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AUTHOR'S SUMMARY

**OF A DISSERTATION THESIS FOR ACQUISITION OF THE
EDUCATIONAL AND SCIENTIFIC DEGREE OF DOCTOR OF
PHILOSOPHY**

**PF 3.7. ADMINISTRATION AND MANAGEMENT (BUSINESS
COMMUNICATIONS)**

DISSERTATION TITLE:

**BUSINESS COMMUNICATIONS AS A CORPORATE IMAGE-MAKING
TOOL**

(based on companies from the soft drinks and bottled water sector)

DOCTORAL STUDENT

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The dissertation consists of 199 standard pages and includes: introduction, main text comprising three chapters, conclusion, list of references (99 references to Cyrillic and Latin alphabet sources, internet sites and periodicals), and exhibits. The text of the dissertation includes 11 tables, 49 figures and three exhibits.

The dissertation thesis has been discussed by the members of the Educational and Scientific Panel and approved for defense at the International Business School – Botevgrad.

The author of the dissertation thesis is an unsupervised PhD student at the International Business School.

The dissertation thesis is to be defended at 07/12/2022 on 11,00 am via the Distance Learning Centre – Sofia at a public meeting of a Scientific Panel appointed by order of the Rector of IBS.

All materials related to the defence are available upon request from the administration of IBS as well as on the following web address: <https://ibsedu.bg>.

I. GENERAL CHARACTERISTICS OF THE DISSERTATION THESIS

1. Contemporaneity of the topic

The **topicality** of the dissertation stems from the need to systematize the practical competencies companies need to communicate effectively with external and internal audiences and to establish trust and open dialogue across the horizontal and vertical levels of their management, which is essential for creating a positive image of every organization.

There are many aspects that determine the importance of the communication process in the business environment of the XXI century. The growing role of communication is of paramount importance in building a professional environment for development, in building corporate responsibility, in protecting the competitiveness of businesses. Communication is extremely important for management, business and human resources. All forms of business communication (writing, reading, speaking and listening) are used in every business activity. Information is a key factor in any business, and communication is the catalyst for its relations. Therefore, every company needs an effective system for transmitting, receiving, processing and storing information. Employees spend most of their time communicating with managers, colleagues, customers, partners, etc. In managers perform their functions (coordination, guidance and control) in the company through verbal and nonverbal means. All this is possible due business communication.

The ability to communicate effectively with external and internal audiences and to establish trust and open dialogue across the horizontal and vertical levels of corporate management is essential for creating a positive image of every organization.

Corporate image (CI) is the result of presentation and public relations activities of organizations and has a direct effect on their success. It is created through these activities and contains stakeholders' opinions and perception of the company. Image management is a means to establish and communicate the position of the company through communication in order to attract and focus the attention to its best qualities.

Building an image is a complex process; the image of a product is built imperceptibly and sometimes seemingly spontaneously. It is based on the continuous

interaction between a company and its environment, e.g. its competitors, which determine the market position of its product or the overall product policy of the organization.

To establish and maintain a good corporate image are perceived as the main objectives of the management of any company. These objectives are achieved through a process of creating, maintaining and improving the corporate image using various approaches, methods and tools from the fields of communication management, marketing, psychology and behavioural sciences. The interpretation of the relationships and interdependencies within this management process is a field for creativity, knowledge in different scientific areas and a lot of personal practical observations and experience.

The research addresses one of the fastest growing sectors of the food industry - the production of soft drinks and bottled water.

The choice of this topic was determined by the constant drive of the companies producing bottled water to meet customer requirements, which increases the competition on this market. As a result of increased market supply (abundance of bottled water), consumers are beginning to look for established brands on the market, which in turn forces manufacturers to strengthen their market positions by establishing an image of manufacturers who offer high quality at affordable prices. This, in turn, requires better communication, including communication within the company to encourage its staff to perform more efficiently and effectively.

1.2. Subject and object of the research

The subject of the dissertation research are business communications and corporate image.

Its **object** are the companies operating in the soft drinks and bottled water sector and especially those engaged in the production and distribution of mineral, spring, and table water.

1.3. Research hypotheses

The main **research hypothesis** is that *business communications are essential for building a positive corporate image of the organization and there is a connection between them that can be assessed.*

This hypothesis is to be proved with the following **two hypotheses**:

Hypothesis One: There is a relation between motivation and satisfaction in communications;

Hypothesis Two: The corporate image of an organization is formed by the personal qualities and competencies of its managers.

1.4. Research goal and objectives

The main objective of the dissertation research is to develop a system for business communications and determine their effect on corporate image development.

For the purposes of this research, the term “business communication” is defined as *“a system of communications (information, communication channels, information links and forms) and the business relationships that emerge as a result of its utilization.”*

The terms “company”, “business”, and “organization” are used synonymously.

The tasks to be performed for achieving the set objective are:

1. To study and analyse the main theories regarding the nature of business communications;
2. To determine the models and activities used to build corporate image and corporate reputation;
3. Approaches and methods for evaluation of corporate image;
4. To conduct an empirical research with actual companies;
5. To estimate and analyse the level of business communications;
6. To systematize the competencies related to the communication process and the digitalization of communication activities;
7. To develop a system for evaluation of image-making business communications;
8. To determine the place of corporate image within the Balanced Scorecard.

1.5. Approach, method and sources of information

Approaches and methods. The research is based on the fundamental scientific concepts of business communications theory proposed by McClelland, Boyatzis, L. Spenser and S. Spenser, Schroeder, Dulevich, and Webster and the cluster approach for CI determination of Thomson, Steward and Lyndsey, D. Golman, O. Iversson, etc.

The role of corporate image is defined on the grounds of the scientific analyses of G. Allport, L. Vaytkunen, G. Pocheptsov, E. Bogdanov, C. Bowlding, etc. and the theoretical Balanced Scorecard concepts of R. Kaplan and D. Norton.

These theoretical concepts were supplemented and developed with definitions and concepts of the author of this dissertation thesis.

The empirical research is based on a questionnaire survey and self-assessment, the competence approach, a comparative parametric analysis, statistical economic analysis and graphical modeling, and the method of complex assessment of BC. The quantitative parameters are determined using statistical analysis, expert evaluation and coefficient methods.

The empirical data was processed with the application SPSS for Windows.

The sources of information for this research are the official statistics, the results from the survey and expert opinion regarding the companies operating in “bottled water” sector.

1.6. Structure and contents of the dissertation thesis

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II. CONTENTS OF THE DISSERTATION THESIS

2.1. CHAPTER ONE. THEORETICAL AND METHODOLOGICAL FOUNDATIONS OF COMMUNICATION AS AN IMAGE-MAKING TOOL

Chapter One of the dissertation thesis includes 3 paragraphs in which the author presents a literary overview of the theoretical concepts of interaction, communication, image, and reputation.

The **first section** clarifies the *place, importance and role of communication in the activities of an organization*. It compares the terms “communication” and “interaction” aiming to review their definitions proposed by distinguished authors and formulate working definitions the author could use in her dissertation research.

Interaction is a phenomenon that characterizes the mental nature of human unity. It is a purposeful exchange of information, thoughts, ideas, positions, emotions, and values among people in the process of their joint activities. Business interaction is essentially a contact between business partners in order to perform important functions such as exchange of business information in order to strengthen existing business relations or establish new ones.

The communication within an organization, on the other hand, is a term used in management science and practice to denote the overall organization and the process of vertical communication between subordinate levels and horizontal communication among the working groups that make up the organization. The communication within the organization creates an integrity of its employees and units and directs their efforts towards the achievement of its goals. In this aspect, the communications within the organization are studied not only in psychology but also in management as a scientific discipline.

On the other hand, according to the definitions of famous authors, communication is the “ability to organize and express ideas in writing and speaking”¹; it is the ability to understand and be understood. Whether written or oral, it is the conduit through which businesses interact with their customers. It is the mechanism through which management interacts with the employees and guides their activities. It is also the means by which workers provide the information and feedback that management needs to make informed decisions. An organization that communicates clearly,

¹ Druker, Peter. Management: tasks, responsibilities and practices, Harper & Row, 1974

meaningfully and effectively with customers, employees, shareholders, creditors and the public has a good chance of building trust and can count on their cooperation.

After analyzing and reviewing the definitions proposed by some well-known authors in this field, the author of the dissertation thesis has formulated a general definition of communication as: *a purposeful exchange of information, thoughts, ideas, positions, emotions and assessments between people in the process of their joint activities that aims to make it more efficient. It has two clearly distinguishable components - exchange and understanding. Communication is the exchange of information between interlocutors. It is effective when understanding is achieved between the participants.*

The functions of communication in the process of interaction are defined as:

- **Regulatory** – it regulates the behavior and relationships between the parties;
- **Perceptive** – it facilitates the mutual understanding and acceptance of the interlocutors;
- **Suggestive** – it can be used to suggest ideas.

In conclusion, after analysing the definitions of various authors, the author summarizes that *communication is a concept that is rich in content and volume, a complex and multi-layered process. Good communication is a prerequisite for the mutual understanding between an organization and its partners, between representatives of different social groups and participants in this process.*

Clarifying the characteristics of interlocution and communication, their similarities and differences, and their role in achieving efficiency and pre-set goals, is necessary to explain and build the image of an organization.

The **second paragraph** presents analysis of the types of communications and PR activities to build the image of the modern company. Note that for the purposes of the research, "company", "organization" and "firm" are used as relevant and synonymous terms with the same meaning and denomination.

The paragraph also addresses the types of communication in organizations since its effectiveness depends not only on the channel through which it is conducted, but also on its style.

The importance of **internal** communication for building a positive work environment in the organization should not be underestimated, because it could create

tension and gradual mistrust in its leadership. An informed and motivated employee is the best defence of the organization against its contractors, as well as the timely communication of successes. Internal corporate communication enhances the engagement of the employees with the implementation of company's policies, investment in continuous staff training, maintaining an active dialogue with employees, out-of-the-box ideas and positive thinking.

External is the communication between the organization and the various social groups and contractors. External communication creates connections with business partners, with the mass media, with the representatives of the state and local authorities, as well as with the public. Particularly suitable for this type of communication process in the organization are: PR activities, advertising, customer relations, press conferences, briefings, symposia, business talks, negotiations, correspondence, telephone conversations, interviews, articles and reports между организацията и различните обществени групи и контрагенти. Външната комуникация създава връзки с делови партньори, със средствата за масова комуникация, с представителите на държавната и местна власт, както и с обществеността. Като особено подходящи за този вид комуникационен процес в организацията може да се посочат: PR-дейности, реклама, връзки с клиенти, пресконференции, брифинги, симпозиуми, делови разговори, преговори, кореспонденция, телефонни разговори, интервюта, статии и репортажи.

According to the way information is disseminated, communication is classified into **formal and informal**. **Formal** communication takes place within the activities of the organization and is disseminated through established corporate information channels following certain rules and principles for message transmission. **Informal** communication is carried out through channels that are not used for formal communication. Outside the formal staff meetings and briefings and through the established corporate documents, the employees of the company communicate with one another to share interesting and useful personal information.

Other types of communication that are addressed and analysed are interpersonal, group, intrapersonal and mass communication; visual, auditory, olfactory, gustatory and tactile; one-way and two-way; verbal, nonverbal and para-verbal. This follow-up was necessary to show the role of communication in achieving agreement and trust in communication, as well as in building an image.

From the point of view of the theory of communication, the concept of "image" can be defined as "purposefully created mental concept of the recipient"² or as: "the social understanding for an individual, group, institution, state; reputation, etc."³

For the purposes of the dissertation research, the author has adopted the following **working definition** for corporate image: *“an intangible asset of great importance which attracts clients to a certain company and/or brand and is formed in the process of communication.”*

The image of a product or commodity is constantly modified by the elements of the company and the environment. This is why image management is associated with communication management.

This paragraph presents an analysis of the PR activities in image formation. Authors such as N. Stone⁴ and J. Grunig⁵ investigated image as the management of the impressions that the object leaves in people's minds. This approach is used by many theorists and practitioners in the field of PR, marketing, advertising, management, etc., who associate "image" with "identity" and whose interpretations of the relationship between the two terms have different and often contradictory aspects, degree of precision and focus. They range from the understanding that "image" and "identity" are interchangeable to seeing "identity" as a structural element of "image." There are even definitions, in which image is defined as a "tool" for establishing external corporate identity.⁶ According to M. Nedelchev,⁷ "creating an image is a priority of corporate PR. The most effective way to create an image is to use the media - cinema, television, radio, press, etc. The image reflects the social expectations of certain groups and can ensure political and business success."

A specific PR method based on direct communication with the public is the "open doors" method. It is used to influence the general public and consists of organizing individual or group visits to the building of the organization where a specially trained employee provides guided tours to the visitors and answers their questions. Thus, while the general public is gaining knowledge about the organization

² Coppetti 2004, p. 9

³ <http://www.t-rechnik.info> Български тълковен речник

⁴ Stone, N. The management and practice of Public Relations. Macmillan, 1995

⁵ Grunig, J. Image and Substance. In: Perspective on identity, image, reputation, corporate branding and corporate-level marketing. An Anthology selected and interpreted by J.M.T. Balmer and S.A. Greyser, L., 2003

⁶ Райков, З. Публична комуникация. С., 1999

⁷ Неделчев, М. Корпоративният имидж на търговските банки и неговото отразяване в средствата за масова информация. Връзки с обществеността, № 4, 1997, p. 34

and their common interests, the image of the organization can be modified according to the changing public attitudes and realities. This unique opportunity stems from interactivity as a characteristic feature of Public Relations. Moreover, the practical orientation of this communication technology allows the image of the organization to be shown in different situations and in different ways.

Public Relations constantly adjust the activities of the organization according to the dynamics of public interest. There is a continuous upgrade of the elements of the corporate image. Thus, the initially established image is improved and the formation of lasting cognitive attitudes in the audiences is achieved. In other words, Public Relations are already beginning to play an increasingly important role in shaping the way the organization is perceived.

The image interviews aggregate public capital for the organizations through the personality of their managers. The general public is informed about the abilities and the character of the decision-makers and thus their image reflects on the image of the organization. Special events are another way to demonstrate the capacity, achievements and policies of an organization. They are usually held on special occasions - anniversaries, presentations of new products, signing important contracts, etc. They aim to interest the community in the success of the organization. Public relations support the corporate image through their ability to create news.

PR campaigns often aim to provide support to competent, famous, socially prestigious personalities. By established contacts with the general public, Public Relations create prestige and strengthen the corporate image. The credibility and prestige of such individuals guarantee the effectiveness of the company's policy.

PR activities establish and maintain the corporate image through the social responsibility of the company. Thus, social engagement and social responsibility are already at the heart of modern business. Therefore, corporate is becoming increasingly dependent on the presentation of the organization as an entity which is beneficial and useful for the society. That is why modern Public Relations are responsible for the adequate planning and communicating public engagements, charitable causes and good business practices that benefit the society.

The author of the dissertation draws a parallel between the closely related concepts of "image" and "reputation". Generally, the main difference between these two concepts is that corporate image is the impression we want to create for the brand while company's reputation is consumers' actual perception and opinion about it. The

common features of these concepts are that they aim to stimulate target consumers to take certain actions, build and maintain consumer confidence, increase the support for the business organization in order to distinguish it and give it an advantage over its competitors and thus increase its sales. In fact, image-building and reputation-building activities often coincide. Ideally, they overlap and complement each other.

Good reputation becomes the intangible capital of the organization. It strengthens and develops the corporate image, making it more attractive and meaningful for the public. Good reputation established through PR links the corporate image to the values that important for the target audience. Such values demonstrated in PR-campaigns are loyalty to the public, perseverance, striving for excellence, rich experience, knowledge, utilization of technological advances, management efficiency, desire for full dialogue, respect for the rights and interests of customers, shareholders and the society. In conclusion, *perception is related to the conscious and hence to reputation, while image is related to the unconscious and the subconscious. Image precedes the establishment of reputation; it gives us a rudimentary idea of the subject which is the base on which the specific features or the rationality of reputation is developed and its assessment strongly depends on the attitudes in society.*

Certain models for establishment and management of corporate Image and corporate reputation are reviewed and systematized, and then their characteristics and application possibilities are compared. The relationship between image and identity is discussed.

Image is a strategic resource and can be the source of a competitive advantage. Its interaction with other factors such as culture, communication, reputation, helps to understand its cumulative character.

In summarizing the different models for corporate image and reputation management, their common elements are identified and then incorporated in the following model⁸:

⁸ Author's systematization

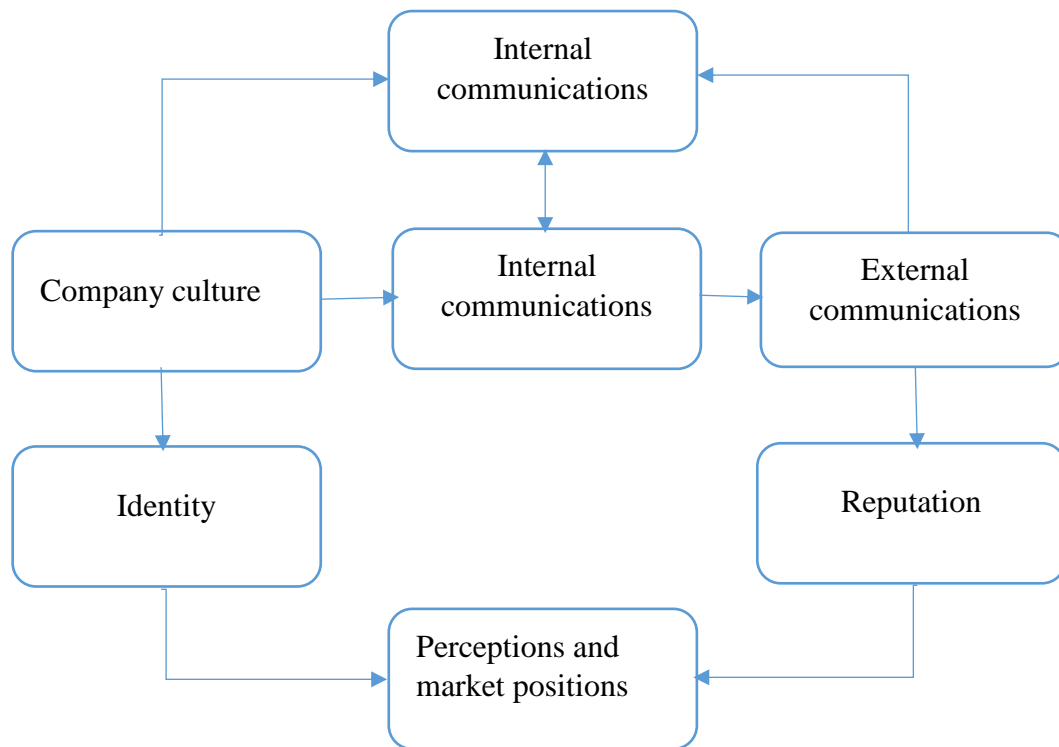


Figure 1. A model for formation and management of corporate image

Source: Author's systematization

The model for the formation and management of corporate image explains how the culture, identity, reputation and communication of a company influence and modify the way it is perceived and positioned on the market. Over time, they become bare necessities that are not subject to discussion and evaluation and thus from individual characteristics, they become collective practices. This is how the image is established as a set of collective beliefs and behaviours. It can be said that it is formed by the intentions of the employer and the enthusiasm of the staff.

The **third paragraph** describes the approaches and methods for evaluation and analysis of corporate image.

The criteria for selection of the methods for analysis and evaluation to ensure the relevance of the study are validity/reliability, available resources, individual capabilities. The following tools are applicable for performing the empirical research and for proving the dissertation hypothesis:

Analysis of the relation between business communications and image making. The empirical research consists of a survey based on a questionnaire of previously

compiled list of questions. The results of the analysis are illustrated by various tables, graphs, charts and diagrams.

- The survey was conducted with 30 employees from each of the following companies: "Coca-Cola Hellenic Bottling Company Bulgaria"; Devin AD; Gorna Banya Bottling Company OOD and Mihalkovo AD, or a total of 120 respondents.
- The questionnaire includes three groups of questions – general information, communication and management style, and corporate image making;
- For the purposes of the research information was collected, analyzed and synthesized from various sources: the Commerce Register, NSI, NSSI, Eurostat, the Ministry of Agriculture, Food and Forestry, the Ministry of Economy, etc. The collected, processed and analysed information was taken from corporate websites and annual financial statements of the surveyed enterprises.
- To achieve the main goal, perform the research tasks and corroborate the hypotheses, a variety of methodological tools were used: observation; analysis; induction and deduction; synthesis; survey, statistical analysis methods, econometric models (corporate reputation ratio, methods for assessing the return on investment in image), adapted to the specifics goals of the research. The empirical data was processed and analysed using the SPSS software application.

2.2. CHAPTER TWO. RESEARCH ON THE IMAGE-MAKING BUSINESS COMMUNICATIONS AND ACTIVITIES (based on companies from the Soft Drinks sector and with a focus on companies from the Bottled Water sub-sector)

Chapter Two of the dissertation thesis includes **three paragraphs** and describes the field research activities.

Paragraph One presents an analysis of companies in the Soft Drinks sector in terms of their type of communications (internal and external) and corporate social responsibility (CSR - responsibility to customers, staff and the environment) to build a positive image for the general public. The positioning of the companies on the market, the product portfolio and organizational structure, the programs for talent development and educational platforms are also analysed.

The purpose of the analysis is to determine their image-making initiatives and activities aiming to provide a competitive advantage to these companies.

The **second paragraph** presents the profiles of these companies.

Devin mineral water is natural and comes from an ecologically clean region. It has a unique mineral composition and pleasant taste. The company holds a license to bottle water from the Baldaran spring, which is unique for the Bulgarian market - pure mountain water with very low mineralization from the Rhodope mountains. DEVIN's product portfolio includes mineral water, spring water, carbonated water, Granini fruit juices, and Red Bull energy drinks.

Devin EAD has applied a world-renowned methodology for measuring organizational culture and employee engagement - the Great Place to Work index since 2018. The index measures the effect of the efforts made by the management. The company's goal is to achieve a rate of over 75, which is equivalent to a high degree of job satisfaction in the company. Internal initiatives are being implemented to increase employee engagement, maintain trust in the company and create a positive work environment. CSR activities are carried out as well.

Coca-Cola created and launched in March 2018 the first free online platform for training and career guidance in Bulgaria (www.youthempowered.bg). As a company which creates and implements youth development projects, Coca-Cola is a co-founder of the national platform "Education 2030", whose mission is to raise public awareness of the need for real change in education by setting measurable goals by 2030 and tracking the progress to their achievement. As a member of the Association of Soft Drinks Producers in the country, together with the American University in Bulgaria and with the assistance of world-renowned Harvard university professors, the country's first program for business leaders entitled "Leadership and Innovation for Sustainable Development" was created. It aims to train specialists in the field of sustainable development and disseminate good business practices and is open to both students and experts who want to acquire additional qualifications.

With its high quality products, Gorna Banya BC has become one of the leading producers of bottled natural mineral water, table water and carbonated soft drinks in Bulgaria. In June 2012, BBB fruit juices and nectars became part of the company's portfolio. In 2015, the company continued to increase its brand portfolio by starting the production of fruit drinks and carbonated soft drinks. Its relationships with business partners and customers are based on the principles of honesty, professionalism and the highest degree of cooperation. Among the main responsibilities of the staff are to

monitor and increase customer satisfaction as well as to constantly increase the volume of sales. The company participates in a number of initiatives and develops CSR.

Mihalkovo AD is one of the oldest producers of bottled mineral water in Bulgaria. For more than 60 years, the company has bottled the naturally carbonated Mihalkovo water used by generations of Bulgarians. There are only three mineral springs in the world, whose water has similar composition, taste and quality to that in Mihalkovo: Vichy in France, Borjomi in Georgia and Fachingen in Germany. In 2013, the company launched the new beverage brand of VITU - low-calorific soft drinks with four fresh flavours (apple, lemon, orange and strawberry cola). The strengthening of the market position of the Mihalkovo brand is due to the constantly high quality of these products. The corporate image is based on the strict quality control throughout the production process. The mineral waters of Mihalkovo are certified according to ISO 9001: 2008 and the International Food Standards (IFS). The company develops CSR initiatives.

This analysis aims to determine these companies' unique characteristics, production capabilities, market share, and corporate social responsibility level due to their managers' ability to manage these processes and develop their corporate image. The implementation of a Social Responsibility Management System has the following benefits for the companies:

- Ensures their good public image;
- Improves the confidence and ensures long-term and mutually beneficial relationships with customers and business partners;
- Establishes internal control mechanisms to ensure the elimination of potential problems that could damage the company's prestige or lead to sanctions by regulatory authorities.

The third paragraph contains an evaluation and analysis of the level of business communications established with an empirical study. It aims to prove that, as a manageable process, business communications affect the formation of the image of organizations. The answers to the questions in the survey aim to analyse and assess the impact of business communications on the image of the six surveyed producers and distributors of table and mineral water and to determine the possibilities to improve their image.

The survey questions were organized in three categories - general information; communications and management style; and corporate image making.

The answers of the questions in the **first category** lead to the following **conclusions**:

- The gender distribution has a very slight prevalence of men (51%) to women (49%);

- Most of the employees are under 35 year of age (56%) followed by the age group of 35 to 50 years (44%). None of the respondents was over 50. Therefore, the survey shows that the employees of all the four companies are relatively young. This implies that these young people are looking for professional and career development opportunities;

- The respondent group comprised 40% manual workers, 51% middle managers and 9% top managers from the four companies. The largest respondent group is that of the middle managers (more than one half of all respondents.) The respondent group structure provides a realistic picture about the employee structure of the four companies;

- Most of the respondents have Master degrees 47% (they are predominantly middle and top managers), followed by the group of employees with secondary education 32% (mostly manual workers) and those with Bachelor degrees 21% (both middle managers and manual workers). Generally, the level of education corresponds to the position held and there even are manual workers with the higher education degree of Bachelor. Therefore, the educational level of the staff is adequate to their job positions;

- The length of service of the largest group (50%) of the respondents is from 10 to 20, followed by the groups of those with up to 10 years of service (47%) and over 20 years (only 3%.)

The second category includes questions regarding the management and communication style. The survey results prove the two **hypotheses** that:

- Almost all respondents (98%) believe that their managers have the skills to motivate when they rely on their personal relations with their subordinates;

- Managers have personal qualities that influence the overall performance and motivation of their employees, which affect the image of their company.

The analysis of the survey results regarding the management style in the four organizations and its impact on the management of communications in the companies led to the following **conclusions**:

- Manager's personality plays an important role for the success of the company (99% positive answers). Personal traits such as accuracy, discipline, initiative, enthusiasm are important on both individual and organizational level and stimulate the employees to get involved in the work process imitating the behaviour of their leader. Moreover, 98% of the people believe that their managers have the right style of management and steer the organization in the right direction;

- Leadership is a process that inspires others to work to accomplish their tasks through motivation, communication, teamwork, and building effective interpersonal relationships. Therefore, 100% of respondents approve of the way they are managed by their manager;

- According to 98% of the respondents, their managers have the skills to motivate the staff. Motivating employees is a complex activity that includes many factors that affect different personalities in different ways. It is a process that inspires others to work to accomplish their tasks through motivation, communication, teamwork and building effective interpersonal relationships;

- Managers make the right decisions (90% of respondents) and their decisions inspire the employees (100%). The right decisions and assigned tasks contribute to the success of the organization;

- The managers in all the four companies have the right problem-solving skills (100%) and conflict management skills (98%);

- Managers are the main drive for the success of the organization according to 69% of the respondents. Therefore, the management style and the ability to motivate staff have a positive role for the communication in the surveyed companies and for the formation of their image, which proves the hypotheses;

- Managers have the ability to understand their subordinates, to know what motivates them, how they work, how to establish lasting relationships and cooperation with them. These qualities enable them to become perfect professionals. This is an ability that guarantees the popularity, leadership and effectiveness in interpersonal relationships, a condition for successful teamwork.

The **third category** of survey questions (image making) addresses the set of competences a manager must have in order to effectively manage the organization and build its image. The respondents were asked to rank them in order of importance on a scale from 1 to 10. The results were to prove that the success of the management of an organization depends on the personal qualities of its managers and the set of competences they have. These competences also make its image in the society.

Respondent's answers are summarized in the table below⁹:

Table 1. Manager's competences

No.	Competence
1.	Digital competence
2	Emotional intelligence
3.	Pro-active attitude
4.	Personal and social competence
5.	Keeping promises
6.	Team-motivation skills
7.	Responsibility and respect
8.	Personal balance and individual style
9.	Communication competence
10.	Knowledge and decision-making experience

Source: Author's systematization

Each organization compares itself to its rivals in terms of its competitive advantages. We offered the respondents a list of factors that they had to rank in order of importance. Their responses are presented graphically in the chart below:

1. The most important factor, which was ranked first by all respondents (1) is corporate culture;
2. Second in importance (2) in Gorna Banya BC and Coca Cola is management's competence, in Mihalkovo is ethical work environment, and in Devin is prestige (competence);
3. The third most important factor (3) in Coca Cola, Gorna Banya BC, and in Mihalkovo is prestige (competence);

⁹ Author's systematization

4. The factor ranked fourth in Gorna Banya BC is media presence, in Mihalkovo it is management's competence, and in Devin - ethical work environment;
5. The factor ranked fifth in Gorna Banya BC is ethical work environment and in the other three companies – media presence;
6. The same three companies rank advertising sixth while in Mihalkovo this rank is held by training programmes that are tailored according to the market requirements;
7. The same three companies rank the market-oriented training programmes seventh while in Mihalkovo this rank is held by advertising;
8. Business programmes is ranked eighth in all the four companies;
9. The factor ranked ninth in Mihalkovo and Gorna Banya BC was union development and in Coca Cola and Devin – infrastructure;
10. The factor ranked tenth in Mihalkovo and Gorna Banya BC was infrastructure and in Coca Cola and Devin – union development.

The success of an organization depends on the personal and business qualities of its management. The respondents gave positive answers to this question and confirmed that manager's personal competencies guarantee development efficiency and sustainability of the organization. Unanimously (100%) of the respondents from the four companies believe that manager's qualities affect the achievement of efficiency and sustainability in the work of the organization. In my opinion, "managerial qualities are a set of knowledge, skills and personal characteristics that allow the manager to effectively cope with the responsibilities of a leader."¹⁰ Respondents' opinions show that performance efficiency and sustainability is achieved largely due to managers' qualities and skills to solve operational and strategic tasks in order to achieve the set goals.

Environment challenges stir the interest in managerial skills and abilities that are related to the main functions of managers - their ability to plan, organize, lead, control and motivate. They rely on their position of authority in their interaction with subordinates and peers to perform the managerial functions delegated to them by the organization. They are expected to motivate and stimulate, to set goals and give orders, to control and evaluate their implementation, to evaluate the work and promote success.

¹⁰ Author's definition

Respondents from the surveyed companies ranked highly the image-making communication and PR models in their organization - 90% in Mihalkovo, Gorna Banya and Coca Cola and 85% in Devin. This is logical, as all four companies have very good communications (both internal and external) and a highly developed social and corporate programmes.

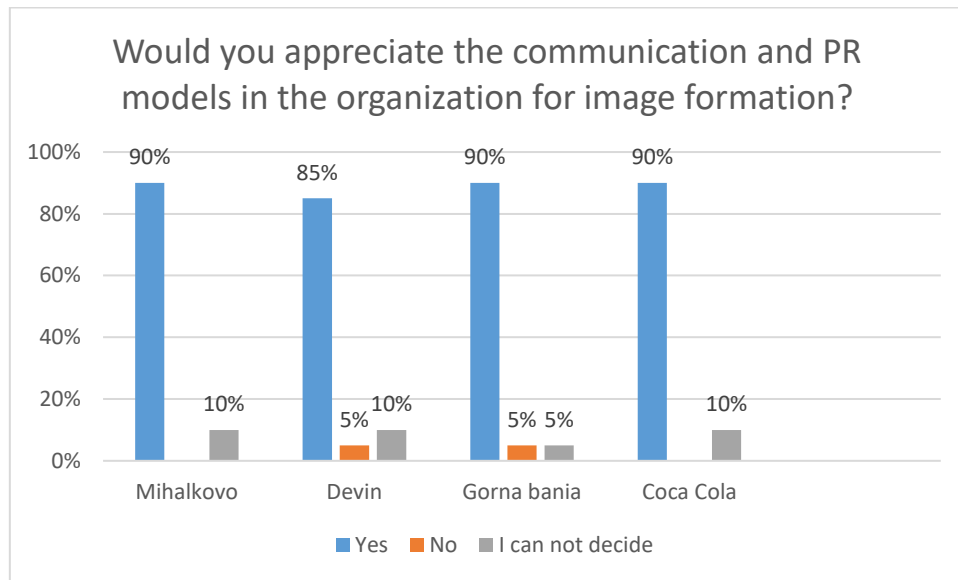


Figure 6. Communication and PR models evaluation

We asked the respondents to choose the word that best describes their organization. The answers are illustrated in the following figure:

- The employees of Mihalkovo AD define their company as having a good public image (50%), developing (40%) and modern (10%).
- The respondents from Devin AD define their company as developing (60%) and having a good public image.
- The employees of Coca Cola AD define their company as having a good public image (54%), developing (33%) and modern (13%)
- The respondents from Gorna Banya BC define their company as both developing 40%) having a good public image (40%) and modern (20%).

These assessments coincide with the public image established by the four companies as they demonstrate very high social corporate responsibility which highlights their strengths, both internally and externally (environmental initiatives, production sustainability, sponsorships and other environmental initiatives).

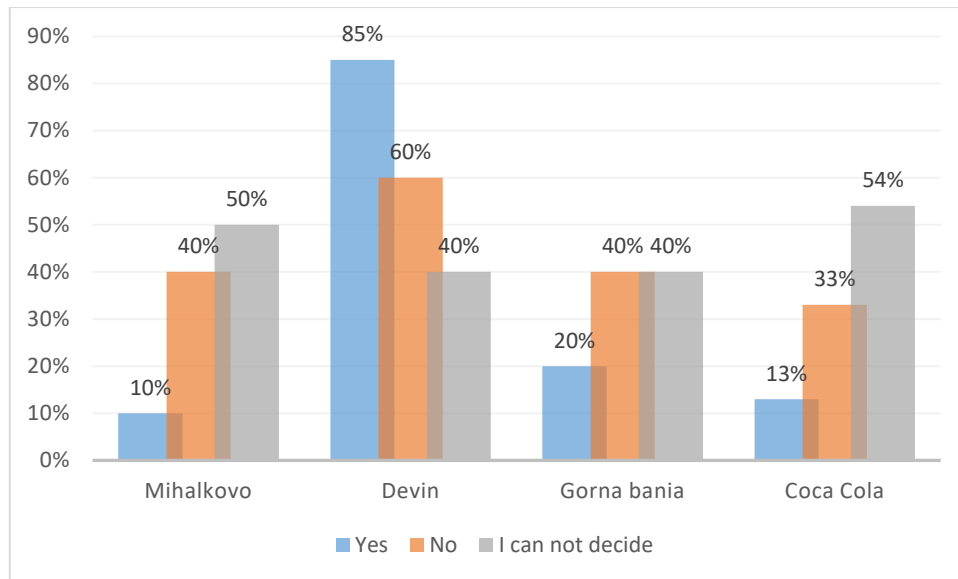


Figure 7. Describing the company with one word

The assessments coincide with the image that these four companies have built in the site, as they have very strong social corporate responsibility, leading to remembering their strengths, both internally and externally (environmental initiatives), production sustainability, sponsorships and other environmental initiatives).

In the context of the COVID-19 crisis, most companies face the task of creating a quick, memorable, positive image that sets them apart from their competitors. In the current economic situation, it is becoming more and more difficult and expensive to produce new goods and provide unique services, so one of the principal means to distinguish an enterprise is to create its own image.

The image is an opinion of an enterprise created and formed in society on the basis of many factors, such as compliance with ethical standards for doing business, conscientious conduct of its business activities, entrepreneurial spirit, corporate social responsibility, various innovative initiatives. etc. Therefore, the image of a company is the notion it creates for itself to make the right impression among customers, partners and competitors, as an important component of success.

A positive corporate image has a two-fold effect - on the one hand it regulates the behaviour of customers and on the other hand it influences the behaviour of its employees. Therefore, employees are considered both as an element of the company's competitiveness and as a key source of public information about the company.

When asked about the role of image, all respondents (100%) believe that a positive public image guarantees successful development in the present and future.

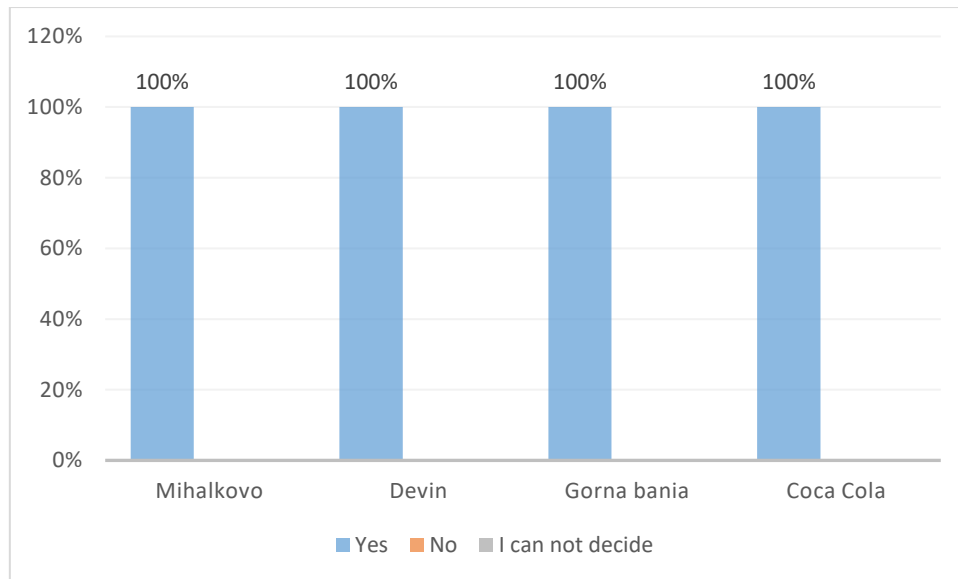


Figure 8. The role of image for the development of the organization

Long ago, the founders of innovative companies were aware that every company is responsible not only for its employees, but also for the society: "I think many people assume, wrongly, that a company exists simply to make money. While this is an important result of a company's existence, we have to go deeper and find the real reasons for our being. As we investigate this, we inevitably come to the conclusion that a group of people get together and exist as an institution that we call a company so they are able to accomplish something collectively which they could not accomplish separately. They are able to do something worthwhile— they make a contribution to society (a phrase which sounds trite but is fundamental)."¹¹ This group of people do good through corporate social responsibility.

Respondents gave a positive answer about the ability of companies to do good:

¹¹ <http://www.karieri.bg>. Дейв Пакард, съосновател на Hewlett Packard Company през 1939 г., 2019

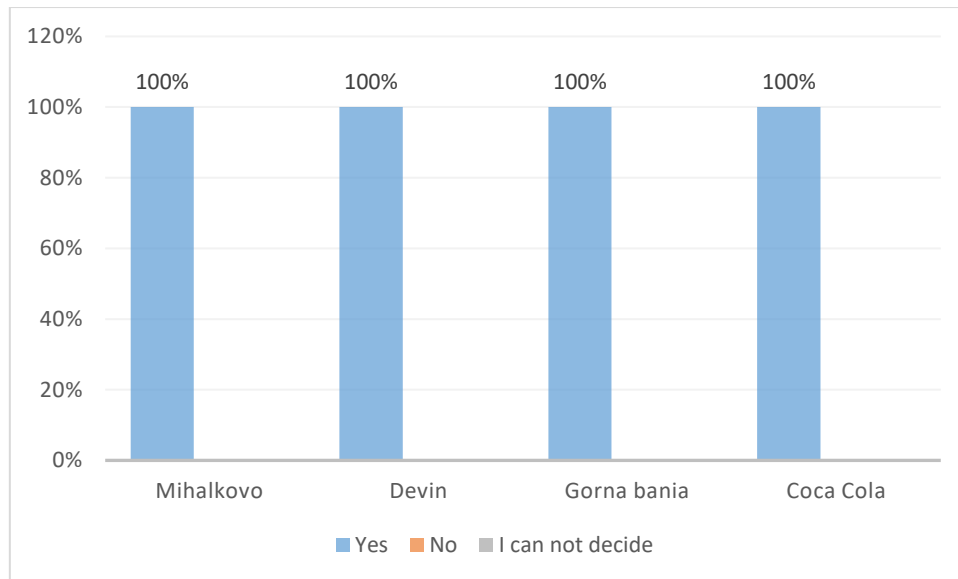


Figure 9. Corporate social responsibility system

The results of the analysis of the survey answers led to conclusions that prove the working hypotheses.

A certain role in the formation of the corporate images of Coca-Cola, Devin, BC Gorna Banya and Mihalkovo is played by their managers, i.e. their leaders. Therefore, some of the questions we asked the respondents from these companies were related to the qualities, competences, and management style as well as the influence of their managers to their subordinates. The results show that managerial qualities are a set of knowledge, skills and personal characteristics that allow the manager to effectively cope with the responsibilities of a leader. Respondents' answers show that efficiency and production sustainability are achieved largely due to the qualities and skills of their managers to solve operational and strategic tasks in order to achieve the set goals. The efforts of the managers to plan the professional development of their team members are very well appreciated. Their efforts are focused on improvement and career development. All respondents (100%) from Gorna Banya BC, 90% from Coca Cola, 80% from Mihalkovo and 60% from Devin share this opinion. Therefore, this is a highly motivating factor that is highly appreciated by the staff.

2.3. CHAPTER THREE. PROSPECTS FOR DEVELOPMENT OF COMMUNICATIONS AND THEIR TRANSFORMATION INTO A COMPETITIVE ADVANTAGE AS A CORPORATE IMAGE-MAKING TOOL

Chapter Three comprises **three paragraphs** regarding the image-making model in the studied enterprises through innovative communication activities, development of a business communications and corporate image evaluation system and a Balanced Scorecard of efficiency indicators. The role of the corporate image in this system is determined in four aspects - financial, customer relations, business processes and training and development.

Paragraph One presents an analysis of communication activities and their digitalization as tools for establishing a company's image among its customers and the general public. Digital communication has simple and measurable goals: to attract new customers and maintain the relations with the existing ones. The information technology developments and the changes in the way people around the world communicate have changed not only the traditional media, but also the way PR professionals work. Today, due to the abundance of online resources, they can instantly reach a huge and highly targeted audience. There is a wide range of online PR resources ranging from the traditional news releases to the latest specialised social networks, blogs, and forums, which not just disseminate news and information but also provide a media for discussions. Online users are now radically different from the users one, two, or five years ago. They actively search for, comment on and share information.

Businesses are actively looking for their customers, they are eager to be better informed about their opinion, to follow their interests and meet their requirements. Digital PR includes a diverse set of possibilities - from the classic online presence (websites) to active social Web 2.0 communication (Facebook, blogs and microblogs). The best practices presented are proof that digital PR can be used in an impressive way and far exceeds the generally accepted notion of PR.

Digitalization of the economy is inevitable against the background of technological development and these processes inevitably affect business communications and the ways they are conducted. It requires new competencies to facilitate the exchange of information and improve its reliability. Information flows in two directions, the speed of exchange, and feedback are factors that affect its efficiency

and effectiveness. Digital communication usually involves the development and publication of materials on the Internet.

Every institution that seeks to attract new and younger audiences must develop and implement a digital strategy for its Internet presence. The Internet is the second most popular news channel after television by means of its websites and social networks.

In our opinion, digital communication channels are among the most powerful and accessible tools for establishing emotional relations. Although it may take a while, digital communication will inevitably become ubiquitous. "Companies use innovation as a strategic, systemic and technological lever for the development of flexible innovative cultures, responsible business management processes and global ecosystems"¹².

Digital communication accelerates the process of interaction with the user. The main difference between the traditional and the digital channels is the ability of the latter to ensure interactivity by means of the digital technologies. Even when the company cannot establish a dialogue and create an emotional relationship with the customer, it is much easier to maintain customer relations for a long time. This type of communication requires certain competencies that the company's managers must have. We have systematized these competencies as necessary to achieve effective communication¹³:

Table 2. Communication competences

No	Competence	Действено-целєви умения
1	Digital competence	Use of interactive methods and techniques; skills for adaptation in a dynamically changing world;
2	Emotional intelligence	Resilience to negative processes;
3	Pro-activity	Taking initiative and risks
4	Personal and social competence	Self-control and empathy
5	Keeping promises	Influence trustworthiness; Coherent behavior
6.	Team-motivation skills	Team leadership and motivation skills
7	Responsibility and respect	Forecasting and management skill; Motivation skills; Leadership
8	Personal balance and individual style	Business skills; Emotional intelligence and competence;

¹² Nedelcheva, Yulia. Competition and competitiveness in pharmaceutical industry, Economics and management" Volume: XVI, Issue: 2, SWU Neofit Rilski, Blagoevgrad, 2019, стр. 71

¹³ Author's systematization

9	Communication competence	Personal approach techniques – loyalty, empathy, trust
10	Knowledge and decision-making experience	Patience, flexibility, responsibility, tolerance and control

Source: Author's systematization

These competencies are to be manifested by active and open-minded people with critical thinking who take responsibility for the important decisions in their lives and intend to interact with other people and work in the information society based on their own motivation and value potential. A manager strives to develop better customer relations in order to expand sales through support campaigns that differ from those of the existing competitors. According to Reza Haem-Mahami¹⁴: "Here comes a new era, in which what we call the Internet today will have a completely different status."

To work successfully and using their full potential, people need to understand each other by speaking and listening, writing and reading. Most important is the need for business people to be able to feel the emotional attitudes of colleagues, bosses or subordinates and to find the right approach and the appropriate models for successful behaviour. The errors and shortcomings of business communication today and the problems that arise from them stem are mostly due to inability to send and receive messages, motivate people, demonstrate listening skills, follow the rules of business etiquette and company culture, lack of professional competences. These shortcomings can be compensated with communication activities in the digital environment¹⁵:

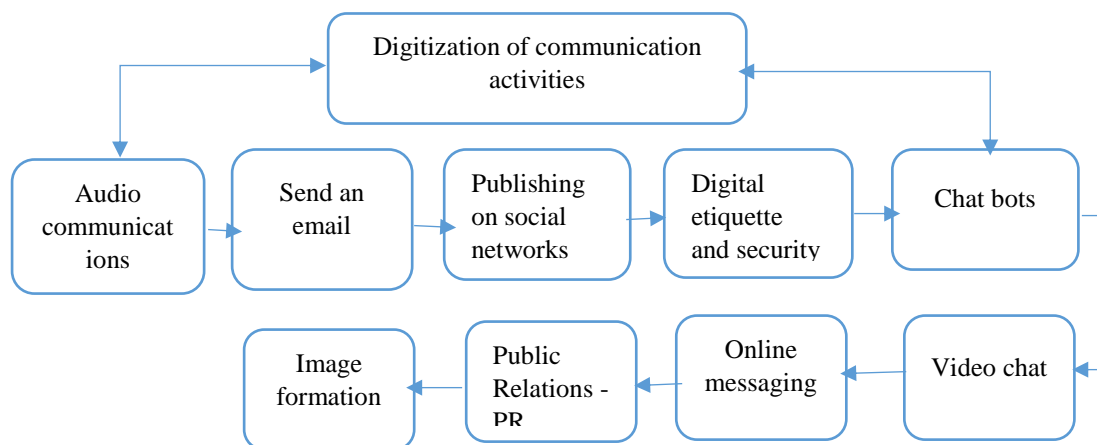


Figure 10. Digitalization. Communication activities

Source: Author's concept

¹⁴ <http://new-marketing.ru>. Cited from: Татьяна Сичко, Цифровые коммуникации теснят традиционные медиа, 2020 (retrieved on 03.03. 2020)

¹⁵ Author's concept

All these steps lead to one goal - image formation. In today's competitive world, goods and services do not differ much, and for customers the difference can be the company's attitude, public image, trustworthiness or reliability. A company's good standing is part of its reputation. The preservation of corporate traditions, the establishment of stereotypes, and the protection of technological secrets continuously improve the image of an organization.

The dissertation thesis describes the steps in a certain sequence for successful digitalization of communication activities. This process should involve the company's staff, communicate its goals, and develop a strategic action plan. The key skill for online communicators, which will guarantee the quality of the exchanged information and achieve the planned goals, is to be able identify the information needs of potential audiences and make systematic efforts to meet these needs. That is why it is very important for every organization to create a virtual Internet environment so that employees can receive and use the Internet resources they need to perform their activities and business communications. In this respect, the social networks are quite useful. As the saying goes, "information is at your fingertips - you press a key and you're done." In the process of virtual communication, communicators should adhere to a certain etiquette known as netiquette.

Digital technologies automate and facilitate the communication processes to meet information needs. We may claim that we live in the age of digitalization, which requires institutions to train their staff to perform new jobs that require digital skills. Many occupations will become obsolete due to digitalization. What should institutions do to meet the challenges? First of all, to retrain their staff. In this case, faster and more creative approaches are needed, as well as competence-centered training. Modern business is facing an interesting situation in a world where nothing is static and the environment is changing dynamically.

Paragraph Two describes the main goal of the dissertation research - to develop a system for evaluation of business communications and to determine their role for formation of corporate image and thus to **corroborate** the working hypothesis.

The evaluation of business communications and image making is based on a five-grade scale.

<input type="checkbox"/> Lowest grade - 1 point;	<input type="checkbox"/> Highest grade - 5 points;	<input type="checkbox"/> Total maximum points - 85 points
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Table 3. Assessment scale

Positive response (Yes)		
Percentage	No. of points	Level
from 1% to 20%	1	low (poor)
from 21% to 40%	2	satisfactory
from 41% to 60%	3	fair
from 61% to 80%	4	significant
from 81% to 100%	5	high

The survey is based on a three-section questionnaire. The **first section** gathers general information about the companies and this information is not relevant to the proposed system.

The **second section** of the questionnaire – addresses the management style and communications, and the results of the evaluation are presented in table in Exhibit 3 of the dissertation thesis.

The **overall average score** from the assessment of the management style and business communications as image-making tools of the surveyed companies is **4.41** (on a five-point scale). The number of points scored is 75 of a total of 85 points. The level achieved is significant. The questions follow a certain order starting with manager’s personality and professional competences and followed by management style.

The **third section** of the questionnaire addresses the formation of public image and the assessment results are presented in a table in Exhibit 3.

The formation of public image in the surveyed companies was scored 75 points or an average of 4.69 (on a five-point scale). All scores correspond to levels 4 (significant) and 5 (high.)

Managers’ personal and professional qualities, management style and ability to work with people so as to use their strongest qualities (professional skills and competences) to achieve higher results were assessed at level 5 (high). At the same level (5) are assessed some of the intangible incentives for motivation - healthy working conditions and professional development of staff. The companies’ image-making communication and PR models, the awareness of the work in the organization, and the established CSR system are also assessed at level 5 (high.)

It is no coincidence that companies are highly rated (5) as developing, modern companies with positive images and strategies for maintaining a positive public image. A positive public image guarantees the successful development of the companies.

In order to be manageable, business communications as a corporate image-making factor must be evaluated in order to determine whether they are significant. They are evaluated on the grounds of the results from the analysis of the personal qualities of managers and their management style as well as their communication and image-making competencies.

The personal and professional qualities of a person are difficult to quantify. However, once these qualities are required, there must be a system for their assessment. The evaluation system proposed below is a mechanism that allows managers to demonstrate their management and communication competencies as well as contribute to the formation of a positive public image.

Table 4. Evaluation characteristics

Personal qualities, management style and communication		Image-making competences
Manager's personality influence on company's performance		Manager's qualities as a factor for the efficiency and sustainability of the operations of the organization
The manager applies the right management style		The manager is able to use the best personal and professional qualities of the employees
The organization develops in the right way in terms of its management		The management style of the manager
Manager's staff motivation skills		Public commendation by the manager for achieving the set goals
Manager's ability to take the right decisions		The manager plans the professional development of their team members
The manager influence not only their subordinates but also all other employees of the company		Healthy working conditions are ensured
The manager has the right problem-solving skills		The manager motivates the staff to form a public image
Manager's task allocation skills		High opinion on the image-making communication and PR moels of the organization
Preference to material to moral performance stimuli		Awareness of organization's processes
Participation in decision-making processes in the organization		A one-word definition of the organization
Freely expressed opinion		Positive public image to guarantee the success of the company
If you were a manager, would you modify the management style		Implemented CSR system
The manager is able to resolve conflicts		Business partner's trust based on the company's performance
A change in the style of management may lead to workplace reorganization		Do customers, competitors and suppliers appreciate the company's efficiency
The manager is the main factor for the success of the company.		The management discusses the public opinion on the company's activities with the staff
If you had more delegated rights, you would perform better		Does the organization have a strategy for maintaining a positive public image
Do you approve the management style of your manager		Brand image
Score		
Percentage of respondents	Score	Significance level
1% - 20%	1	low (poor)
21% - 40%	2	satisfactory
Score		
Percentage of respondents	Score	Significance level
41% - 60%	3	fair
61% - 80%	4	significant
81% - 100%	5	high

Source: Author's concept

According to the rules of modern control, **business communications and CI formation** should be evaluated internally, during training activities and by monitoring the compliance with the established procedures. The evaluation may be performed based on the objectives set in the "Training and development" section of the Balanced Scorecard. The employees who will be evaluated will take on the role of respondents.

The following evaluation methods can be used:

- Simulation – direct monitoring, performance review, written and oral reports, interviews, results from 360 peer, subordinate, and superior reviews, knowledge and skills gained in advance;
- Assessment interviews;
- Personal statements;
- Professional certification – written scenarios:
 - plot;
 - questions and answers;
 - specific evidences, candidate's skills to present evidences and experience.

The materials provided by the applicant are evaluated according to the requirements for validity, timeliness, sufficiency and reliability. The evaluator documents the assessment in a statement.

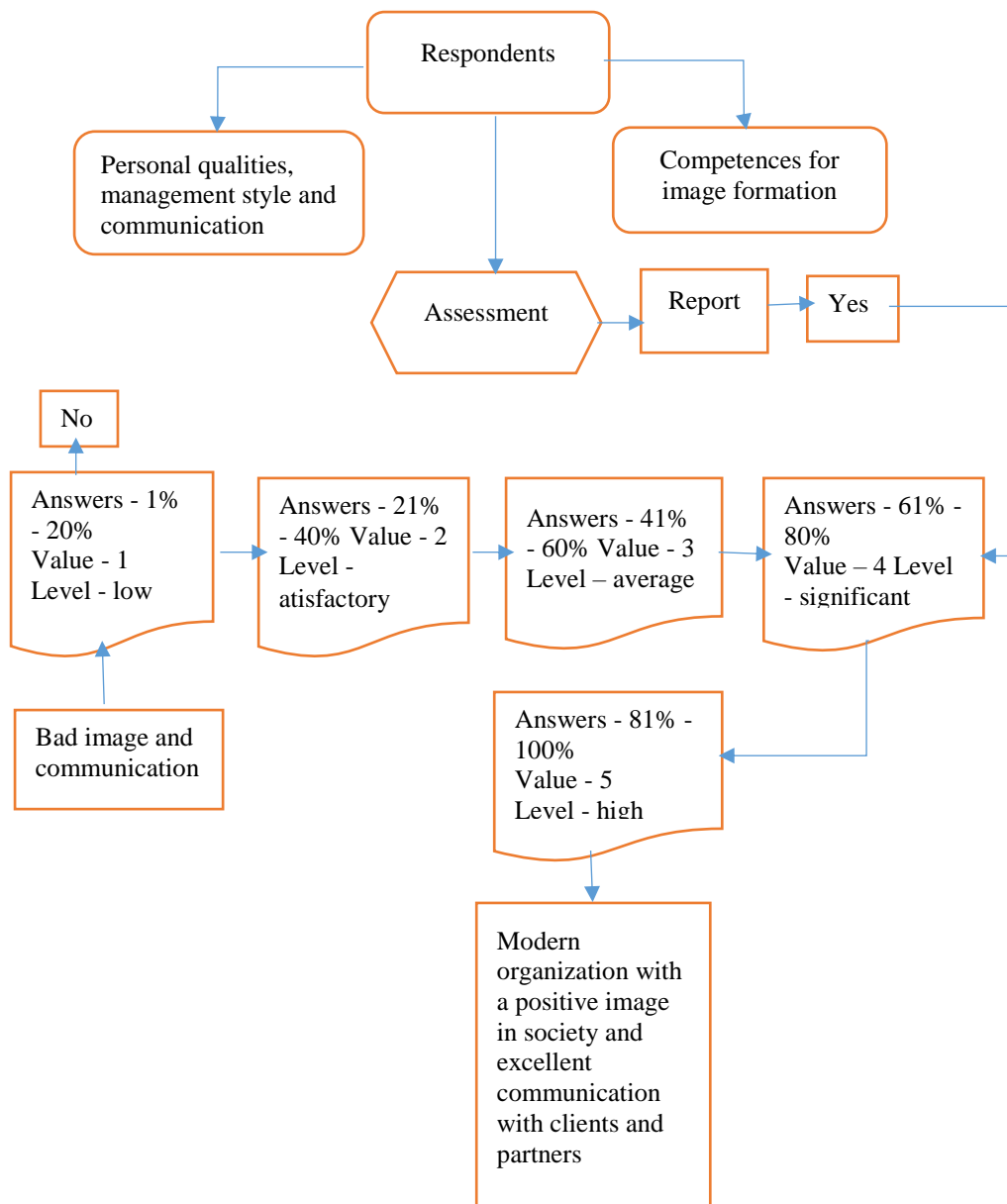


Figure 11. A system for evaluation of business communications and CI

Source: Author's systematization

Paragraph Three presents the Balanced Scorecard for organizational development and the place of corporate image in it.

The development of various management concepts is very common in recent years. Particular attention is paid to strategic management, because the functioning of any organization without strategic management is too risky.

In the early 1990s, R. Kaplan and D. Norton developed a new approach to strategic management, which they called the Balanced ScoreCard (BSc). Unlike previous management approaches, this system provides a clear prescription for setting measurable goals in four aspects, of which two are related to the financial and market

performance and two are related to improving internal factors such as work processes and staff qualification. However, it is not only a system for measuring the performance in these areas but also a management system which allows the company to incorporate its vision into its plans and to develop and implement adequate strategies. This system provides a clear set of indicators that organizations are required to measure in order to "balance" their financial perspective. This provides a feedback regarding their internal business processes and external results in order to continuously improve them. Thus, the system transforms the strategic planning of the organization from an academic prescription into a principal guideline.

Kaplan and Norton describe the advantage of this system as follows: "The balanced Scorecard retains the traditional financial performance measures that historically reflect past events. This approach would be adequate for companies in the industrial age, for which investing in long-term opportunities and customer relations is not a vital condition for success. These financial measures are insufficient as a basis for guiding and assessing the transition that information age companies must go through to create future value by investing in customers, suppliers, staff, processes, technology and innovations."¹⁶

The Balanced Scorecard translates the company's mission statement and strategy into a set of performance objectives and measures organized in four areas (perspectives): Financial, Customer Relations, Internal Business Processes, Learning and Growth... It uses these measures to inform the employees about the factors of current and future success."¹⁷

The four perspectives of the system ensure the balance of short-term and long-term objectives¹⁸:

- Financial perspective – the financial objectives are related to the performance measured by indicators such as current income, return on borrowed capital, sales growth, cash flows, etc.;
- Customer Relations perspective – managers determine the consumer and market segments in which the company wants to compete, as well as indicators for measuring its performance in these target segments;

¹⁶ Каплан, Р. и Д. Нортън. Балансирана система от показатели за ефективност, С., 2005, р. 10

¹⁷ Каплан, Р. и др. Балансирана система от показатели за ефективност, Класика и стил, ООД, 2005, р. 34

¹⁸ *ibid*, р. 35

- Internal Business Processes perspective – the management identifies those internal business processes in which the company must achieve excellent results. In my opinion, this is the sphere for image-making initiatives;
- Learning and Growth perspective – it includes the infrastructure that the organization needs to build in order to achieve its long-term goals for growth and improvement. In this perspective includes acquisition of business communication competences.

Graphically, the system can be visualized as:

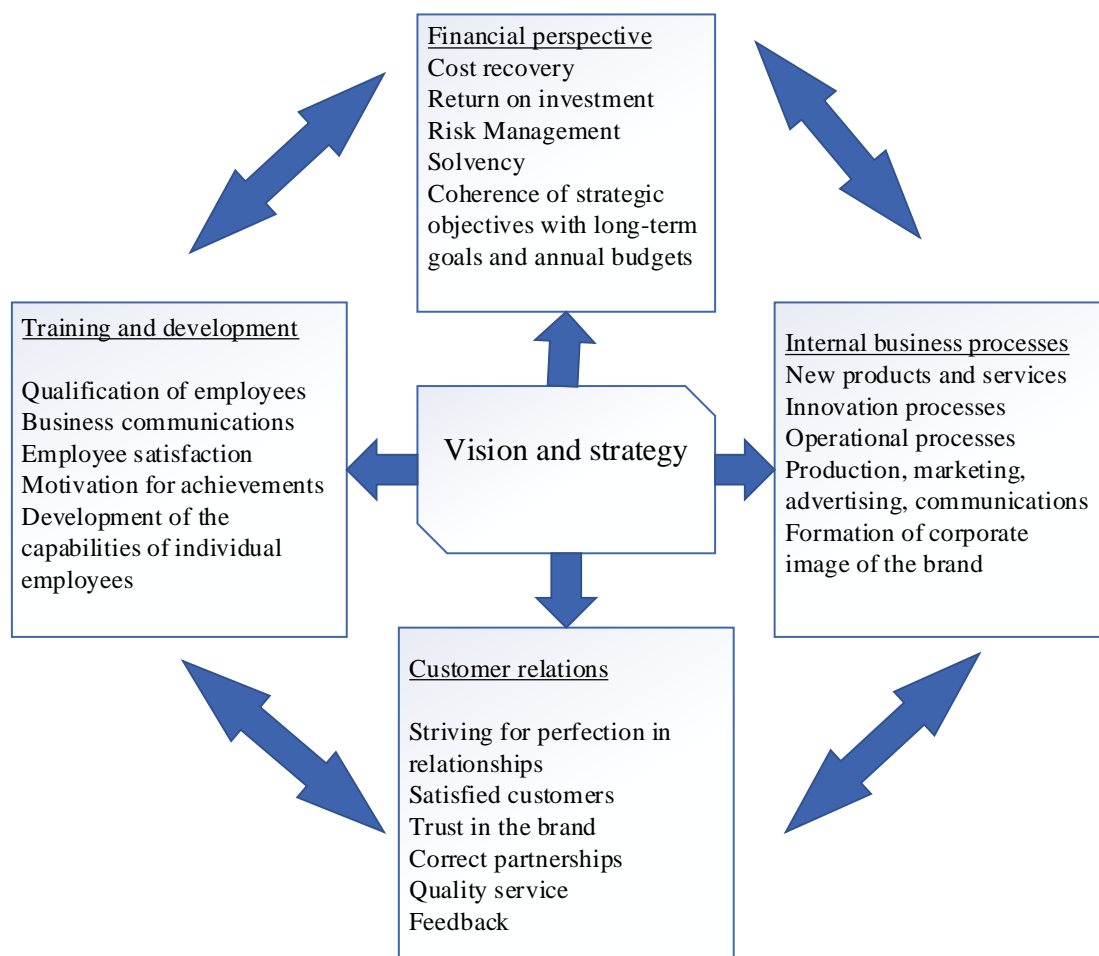


Figure 12. Balanced scorecard

Source: Author's concept

The characteristics of the Balanced Scorecard were identified in order to draw attention to the need to ensure the achievement of the strategic goals adopted by a company by setting internal requirements for its development. These internal requirements include the role of business communications in the process of **corporate image making**.

The Balanced Scorecard incorporates the company's mission and strategy into a consistent set of indicators for its implementation in the four perspectives, allowing a balance between short-term and long-term goals, between desired results and measures of their achievement. All of them are aimed at achieving a common goal - the implementation of development strategies to form a corporate image. The BSc creates a condition for unanimity and teamwork, and the goals set in it become a shared responsibility of management to manage a wide range of business processes. The developed system should be brought to the attention of all employees (via notice boards or electronic means) so that they understand both the long-term goals of the organization and the strategy for achieving them. In this way, all efforts and initiatives of management will be synchronized.

Our model for implementation of the BSc in the four companies provides that it should be used as a system of communication, information and training rather than control. A measurement and management system will clearly define how improvements in operations, customer service, innovation, employee training, quality of business communications, will improve the financial performance by means of higher income from sales and profitability, faster asset turnover and reduced operating costs. It must remain strictly focused on financial performance, and the cause-and-effect relations among all indicators across the four perspectives must be linked to financial objectives.

The ideas for enhancing the company's processes and activities must be put forward by its managers, who are directly involved in its internal processes and are in direct contact with its customers. This new approach requires professionally competent managers whose ideas and creativity should be used to achieve company goals. Each of the proposed indicators is a unit of causal links leading to the achievement of financial objectives. The initiatives in the four perspectives must be balanced, there must be causal links between them in order to implement strategic initiatives, and as a result - to form the **company's image**.

The author has formulated the following goals, indicators and achievement measures in the four perspectives:

- **Financial perspective** - the financial objectives reflect the long-term objectives of the company in terms of profitability, cost reduction, investment selection, collection of receivables from customers and return on investments;

- **Customer Relations perspective** - in this perspective the company determines its consumer and market segments in which it will compete and make profits to achieve its financial goals. Both attracting new and maintaining the existing customer base are based on the degree of satisfaction and image of the brand. Satisfaction indicators play the role of feedback, giving information about the company's performance;

- **Internal Business Processes perspective** – this perspective sets the strategic initiatives to meet shareholder and customer expectations in terms of financial performance. This process requires training of employees through learning and growth. We believe that corporate image-making initiatives should be included in this perspective besides the Internal Business Processes perspective. In our opinion, "*the image of a company is an intangible asset, of great importance as it attracts customers to a particular company or brand*"¹⁹;

- **Learning and Growth perspective** – the achievement of the goals in this perspective is a prerequisite for achieving results in the other three perspectives. Employees should be involved in an ongoing training process as technology evolves and hence their competences should be enhanced continuously. This ensures employee satisfaction, which is an important prerequisite for increasing productivity, improving the quality of customer relations, responsible attitude to internal business processes and sharing the company's culture and values.

It is extremely important for every company to properly organize its internal business processes in order to achieve the planned strategic initiatives related to shareholders and customers. Individual performance is not sufficient for the achievement of the long-term goals as they depend on collective decision-making regarding important goals of the company, such as financial results, new product launches, marketing and advertising campaigns, customer service and internal business processes, staff training and development. It is extremely important for a company to establish its own corporate image in order to achieve operating efficiency and a profitable market position.

Having identified its place of corporate image in the Balanced Scorecard, we strongly hope that it will help them (and will be adopted by other companies as well) achieve good results and add value to their activities. These opportunities are based on

¹⁹ Author's definition

four perspectives: financial, customer relations, internal business processes and learning and growth illustrated by the following efficiency formula²⁰:

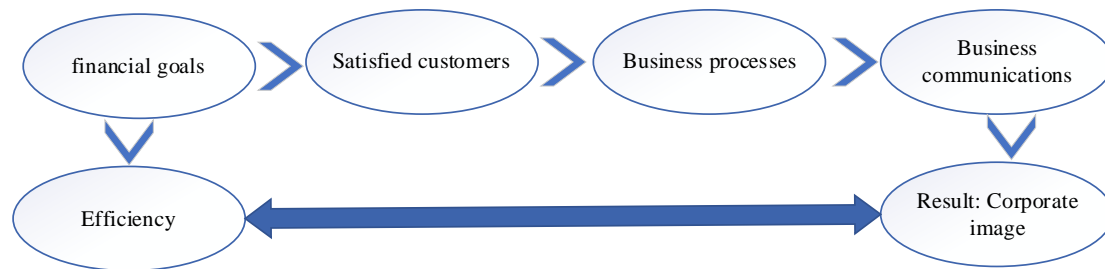


Figure 13. Efficiency formula

Source: Author's systematization

The Balanced Scorecard aims to implement strategic initiatives in four perspectives. By means of the BSc, these strategic initiatives are communicated to all employees of the company as financial and non-financial performance measures.

The following figure illustrates the causal links between the implementation of the strategy and achieving the company's mission in the four perspectives to establish the image of the company²¹.

²⁰ Author's definition

²¹ Author's concept

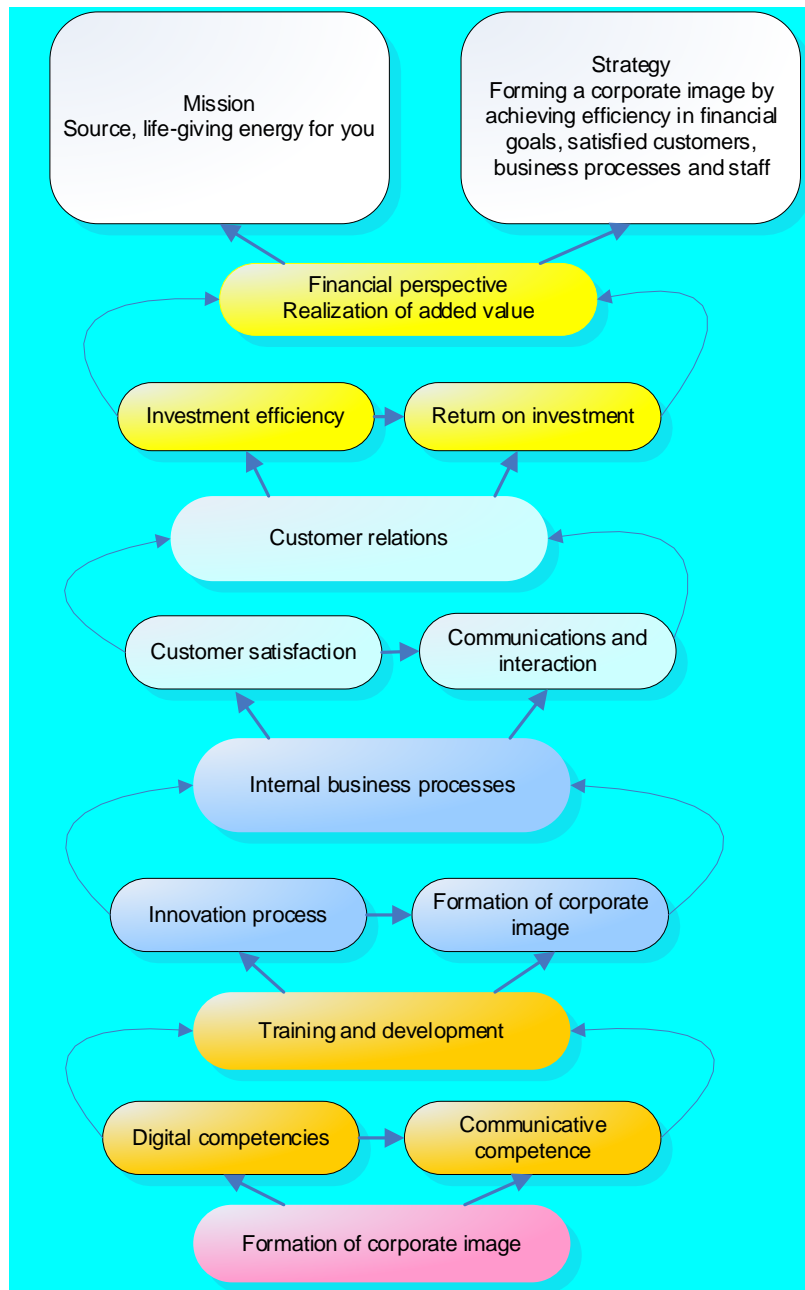


Figure 14. Causal relations between corporate image making and strategy

Source: Author's systematization

This figure clearly shows the causal links among the perspectives:

- Corporate image-making is related to the achievement of the goals in the four perspectives and the strategy of the company;
- The goals set in the Learning and Growth perspective ensure the achievement of the goals in the other three perspectives;
- the achievement of the goals in the Internal Business Processes perspective modifies and enhances the communication with customers;

- The achievement of all goals in the three perspectives guarantee the achievement of the goals in the Finance perspective, i.e. better profitability through higher return on investments and added value.

The cause-and-effect links between the four perspectives are series of the type "if we reach..., then we will achieve". For example, for the purpose of this study: If the employees receive timely training and qualification, are familiar with the internal business processes, and know how to communicate, then they will sell more bottled mineral water and soft drinks; will generate more revenue; the quality of the products will increase; customer satisfaction will be improved; the financial goals will be achieved and a positive public image of the company will be formed.

The main conclusion is that an effective Balanced Scorecard should be focused on:

- Financial performance (increase of profits);
- Customer satisfaction;
- Product quality (productivity);
- Employee satisfaction through learning and growth, business communication competences;
- Formation of a positive public image of the company.

In conclusion, BSc reflects the company's strategy presented as a system of performance indicators in four perspectives (financial, customer relations, internal business processes and staff learning and growth) that are linked causally. The study attempted to justify the need for setting goals in several interrelated perspectives to ensure the implementation of a given strategy.

MAIN CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Summarizing the results of the analysis and the empirical research on communication and its role as a corporate image-making tool, we can draw the following **conclusions** formulated as **practical guidelines**:

1. Manager's personality plays an important significant role (high level of assessment) for the success of the company (99% positive answers). Personal traits such as punctuality, discipline, initiative, and enthusiasm are both individual and organizational factors through which people are involved in the work process by following the example of their leader. Moreover, 98% of the respondents believe that

their managers have the right management style and steer their organization in the right direction in terms of its management (98%). Therefore, the personal factor of the manager has a positive effect on communications in the company.

2. Leadership is a process that inspires others to strive to accomplish their tasks through motivation, communication, teamwork, and effective interpersonal relationships. Therefore, 100% of respondents approve the way they are managed by their manager.

3. Managers have the right skills to motivate their staff according to 98% of the respondents. Employee motivation is a complex activity involving many factors that affect different personalities in different ways. It is a process that inspires others to work to accomplish their tasks through motivation, communication, teamwork, and effective interpersonal relationships. The majority of the respondents (60%) from the four companies prefer monetary incentives to moral ones. The greatest challenge for the managers is how to achieve this commitment of their employees, because cash bonuses and rewards do not always give the desired result. Understanding and skilful handling of interpersonal relationships in the organization and intangible motivators are key factors for achieving an environment of highly motivated employees.

4. Managers make the right decisions (90% of respondents) and with these decisions affect other employees (100%). Moreover, after making the right decision, the tasks for implementation should be properly allocated. All respondents (100%) share that in addition to the right decisions, their manager also have the right task allocation skills. Decision making and task allocation are factors that affect the success of organizations.

5. The managers of the four companies have the ability to deal with problems (100%) and the ability to resolve conflicts (98%). Very often, a problem that has not been resolved on time leads to conflict situations that are more difficult to resolve. The right approach to conflict management facilitates work and communication between employees and, most importantly, improves their job performance as it creates a pleasant and relaxed work environment.

6. The low degree of employee participation in decision-making in the organization can be considered a weakness. The majority of respondents replied that they do not participate in decision-making (82%). Thus, they cannot recognize them as their own and do not work actively for their implementation. Another weakness is the lack of open expression of opinion by the subordinates (79%). This restricts the freedom

and rights of people in the workplace. Employee participation in decision-making is one of the ways to ensure democracy in the workplace and a mechanism for involving the employees in the in decision-making processes in the organization. 50% of workers believe that if they were delegated greater autonomy, they would perform better as this would encourage their creativity, promote collaboration for achieving the common goals, increase their satisfaction from the given credit, and result in excellent communication in collective decision-making.

7. A change of the managements style of the manager is not considered a reason for changing the occupation by an employee (16%). This means that people accept the way they are managed and do not want to change it.

8. That managers are the main reason for the success of the organization is believed by 59% of the respondents. Therefore, the management style has a positive role in communication in these companies.

The main conclusion which can be made from the analysis of the survey is that the surveyed companies do not use efficiently their corporate PR to achieve greater success. More than half of the respondents in the survey state that their company does not follow a targeted policy to maintain its public image.

Recommendations:

The need for implementing a communication policy based on consistent messages to all stakeholders of the company requires skilful use and coherence of internal and external corporate communications. In this respect, the situation in Bulgaria is determined by studying the channels of communication with internal stakeholders and the methods for implementation of policies to maintain the public image of companies. Internal corporate communication is carried out by means of a combination of communication channels – direct communication with the immediate superior, regular working meetings, seminars, periodic employee training sessions, business e-mails, the company's intranet. The companies that do not have policies to maintain their public, do not have an established system for internal corporate communications as well. The measures to implement and maintain the corporate image include various channels for internal communications.

For a more comprehensive study, a more detailed presentation of the understanding of the importance of professionally and competently implemented internal corporate communication policy is needed, because the consistency of the overall corporate communications policy is a prerequisite for the overall management

of the organizational/corporate identity, image and reputation which contribute to the successful competitive performance of the company.

It is important for the owners and managers of the surveyed companies to accept the idea of the need for PR specialists employed on a full-time labour contracts in the organizational structure or as external PR consultants. Planned, focused communication activities are an essential component of trust in the organization. A company that has the trust of its stakeholders, reduces its operating costs, has a better chance of overcoming crises, is more attractive to customers, investors and potential highly qualified employees; its current employees are more motivated and less likely to leave. A company that has the trust of its stakeholders maintains a positive corporate image and has a positive reputation, which are key to its sustainable competitiveness.

Corporations must adopt the principles of a "learning organization." The key to the future development of the business in the open world of the "knowledge economy" is to modify their corporate goals and public relations. The model of public communication of an organization is its response to the dynamically changing macro and micro environment, as well as to the actual public need for understanding and support. Change is a great challenge. It requires a higher level of organization, way of thinking, attitude towards oneself and the others. Proper management requires knowledge and experience. When change is desired and shared, then it inspires and is a prerequisite for success, which is achieved when interaction and communication are professionally managed. A negative change is often the result of certain inconsistencies in relations that have created dissonance and misunderstanding. Public relations aim to achieve a series of goals, which include the establishment of effective communication and communication channels with certain groups, audiences and communities.

The process of planning based on various scenarios allows a seemingly unattainable overall objective to be presented as a series of goals that managers can set within the plans for implementation of the company's strategy. The **benefits** of BSc can be summarized as follows:

- The BSc equalizes the key performance measures with the strategy on all levels of the organization;
- It provides opportunities for management through understandable business activities, provides strategic feedback from customers, staff learning and growth, and an overall vision of the organization's future and perspectives;

- One of the most significant benefits of its application as a system of measurement and management is the definition of communications and image making as important elements for achieving the strategic goals of the organization related to its customers, financial performance and internal business processes;

- Investments in people and procedures generate innovation and improve the internal business processes to achieve greater customer satisfaction, increase profitability and expand market shares;

- As a comprehensive management system, this approach allows the company's management to understand what internal changes are needed to ensure the implementation of its strategy.

The analysis of the empirical research resulted in the development of a system for evaluation of business communications and CI, which can be implemented in the surveyed companies. The degree to which they will be able to achieve this goal will be a measure of the added value of the specialized learning process for each trainee and for their organization.

In conclusion, it can be said that the implementation of the process is associated with an appropriate environment and infrastructure including:

- A training programme;
- A methodology for assessment of competences and personal qualities;
- A methodology and tools for development of efficient learning skills – the “practical thinking” skills;
- Trainers who work together to support the development process;
- Learning consortium – collaboration among trainers, trainees and their organizations and environment that stimulated the development process.

LIST OF THE MAIN SCIENTIFIC AND APPLIED CONTRIBUTIONS OF THE DISSERTATION THESIS

1. On the grounds of a constructive analysis of the existing theoretical concepts, methods and approaches, communication is defined as a concept rich in content and volume and a complex and multi-layered process. Good communication is a prerequisite for laying the foundations for understanding between organizations and their counterparties, between representatives of various social groups and participants in this process. The terms interaction and communication have been compared and distinguished;

2. Summarizing various models for corporate image and reputation management, the common elements are identified and compiled in a comprehensive model as a strategic resource and a source of competitive advantage. The corporate image of a company is defined as: *“an intangible asset, of great importance that attracts customers to a particular company and brand and is formed in the process of communication”*;

3. Empirical data from a survey conducted with in companies producing bottled mineral water and soft drinks was used to systematize the competences they managers are required to have and to define the managerial competencies and qualities of a business leader;

4. A scheme for communication activities in a digital environment to form the company's image was developed;

5. A system for evaluation of business communications and corporate image has been proposed and field-tested empirically regarding:

- Personal qualities, management style and communication;
- Image-making competences;
- Evaluation using a five-point grading system and significance levels.

6. A Balanced Scorecard of indicators for development of companies bottling mineral water and soft drinks was developed and approbated to ensure a balance of "external goals - results" and "internal goals - factors" by adding non-financial criteria related to the development strategy and management; the role of **corporate image** was determined as a condition for achieving efficiency through a systematized formula and

implementation of the strategy in four perspectives - financial, customer relations, internal business processes, learning and growth.

PUBLICATIONS ON THE TOPIC OF THE DISSERTATION RESEARCH

Monograph

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Study

Николова, Цв. Видове комуникации за изграждане на имидж на съвременната фирма, сборник Научни трудове, МВБУ, 2021

Article

Nikolova, Tsvetelina, The balanced scorecard as an image-making tool, Economics and Management, Volume: XVIII, Issue: 2, 2021, pp. 149-157, ISSN: 2683-1325

Papers:

1. Николова, Цв. и Л. Борисова. Дигитализация на комуникационните дейности, Седемнадесета международна научна конференция „Цифровата трансформация – бизнес, образование, наука“, МВБУ, 16–17 октомври 2020 г., София, 27 ноември, 2020 г., София, pp. 63-73, 2020; ISBN 978-954-9432-98-5
2. Николова, Цв. и Л. Борисова. Рациональное поведение в процессе деловой коммуникации в цифровой среде, III Международной научно-практической конференции: „Герценовские чтения: психологические исследования в образовании“, 1-2 октября 2020 г., Санкт-Петербург, 1-2 октября 2020 г., Санкт-Петербург, pp. 110-118, 2020, ISSN 2687-0177