% of respondents think that companies operating in Poland do not prevent corruption or its manifestations. Replies in particular areas are presented on Figure 2.

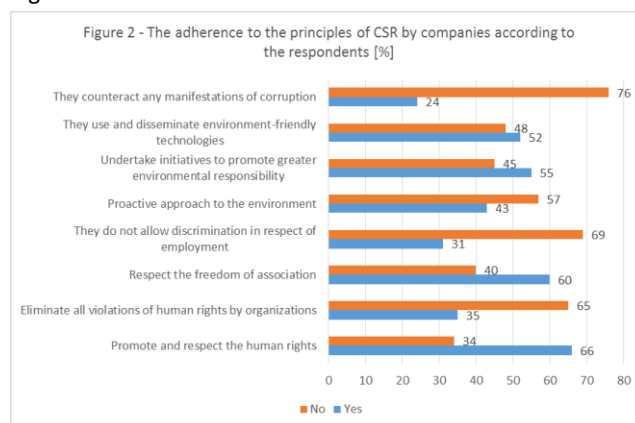


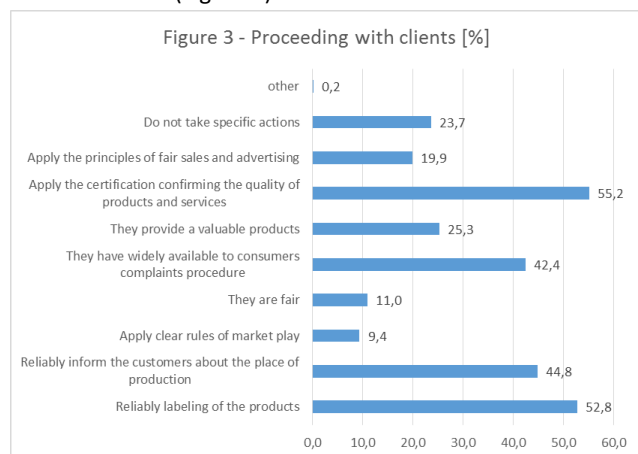
Figure 2

Source: Own study based on empirical research. N = 502.

To the question: What special actions are taken by your company in relation to customers? more than 55% emphasized that it is the implementation of quality standards, confirming the quality of products and services (55.2%). Slightly less - 52.8% said that it is an accurate labeling of products and indication of the place of manufacture of the product - 44.8%.

Source: Own study based on empirical research. N = 502.

Over 40% of respondents also indicated that companies have widely available to the consumer complaint procedures (42.4%). Relatively fewer respondents indicated that companies just provide valuable products - 25.3%, applying the principles of fair sale and advertising - 19.9%, are fair - 11% or use the pure rules on the market - 9.4%. Relatively many people responded that their companies do not take the specific actions addressed to this group (23.7%). This may indicate insufficient - according to the respondents - the involvement of enterprises in this group of stakeholders (Figure 3).

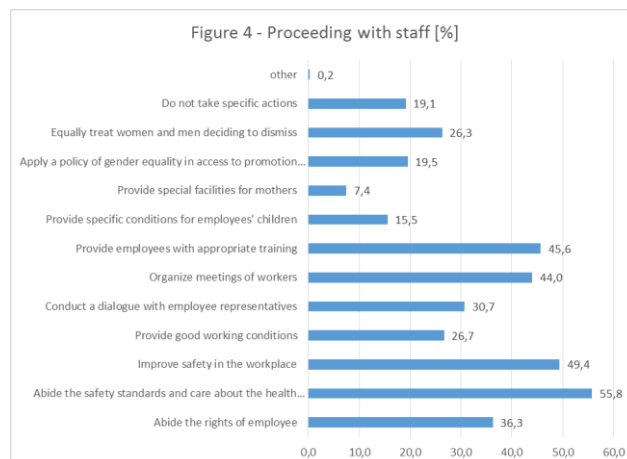


**Figure 3**

Source: Own study based on empirical research. N = 502.

Far better shaping an answer to the question on activity targeted at workers. The largest part the respondents positively assesses the implementation and compliance with health and safety standards of work - 55.8%, well are rated also improve safety in the workplace (49.4%). Respondents also point to foster the development of employees - 45.6% of respondents indicated that companies give employees appropriate training and care about integration of employees - 44% indicated that companies organize staff meetings such as picnics. A relatively large group of respondents also indicates that companies respect the laws of the employee (36.3%) and conduct a dialogue with the representatives of employees (30.7%). A slightly smaller proportion of respondents indicate that companies provide good working conditions (26.7%), they equally treat men and women deciding to dismiss (26.3%) and apply a policy of gender equality in access to promotion and career development (19.5 %). Only a few indicated that the companies in which they work provide specific conditions for employees' children (15.5%) or provide special facilities for mothers (7.4%). Quite a large group considers, however, that companies do not undertake the specific activities - 19.1% (Figure 4).

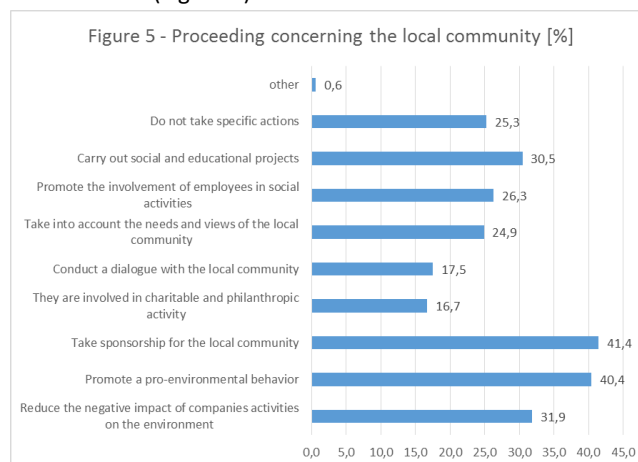
Worse seems to be evaluated activity of enterprises in contacts with the local community. The largest group of respondents sees the activity of enterprises in the area of sponsorship. As many as 41.4% of respondents believe that they are taking sponsorship for the local community. A similar group indicates that companies are promoting pro-environmental behavior (40.4%). The relatively large number of corresponding believes that the companies try reduce the negative impact of their activities on the environment (31.9%) and organize a social or educational projects (30.5%).



**Figure 4**

Source: Own study based on empirical research. N = 502.

Much of the respondents believe that their company supports the employees involvement in a social activities (26.3%) and take into account the needs and opinions of the local community (24.9%). Slightly less considers, however, that these companies maintain a dialogue with the local community (17.5%) or are involved in a charitable and philanthropic activity (16.7%). A large number of respondents believe that these entities do not undertake specific activities - 25.3%, which may indicate in their assessment of insufficient involvement of companies in these actions (Figure 5).

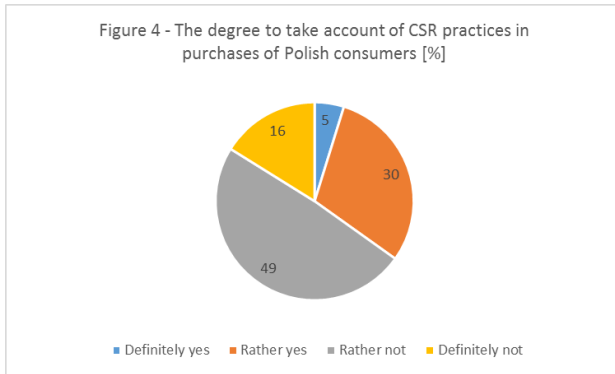


**Figure 5**

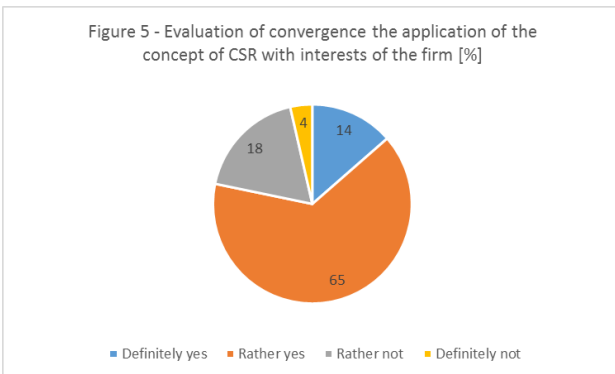
Source: Own study based on empirical research. N = 502.

The Polish consumers - unfortunately - do not pay attention to the social commitment of companies during their purchases (49% replied "probably not" and 16% - "definitely not"). Responses clearly confirming this practice, i.e. conscious consideration of knowledge about social engagement of companies when making the purchase, gave only 5% of respondents. A large part - because approx. 30% - declare that partial draws attention to responsibility of selected suppliers - Figure 4.

The respondents recognize the importance of corporate social responsibility in a market economy. To the question: Does the use of corporate social responsibility is consistent with the interests of the firm? the vast majority replied in the affirmative (13% responded "definitely yes", 65% - "rather yes"). Only 4% of respondents think that it is absolutely contrary to the interests of the company, and 18% - that "rather inconsistent" – Figure 5.

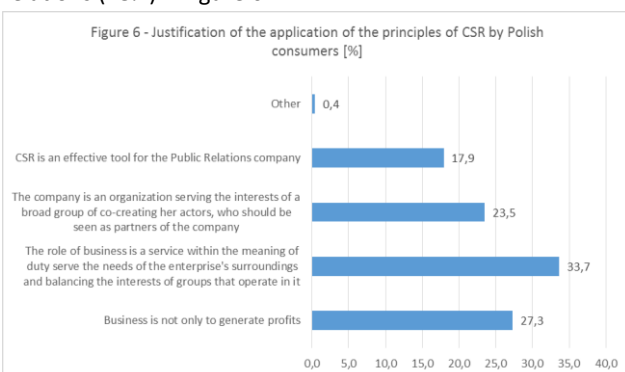
**Figure 4**

Source: Own study based on empirical research. N = 502.

**Figure 5**

Source: Own study based on empirical research. N = 502.

Justifying taken position, respondents indicated that the role of business is a service within the meaning of duty to serve the needs of the enterprise environment and balancing the interests of groups that operate in it (34%), that in the business is not just about generating profits (27%) or - at the end - that company is an organization serving the interests of a broad group of co-creating the actors who should be seen as partners of the company (24%). A large group sees CSR as an effective tool for public relations (18%) – Figure 6.

**Figure 6**

Source: Own study based on empirical research. N = 392.

#### 4. CONCLUSIONS

Polish entrepreneurs and managers like a western companies are increasingly talking about corporate social responsibility and, more importantly - implement its principles in daily operation. Many actors who guided by the principles of ethics and responsibility, applies the principles of CSR without knowing it. It has, among others, reflected in the answers of respondents who were asked about

knowledge of the concept of CSR. They responded in the most negatively but when they replied, how in their opinion looks the implementation of CSR principles in Polish economic practice - had no doubt that these principles are mostly used by most of companies. Such business execution proves the maturity of the Polish economy, in which nowadays would be unacceptable certain behaviors related to e.g. human rights abuses, and their occurrence is associated with a public stigma and directing the matter to court. Summing up the studies it can be concluded that:

1. The degree of knowledge of the CSR concept among Polish consumers is low. For many respondents it is a commitment of the company in the matter of environment or application of the principles of business ethics
2. Polish companies shall apply the CSR principles, but according to the respondents they are insufficient involved in social issues, such as counteracting any manifestations of corruption, elimination of all violations of human rights. The weakest area was equality in employment.
3. Polish Consumers relatively well evaluate the involvement of companies in activities in favor of consumers and employees. The weakest were assessed the companies' activities directing to the local society. The underlined areas indicate, however, more to the appropriate fulfillment of obligations imposed by law, not on a voluntary commitment resulting from the care and responsibility of the companies.
4. Polish consumers do not pay attention to the CSR when shopping and do not take account social responsibility in choosing of specific brands.
5. Polish consumers consider that implementation of CSR is consistent with the interests of the companies, since they should be responsible for the surroundings, trying to balance the interests of groups that interact with it, and not be interested only in generating profits.

As follows from the above conclusions, it is necessary improvement, among others:

- general awareness of CSR principles by both citizens and entrepreneurs and managers,
- application of the principles of equality in employment and promotion in policies of companies and organizations,
- take more account of the principles of CSR in the corporate market activities,
- increase of care about the employees and the local community,
- education of Polish consumers on the environmental and social responsibility.

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