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From Humor to Strategy: An Experimental Survey on Internet Memes in Social Media Marketing

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Abstract

Purpose: The paper addresses the issue of the use of Internet memes as a marketing communication tool in social media. The effectiveness of this type of communication is an important issue due to the large role of memes in digital culture, and at the same time the small number of studies on the use of memes in marketing communication.

Design/methodology/approach: To verify the research hypotheses, a survey with an experimental design was conducted among 153 respondents. For the purposes of the study, effectiveness was understood as the ability of a message to induce the passage of the recipient through all stages of perception of the persuasive message, with the last stage being the acceptance of the sender's outlook.

Findings: The results of the study allowed us to draw conclusions about greater effectiveness of marketing communication using Internet memes in comparison to marketing communication without memes. The level of consumer interest in Internet memes turned out to be a differentiating factor in the perception of the form of marketing communication.

Research limitations/implications: The main limitation of the study is the non-representativeness of the research sample. The practical implications of the study include guidance on the use of memes when conducting marketing communication on the Internet, taking into account preferences of the target group.

Originality/value: This paper not only contributes importantly to the limited literature on Internet memes in marketing activities, but also turns the spotlight onto the characteristics of consumers who are the potential target group of such communication.

Keywords: Internet meme, marketing communication, social media, consumer behavior, brand personality.

JEL: M31, M37

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Od humoru do strategii, czyli eksperymentalne badanie ankietowe nad wykorzystywaniem memów internetowych w mediach społecznościowych marketingu

Streszczenie

Cel: artykuł porusza problem wykorzystywania memów internetowych jako narzędzia komunikacji marketingowej w mediach społecznościowych. Skuteczność tego typu komunikacji jest ważną kwestią ze względu na dużą rolę memów w kulturze cyfrowej i jednocześnie niewielką liczbę badań dotyczących wykorzystania memów w komunikacji marketingowej.

Projekt/metodologia/podejście: w celu zweryfikowania hipotez badawczych, przeprowadzono eksperymentalne badanie ankietowe na próbie 153 respondentów. Skuteczność w badaniu zdefiniowano jako zdolność przekazu do spowodowania przejścia odbiorcy przez wszystkie etapy percepcji przekazu perswazyjnego, gdzie ostatnim etapem jest akceptacja punktu widzenia nadawcy.

Wyniki: wyniki badania pozwalają wysunąć wnioski o większej skuteczności komunikacji marketingowej wykorzystującej memy w porównaniu z komunikacją marketingową, która ich nie wykorzystuje. Czynnikiem różnicującym postrzeganie tej formy komunikacji marketingowej okazał się poziom zainteresowania konsumentów memami internetowymi.

Ograniczenia/implikacje: głównym ograniczeniem badania jest niereprezentatywność próby badawczej. Praktyczne implikacje badania obejmują wskazówki dotyczące wykorzystywania memów podczas prowadzenia komunikacji marketingowej w Internecie z uwzględnieniem preferencji grupy docelowej.

Oryginalność/wartość: niniejszy artykuł nie tylko wnosi istotny wkład do ograniczonej literatury na temat wykorzystywania memów internetowych w działaniach marketingowych, lecz także zwraca uwagę na cechy konsumentów, którzy są potencjalną grupą docelową takiej komunikacji.

Słowa kluczowe: mem internetowy, komunikacja marketingowa, media społecznościowe, zachowania konsumenckie, osobowość marki.

1. Introduction

The aim of the study was to answer the question about the effectiveness of marketing communication using Internet memes, taking into account the impact of the type of communication on attitude towards brand and its personality.

Internet memes are usually humorous pieces of culture transmitted online (Davison, 2012). Memes are said to be the fastest spreading content in the Internet and an important form of Internet users' generativity (Walkiewicz, 2012; Juza, 2013). The combination of text and image is described in the literature as the first form of the Internet meme (Nowak, 2013). Despite the fact that now the term "Internet meme" designates a wider range of virtual objects, the mentioned understating still seems to be prevailing (Jemielniak, 2019; Juza, 2013).

Majority of the studies on Internet memes are placed in the field of cultural and media studies. The issue of their use in marketing communication still deserves further development. So far, the research conducted on the

effectiveness of this type of communication has not considered the specific characteristics of the messages. The impact of memes on brand personality has so far been studied at a general level, without taking into account distinctive features of the personality. Research on consumer attitudes towards using Internet memes as a form of communication has primarily relied on self-report measures which may not accurately reflect the attitudes of those who do not already have a preconceived opinion on the matter (Aronson, 1997). In addition, the marketing and cultural studies literature and the work of Internet users seem to provide conflicting information regarding the public perception of the use of Internet memes by companies.

The literature provides a wide range of information on the use of memes in marketing activities or the consequences for a brand which becomes the subject of memes created by Internet users (Bury, 2016; Hallgren, Sigurbjörnsson & Black Jr., 2018; Toustrup, 2017; Yang & Hayashi, 2021). However, the authors of the paper could not locate studies that specifically measured the impact of brand-created memes, which combine an image and a text, on the declared attitude towards the brand and on particular personal traits associated with the brand. Additionally, none of the studies identified by the authors attempted to compare marketing communication using memes to traditional marketing communication, considering the unique attributes of messages that determine their effectiveness. The present work is probably the first of its kind to consider the level of consumer interest in memes as a potential variable differentiating the effectiveness of communication using memes.

Considering the function of persuasion in marketing communication and the prevalence of Internet memes in marketing communication, the study aims to determine the effectiveness of promotion strategies utilizing Internet memes. Addressing the question is crucial, given the existing research offers mixed responses on the topic. While in the literature we can find encouragement to reach for humor in marketing communication (Iwańska, 2013) or Internet memes themselves (Bury, 2016; Yang & Hayashi, 2021), there are also available research results presenting ambiguous attitudes of consumers towards marketing communication using memes (Toustrup, 2017).

2. Literature Review

2.1. Internet Memes – Definition and Characteristics

The concept of the meme, which gave rise to memetics, the science devoted to the concept, was introduced by Richard Dawkins (Jemielniak, 2019; Kowalczyk-Purol, 2018). The term was introduced as an analogy to the gene, aiming at applying Darwinism to the analysis of cultural evolution (Dawkins, 2021). In the work of Dobrosława Wężowicz-Ziółkowska (2008, pp. 67), we can find a succinct definition of a meme as “the smallest

indivisible unit of cultural inheritance”. Examples of memes include melodies, but also ways of making pipkins or ideas (Dawkins, 2021). The literature offers voices pointing to the applicability of Dawkins’ theory, also in business activities (Kwade, 2014; Levison, 2011; Masłowski, 2014; Wolek-Kocur, 2014).

While some authors still analyze Internet memes through the lens of memetics, many believe that contemporary understanding of memes has become detached from Dawkins’ original definition (Juza, 2013; Nowak, 2013; Walkiewicz, 2012). For the purpose of the study the Davison’s (2012) definition of meme would be used. It states that an Internet meme is a “piece of culture, typically a joke, which gains influence through online transmission”. Due to the broadness of the mentioned definition, the study focused only on memes consisting of an image and a text, which is an essential form of the Internet meme (Jemielniak, 2019; Juza, 2013).

Due to its huge popularity, the Internet meme is regarded as a symbol of Internet culture (Kamińska, 2011). The prominence of Internet memes may be shown referring to the data provided by GWI which says that 56% of Gen Z consumers saw a meme on the Internet in the week before the survey, and 52% of them shared a meme with friends or family members (Smith, 2022). Analogously did 45% and 42% of consumers of the Y generation (Smith, 2022). According to Ypulse (2019) 30% of the consumers between 15 and 35 years old send memes every day.

What enabled memes gain popularity, was their humorous nature (Walkiewicz, 2012). Basically, memes are created and shared primarily for the purpose of entertainment (Nowak, 2013). The literature also draws attention to the role of Internet memes in the online unification of groups of consumers and cultural producers, or the possibility of using them as a tool for social criticism (Jemielniak, 2019; Juza, 2013; Nowak, 2013).

As it was mentioned previously, memes are said to be the fastest spreading content in the Internet and an important form of Internet users’ generativity (Juza, 2013; Walkiewicz, 2012). In the literature it is emphasized that Internet memes spread virally, meaning by means of being send from one recipient to another (Kasprowicz & Veltzé, 2020).

The combination of text and image is considered to be the first form of Internet meme (Nowak, 2013). Although the initial interpretation of memes has evolved and they should now be understood in a broader context, references to the original form persist in literature, suggesting it remains a dominant perspective (Jemielniak, 2019; Juza, 2013; Nowak, 2013). According to Kamińska (2017), other important characteristics related to the form of Internet memes are unprofessionalism (e.g. low quality of the used picture) and usage of elements of language distinctive for the Internet culture.

Another significant features of Internet memes are anonymity of their authors and the way of their distribution (Juza, 2013; Kamińska, 2011).

Sometimes it is pointed out that a meme can be called “meme” as long as it is created by an anonymous author and distributed through the Internet by Internet users who do not do it for financial profit. From this point of view, a meme used for advertising purposes should not be regarded as a meme (Kamińska, 2011). Although some authors assert that the subversive nature of Internet memes hinders their commercial use, yet the literature also presents more favorable perspectives on employing memes in marketing (Kamińska, 2017; Grębosz et al., 2016).

2.2. Memes in Marketing Communication

Marketing communication is defined as a “system or process of transmitting information (symbolic content) between an enterprise (sender) and its environment (receiver, stakeholders) through a specific channel and means of communication” (Wiktor, 2013, p. 15). Various researchers identify distinct components that constitute the process (Rothwell, 2016; Wiktor, 2013). Among the elements, Wiktor (2013) lists: participants (sender, receiver), message, channel of transmission, interference, feedback and context. The message itself contains the sender’s intentions encoded using symbols (such as words, images, gestures) (Hajduk, 2019). The criterion for the effectiveness of communication is the conformity of the receiver’s response to the sender’s intentions (Hajduk, 2019). The effectiveness depends i.a. on the choice of appropriate symbols and form, consideration of limitations, attractiveness and originality of the message, and the degree to which the message attracts attention and becomes memorable (Hajduk, 2019; Wiktor, 2013).

The related instruments and forms of promotion constitute a marketing communication system, which fulfills several functions across three distinct layers (Wiktor, 2013). The main function of the entire system (first layer) is to build awareness of the organization and its offerings (Wiktor, 2013). The next layer is formed by “core” functions: informational, persuasive and competitive. Functions specific to individual promotional tools, such as personal promotion, advertising, sales promotion, and public relations, make up the final layer¹ (Wiktor, 2013). The elements should be viewed in a holistic manner, aligning with the concept of integrated marketing communication. It encompasses integration both in the organization’s activities and the tools employed (Hajduk, 2019; Keller, 2016; Wiktor, 2013).

One of the functions of the marketing communication system is persuasion (Wiktor, 2013). Persuasion, according to Trojanowski (2019 p. 46), is “(...) the art of convincing our views, the purpose of which is to influence the specific attitudes of the audience – their opinions, beliefs and behavior”. For successful persuasion, the message recipient must navigate five stages: taking part in the discourse, understanding the object of persuasion, accepting the argument, reinforcing acquired beliefs, and acting (McGuire, 1973; cited in Stochniatek-Mulas, 2012). To achieve a lasting shift in the recipient’s attitude, the change should follow the central route of persuasion, implying

a meticulous analysis of the message (Stochniałek-Mulas, 2012; Wojciszke, 2004). The change in attitude which takes place through the central route of persuasion is permanent and causes a change in the recipient's behavior (Wojciszke, 2004). On the contrary, a change in attitude that takes place through the peripheral route of persuasion is caused by secondary factors (e.g. the authority of the sender of the message), does not cause a change in the recipient behavior and has a temporary nature (Wojciszke, 2004). Changing an attitude through the central route of persuasion depends on the following conditions: motivation, the ability to process the message and the way of approaching the content of the message (Stochniałek-Mulas, 2012). The last mentioned condition seems to be a particularly important variable. From the psychological point of view, people look for arguments to support their emotional reaction to a phenomenon, rather than create the reaction on the basis of collected arguments (Kahneman, 2012).

The Internet has become the primary channel for communicating with audiences, in which advertising, profiles and sites in social media are among the most important communication tools (Hajduk, 2019). Numerous authors recognize the possibility of building brand image with use of social media (Grębosz et al., 2016; Hajduk, 2019; Kaczorowska-Spychalska, 2011; Sanak, 2011).

Several studies delve into the potential effects of incorporation memes into marketing communication. Firstly, memes have been demonstrated to capture consumer attention. Grębosz et al. (2016) identified several factors contributing to the appeal of memes as a social media marketing tool, including their graphic design, simplicity, low production cost and humorous nature. Humorous marketing messages align with consumer preferences for entertainment, and have been shown to enhance attention, generate empathy, and reduce resistance to content (Grębosz et al., 2016; Iwańska, 2013; Sutherland & Sylvester, 2003). Bury (2016) further noted that memes can effectively attract attention of target audience groups, as well as stimulate interest in the broader topics that they refer to.

In addition, research has shown that memes can enhance customer engagement. Bury (2016) found that Internet memes serve as a means to promote consumer engagement. Yang and Hayashi (2021) corroborated the findings, demonstrating higher audience engagement in posts featuring memes (in the form of graphics and text combinations), as compared to those without. Further analysis revealed that susceptibility to meme-based communication varies with age, with audiences under 40 exhibiting a greater preference for meme-laden posts.

Thirdly, research has indicated that advertising memes can influence brand image. Sigurbjörnsson and Black Jr. (2018) conducted a study that demonstrated the effect of brand-related memes (consisting of pictures with text) created by internet users on participants' brand associations. However, it should be noted that the study did not confirm the authors'

hypotheses regarding the impact of such memes on awareness, perceived quality, and brand loyalty.

Finally, researchers have investigated how consumers perceive marketing communication that utilizes memes. Toustrup (2017) conducted a survey to examine consumer opinions on companies' use of online memes in marketing activities. The survey revealed that meme marketing is perceived by participants as humorous (63%) and amateurish (59%), but also as a reason to stop following a company on social media (4%) or to dislike a company (7%). Additionally, more respondents indicated that meme marketing does not make them follow a company on social media than declared the positive effect. Moreover, more participants denied liking the company more due to this form of marketing than confirmed it. The author concluded that meme marketing cannot be guaranteed to be successful, but noted that the method of data collection limits confidence in the sample's representativeness of the wider population.

Based on the relevant literature, it is hypothesized that messages incorporating Internet memes are more effective in achieving the goal of persuasion than marketing communication not utilizing Internet memes. This hypothesis is supported by several factors, including the criterion of communication effectiveness (Hajduk, 2019), the compatibility of the criterion with the purpose of persuasion (Trojanowski, 2019), and the ability of humorous messages, like Internet memes, to attract and entertain consumers (Sutherland & Sylvester, 2003). Additionally, previous research has shown that posts containing Internet memes have a higher level of user engagement compared to those without memes (Yang & Hayashi, 2021). Overall, it is believed that messages utilizing Internet memes may be more effective in influencing the recipient's attitudes and behaviors, as compared to marketing communication without Internet memes. Therefore, the following research hypothesis was formulated:

H1: Marketing communication using Internet memes is more effective than marketing communication without memes.

2.3. Factors Influencing the Perception of Memes as Marketing Tool

Consumer knowledge can create internal noise during the process of marketing communication, leading to the identification of inaccuracies in the message (Stochniałek-Mulas, 2012). Furthermore, the use of memes by companies to younger target audiences is often viewed unfavorably by them and can be perceived as a "cringeworthy misunderstanding of meme culture (...)" (knowyourmeme.com, 2022), which suggests an awareness of meme culture norms among meme enthusiasts. It highlights the need for a more critical approach to marketing communication utilizing Internet memes by the individuals, supporting the formulation of the following research hypothesis:

H2: Perception of marketing communication using Internet memes depends on the level of consumer interest in Internet memes.

2.4. Memes Influence Brand Attitude and Brand Personality

When making a choice, consumers may be guided by purely economic criteria, but the reason for purchasing a product is often not its function, but its symbolism, which is closely related to the role of the brand (Rudnicki, 2012; Solomon, 2006). Brands are one of the most valuable intangible assets of a company, making a significant contribution to its value and, thanks to certain symbolic baggage (such as its image), enable a product to stand out from others created to satisfy the same need (Keller, 2016; Kotler & Keller, 2012).

Marketing communication plays a significant role in building brand equity by supporting the development of brand awareness, liking, loyalty, and desirable associations (Keller, 2016). The use of humor in marketing communication is expected by consumers, what creates a possibility for building brand equity through such communication (Iwańska, 2013). Internet memes are a form of marketing communication and they are humorous in their nature (Nowak, 2013). Thus, it is reasonable to hypothesize that the use of Internet memes in marketing communication can have a positive effect on the attitude towards the brand. Therefore, based on the above analysis, the following research hypothesis has been formulated:

H3: Using Internet memes in marketing communication has a positive effect on attitude towards the brand.

Brand personality, according to Gorbaniuk (2011), is the sum of personal associations that individuals hold towards a brand. Aaker's (1997) work aimed at developing a standardized measure for the personality traits of brands. Five unique dimensions of brand personality were identified: sincerity, excitement, competence, sophistication and ruggedness. Each dimension encompasses multiple facets, totaling 42 personality traits (Aaker, 1997).

Advertising plays a pivotal role in molding brand personality, influencing the personality traits ascribed to the brand via the emotional reactions it evokes (Keller, 2016). Social media marketing communication can also contribute to brand personification (Sanak, 2011). Internet memes are predominantly humorous (Nowak, 2013). Given the ability of advertising to shape brand personality and the emotions a message can evoke, it's reasonable to suggest a positive impact of using Internet memes on brand personality. Therefore, the following hypothesis has been proposed:

H4: Using Internet memes in marketing communication positively influences brand personality.

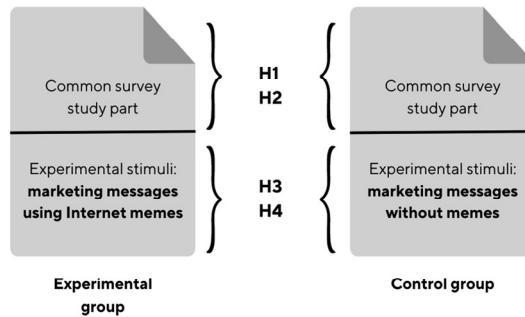
3. Research Methods

3.1. Research Procedure

Due to the fact that two of the four research hypotheses assumed causal relationships, a survey study with experimental design was conducted (Babbie, 2009). The first two hypotheses were verified with the use of survey study with a descriptive purpose (Babbie, 2008). In order to conduct the experimental part of the study, two versions of the questionnaire were prepared: one for the control group and another for the experimental group. Content of the both questionnaires was schematically presented in Figure 1.

Figure 1

Schematic presentation of the content of the questionnaires used in the study



In order to verify hypothesis number three the classical experiment was used (Babbie, 2009). It means that the respondents were divided into two groups – the experimental and control one (Babbie, 2008). In both groups a pretest and a posttest were conducted, in order to capture the impact of the independent variable (marketing communication type – using Internet memes or not using Internet memes) on the dependent variable (attitude towards brand) (Babbie, 2008). The adopted variances of the independent variable differ from those adopted as a rule (presence or absence) (Babbie, 2008). However, using the mentioned standard variances (presence/absence of the marketing messages using Internet memes) would not allow to assure that the change of the dependent variable was not caused by marketing communication per se.

To verify hypothesis number four, an experiment with an omission of pretest was used (Babbie, 2009). According to Campbell and Stanley (1963) it is not necessary to conduct a pretest when randomized selection of the groups is applied. Contrary to the attitude towards brands, the brands' personalities were measured by asking the respondents multiple questions.

The survey took form of the CAWI (computer assisted web interviews). The survey was conducted between February 15 and March 6, 2022. The request to participate in the study was sent to 223 people, while 155 people participated, giving a 69% response rate.

3.2. Experimental Stimuli

The type of marketing communication was the independent variable, and it aimed at measuring its effect on both the attitude towards the brand and the associated personality traits.

As it was mentioned, two versions of the questionnaire were prepared – one for the experimental, and one for the control group. Both of them started with a pretest – respondents were asked to rate their attitude towards the brands for which marketing messages were presented in the survey, on a scale of 1 to 10. Participants unfamiliar with the brand were asked to mark the answer “0”. Survey participants were then asked to take a look at six pairs of marketing messages from the brands’ Polish-language Facebook, Instagram and Twitter profiles.

In order to choose messages with similar appeal, the actual study was preceded with a pilot study conducted among 10 consumers. A set of messages not using Internet memes and messages using Internet memes were selected for the InPost, Zalando, McDonald’s and Pracuj.pl brands. The brands were chosen because of the fact that they combine humorous and traditional themes in their marketing communication. A total of 35 messages were selected, including 18 that used memes. The mentioned messages were then shown to the participants of the pilot study who were asked to rate them on the scale of 1 to 5. Based on the average ratings of each message, two pairs of messages were selected for each brand. Pairs consisted of a marketing message without memes and a message using Internet memes. The criterion for selecting the pairs was a common or similar average rating. A pair with a higher rating was selected if there were more pairs with similar ratings. To select three brands, the standard deviation was calculated for each pair. The brand with the highest summed standard deviations of the two pairs was discarded (Pracuj.pl – summed standard deviation = 0.2).

After presenting the messages to the participants, a posttest was performed. The experimental group declared again their attitude towards the brand after looking at pairs of marketing messages using Internet memes (an example – see: Figure 2). The control group did it after looking at the marketing messages without Internet memes (an example – see: Figure 3).

In the case of measuring the influence of messages using memes on personality traits attributed to the brand, the pretest was omitted. However, analogously to the attitude towards brand measurement, the experimental group rated personality of presented brands after looking at the pairs of marketing messages using Internet memes. The control group rated personality of brands after looking at the marketing messages without Internet memes.

Figure 2

Explanatory pair of marketing messages using Internet memes used in the study



Source: McDonald's. (n.d.). *Photos* [Facebook page]. Facebook. https://www.facebook.com/McDonaldsPolska/?locale=pl_PL (13.09.2023).

Figure 3

Explanatory pair of marketing messages without memes used in the study



Source: McDonald's. (n.d.). *Photos* [Facebook page]. Facebook. https://www.facebook.com/McDonaldsPolska/?locale=pl_PL (13.09.2023)

3.3. Measures

In order to capture the overall impact of the use of Internet memes on **brand personality**, respondents were asked to rate on a scale of 1 to 5 to what extent the brand might be described by selected personality traits. The mentioned traits were selected out of 15 facets of brand personality described by Aaker (1997), basing on their potential to be influenced by brands' usage of Internet memes in marketing communication. The traits together formed the **brand personality scale**.

To measure marketing **messages effectiveness**, after each pair of messages, respondents were asked to rate, on a scale of 1 to 5, how much the

messages could be described by several characteristics. The characteristics operationalized the capacity of marketing messages to guide the recipient through every step leading to succumbing to persuasion and the potential of changing the recipient's attitude through the central route of persuasion. Thus, the ability of the message to invite the recipient into the discourse corresponded to the characteristic "interesting". The possibility of being understood was described by the characteristics "for people like me" and "understandable" and ability to weaken resistance by "nice" (appeal to emotion) and "factual" (persuasion by the value of the content) (McGuire, 1973; Stochniałek-Mulas, 2012). The last step, before taking action, is the confirmation of acquired beliefs. Bearing in mind the fact that consumers expect entertainment from marketing communication with a particular emphasis on humor (Iwańska, 2013) it was assumed that the sender's probable intention was for the message to be perceived as a source of entertainment and humor. It was described by such message characteristics as "amusing" and "entertaining". The conditions of changing recipient's attitude through the central route of persuasion were operationalized by following message characteristics: trait "engaging" described the ability to arouse motivation and the previously-used trait "understandable" described the ability of the message to be processed by the recipient. Together, the above-mentioned characteristics formed a **message effectiveness scale** (Stochniałek-Mulas, 2012).

Consumers' **attitudes toward marketing communication using Internet memes** were verified using five questions placed at the end of the questionnaire. Consumers were asked to rate on a scale of 1 to 5 their attitude towards: attempts by marketing communication to amuse them, the use of Internet memes in marketing communication and liking towards humorous marketing messages. Together, the questions formed a **Meme Advertisements' Likability Scale (the "MALS")**.

The questionnaire also included questions allowing to group respondents by their level of interest in Internet memes – participants were asked about their affiliation to and activity in humorous groups on Facebook.

In order to assess reliability of the scales, Cronbach's α scale reliability index was calculated for each scale (Wieczorkowska & Wierzbiński, 2007). Results of the study indicate that the brand personality scale produced high levels of internal consistency, with scores of 0.915, 0.923, and 0.930 for the InPost, Zalando, and McDonald's brands, respectively. Similarly, the message effectiveness scale demonstrated high levels of internal consistency, with scores of 0.943 and 0.915 for the InPost brand's meme and messages without memes, respectively, and scores of 0.939 and 0.896 for the Zalando brand, and scores of 0.945 and 0.921 for the McDonald's brand. The MALS scale yielded a score of 0.847. The results are summarized in Table 1.

Table 1
Reliability of the scales used

	Scale	α
Brand personality scale	InPost	0.915
	Zalando	0.923
	McDonald's	0.930
Scale of message effectiveness	InPost memes	0.943
	InPost messages without memes	0.915
	Zalando memes	0.939
	Zalando messages without memes	0.896
	McDonald's memes	0.945
	McDonald's messages without memes	0.921
Meme Advertisements' Likability Scale		0.847

3.4. Research Sample

Participants in the study were selected with the use of quota and purposive sampling to include respondents of different age, gender and the level of interests towards Internet memes. To guarantee comparability of the experimental and control groups, randomization was used in assigning participants to the groups (Babbie, 2009).

The experimental group consisted of 72 participants among whom 56.94% were women and 43.06% were men. 86.11% of the group consisted of people born between 1997 and 2006, while 13.89% were born between 1975 and 1996 (see Table 2). The division by age is equivalent to the division into generation Z and earlier generations (Kotler, Kartajaya, & Setiawan, 2021). 76.39% of the participants of the experimental group declared affiliation to humorous groups on Facebook (see Table 2). 96.36% participants of the experimental group belonging to humorous groups (n=55) declared going over content in the groups, 30.91% commenting on the content and 7.27% posting (see Table 3).

The control group consisted of 81 participants among whom 51.85% were women and 48.15% were men. 90.12% of the group consisted of people born between 1997 and 2006, while 9.88% were born between 1970 and 1996 (Table 1). 72.84% of the participants of the control group declared affiliation to humorous groups on Facebook (see Table 2). 98.31% participants of the control group belonging to humorous groups (n=59) declared going over content in the groups, 32.20% commenting on the content and 16.95% posting (see Table 3).

The total research sample consisted of 153 participants among whom 54.25% were women and 45.75% were men. 88.23% of the sample consisted of people born between 1997 and 2006, while 11.77% were born between 1970 and 1996 (see Table 2). 74.51% of the total research sample declared affiliation to humorous groups on Facebook (see Table 2). 97.37% participants of the total research sample belonging to humorous groups (n=114) declared going over content in the groups, 31.58% commenting and 12.28% posting (see Table 3).

Table 2
Diversity of research samples

Variable		Experimental sample (n=72)		Control sample (n=81)		Total research sample (n=153)	
		Number of respondents (NoR)	Percentage (%)	NoR	%	NoR	%
Gender	Female	41	56.94	42	51.85	83	54.25
	Male	31	43.06	39	48.15	70	45.75
Age group	1997–2006	62	86.11	73	90.12	135	88.23
	1970–1996	10	13.89	8	9.88	18	11.77
Affiliation to humorous groups	Yes	55	76.39	59	72.84	114	74.51
	No	17	23.61	22	27.16	39	24.49

Table 3
Activity in humorous groups on Facebook among members of research samples

Activity in humorous groups	Experimental sample (n=55)		Control sample (n=59)		Total research sample (n=114)	
	NoR	%	NoR	%	NoR	%
Going over content	53	96.36	58	98.31	111	97.37
Commenting	17	30.91	19	32.20	36	31.58
Posting	4	7.27	10	16.95	14	12.28

3.5. Statistical Procedures

SPSS was employed to conduct a series of statistical tests to confirm the research hypotheses. The first hypothesis was tested using independent samples t-test. The procedure of the H1 testing was schematically presented in the Figure 4. The testing of the first hypothesis was accompanied with the complementary Pearson’s correlation coefficient analysis to determine the linear relationship between variables. The procedure of the complementary analysis was schematically presented in the Figure 5. The second hypothesis was also tested using independent samples t-test. The procedure of the H2 testing was schematically presented in the Figure 6 (Wieczorkowska & Wierzbiński, 2007).

Figure 4
Procedure of testing H1

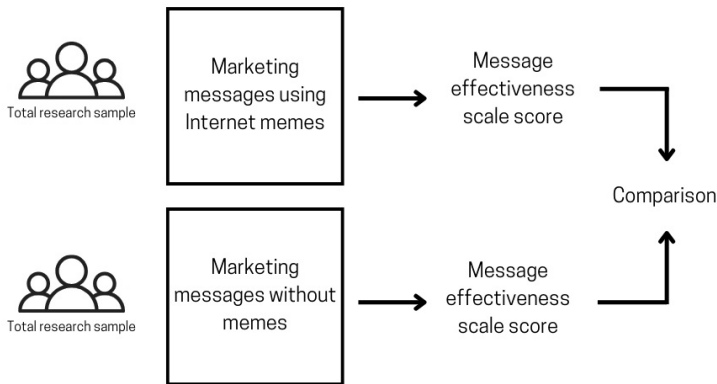


Figure 5
Procedure of the complementary analysis accompanying testing H1

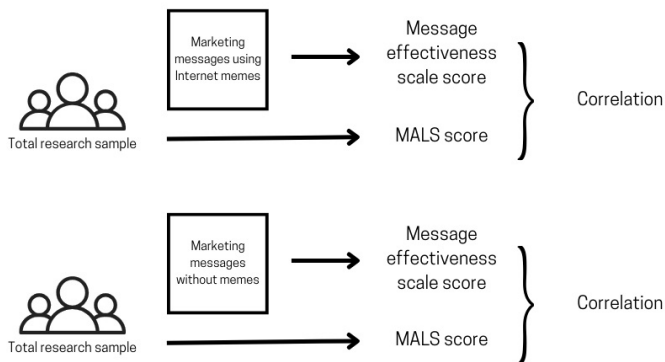
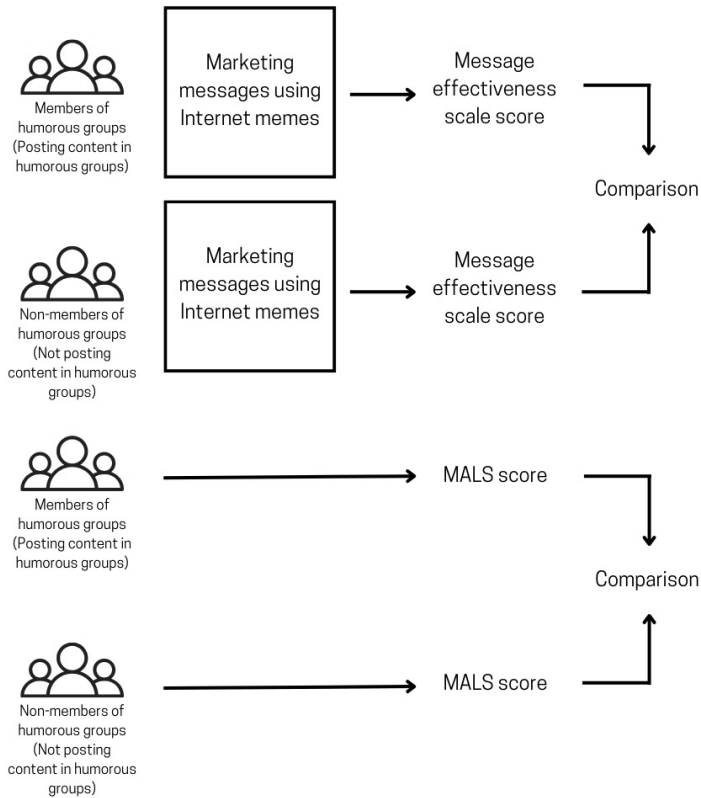


Figure 6
Procedure of testing H2



The third hypothesis was tested using the dependent samples t-test to assess significant differences between the means of pretest and posttest scores and the independent samples t-test to compare the differences between the experimental and the control group. The procedure of testing H3 was schematically presented in Figure 7. The fourth hypothesis was tested using independent samples t-test. The procedure of testing H4 was schematically presented in Figure 8 (Wieczorkowska & Wierzbiński, 2007).

Figure 7
Procedure of testing H3

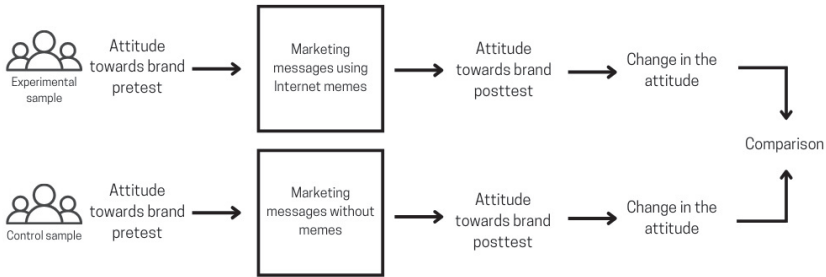
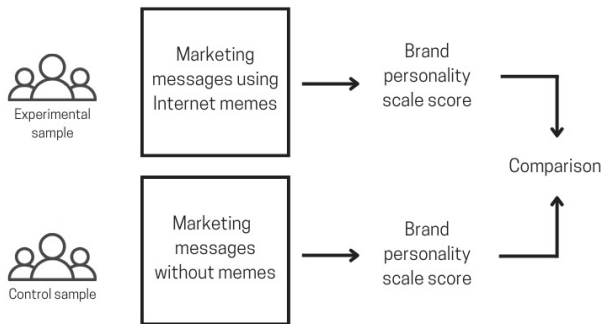


Figure 8
Procedure of testing H4



4. Results

The average effectiveness of messages using Internet memes was found to be higher for each of the three brands. Differences were statistically significant for the InPost and Zalando brands. Detailed results are presented in Table 4.

For both brands, Pearson's correlation coefficient was calculated for the message effectiveness scale scores and the scale of Meme Advertisements' Likability Scale scores. The coefficient was calculated both for the messages using Internet memes and the messages not using Internet memes. Verification of the statistical significance of the correlations was also calculated.

For both brands, attitude towards advertising memes positively correlates with the effectiveness of both marketing messages using Internet memes and messages without memes. Correlations are statistically significant. However, it should be noted that for the messages using Internet memes the correlation is moderate, while in the case of messages without memes it is only weak. Detailed results are shown in Table 5.

Messages using Internet memes are marked by higher effectiveness. Nevertheless, higher effectiveness may be caused by the stronger preference of the surveyed consumers for the form of communication. However, it is not a sufficient basis for not recognizing the fact that higher effectiveness is achieved by marketing messages using memes. *Thus, the H1 statement about marketing communication using Internet memes being more effective than marketing communication without memes was supported.*

For each brand, the average rating of messages using memes was higher among members of humorous groups. All differences were statistically significant. In contrast, there were no statistically significant differences between posting and non-posting members of those groups. Detailed results are presented in Table 4. The average MALS score for members of humorous groups was higher than for non-members. The difference was statistically significant. The average MALS score for publishing members was higher than for not publishing. The difference was statistically significant. Detailed results are presented in Table 6.

The relationship between the level of interest in Internet memes and the perception of marketing communication using Internet memes turned out to be positive, contrary to what was assumed on the basis of the literature. *Hypothesis number two was therefore rejected.*

Table 4

Differences in message effectiveness scale score depending on grouping criterion

Brand	Grouping criteria	Effectiveness scale score	t	df	p
InPost	Messages using memes	3.3124	3.324	304	≤.001
	Messages without memes	2.9439			
Zalando	Messages using memes	3.1510	4.341	304	≤.001
	Messages without memes	2.6773			
McDonald's	Messages using memes	3.1891	0.503	304	0.615
	Messages without memes	3.1330			
InPost	Members of humorous groups	3.5121	4.431	151	≤.001
	Non-members of humorous groups	2.7212			
Zalando	Members of humorous groups	3.2621	2.379	151	0.019
	Non-members of humorous groups	2.8173			

Table 4 cont.

Brand	Grouping criteria	Effectiveness scale score	t	df	p
McDonald's	Members of humorous groups	3.3684	3.923	151	≤.001
	Non-members of humorous groups	2.6571			
InPost	Posting content in humorous groups	3.5089	-0.013	112	0.990
	Not posting content in humorous groups	3.5125			
Zalando	Posting content in humorous groups	2.9643	-1.186	112	0.238
	Not posting content in humorous groups	3.3038			
McDonald's	Posting content in humorous groups	3.4107	0.173	112	0.863
	Not posting content in humorous groups	3.3625			

Table 5

Correlation between message effectiveness scale score and Meme Advertisements' Likability Scale score

Type of message	Brand	r	p
Using memes	InPost	0.462	<.001
	Zalando	0.458	<0.001
Without memes	InPost	0,231	0.004
	Zalando	0.251	0.002

Table 6

Differences in Meme Advertisements' Likability Scale (MALS) score between groups

Group	MALS score	t	df	p
Members of humorous groups	4.1351	2.410	151	0.017
Non-members of humorous groups	3.7744			
Posting in humorous groups	4.5887	2.533	112	0.013
Not posting in humorous groups	4.0720			

Dependent samples t-test showed that familiarization with marketing messages worsened attitudes towards brands, but only for the InPost brand the difference was statistically significant. The test did not take into account those who declared unfamiliarity with the brand in the pretest. Detailed results are presented in Table 7.

The average likability score for the InPost brand worsened after looking at both messages using Internet memes and messages not using Internet memes. Although the average decrease in brand liking was lower for messages using memes, differences were not statistically significant. Thus, *hypothesis number three was rejected*. Detailed results are shown in Table 8.

Table 7

Differences between attitude towards brands before and after showing the marketing messages to the respondents

Brand	Pretest	Posttest	t	df	p
InPost	8.4305	8.0530	3.540	150	≤.001
Zalando	7.4420	7.3333	0.831	137	0.407
McDonald's	7.0783	7.0654	0.089	152	0.929

Table 8

Change in attitude towards InPost brand in the experimental and control group before and after showing to the respondents the marketing messages

Brand	Group	Change in attitude towards brand	t	df	p
InPost	Experimental group	-0.2286	1.301	149	0.195
	Control group	-0.6062			

The average personality scale score was higher for each brand in the experimental group. However, the differences were not statistically significant. In the case of individual personality traits, they together formed the brand personality scale, statistically significant differences were found only for the Zalando brand: the traits “imaginative” and “intelligent” were rated higher on the basis of the messages using memes. Thus, *hypothesis number four was rejected*. Detailed results are presented in Table 9.

Table 9
*Differences between personality scale scores for each brand
 in the experimental and control group*

Brand	Group	Personality scale score	t	df	p
InPost	Experimental group	3.5754	0.700	151	0.485
	Control group	3.4709			
Zalando	Experimental group	3.4107	1.388	151	0.167
	Control group	3.1975			
McDonald's	Experimental group	3.2897	0.555	151	0.580
	Control group	3.2011			

5. Discussion

The aim of the study was to answer the question about effectiveness of marketing communication using Internet memes. The goal was achieved by verifying four research hypotheses.

H1 assumed higher effectiveness of marketing communication using Internet memes, as compared to marketing communication without memes. The hypothesis was accepted. For two of the three brands, effectiveness of messages using Internet memes was higher at a statistically significant level. The outcome aligns with expectations grounded in prior literature. The anticipated higher effectiveness of marketing messages utilizing Internet memes stems from several key findings: the greater ability to attract attention of humorous messages (Sutherland & Sylvester, 2003); the humorous nature of Internet memes (Nowak, 2013); the expectation of consumers to be entertained by marketing communication (Iwańska, 2013); and the ability of posts containing Internet memes to build greater user engagement (Yang & Hayashi, 2021). An alternative interpretation of the results could be attributed to the affect heuristic, which highlights an enhanced acknowledgement of arguments supporting favored subjects (Kahneman, 2013). The observed correlation between scores on the “liking towards advertising memes” scale and the effectiveness scale bolsters the alternative view, especially given the more pronounced correlation for messages incorporating memes.

H2 postulated that perception of marketing communication using Internet memes depends on the level of consumer’s interest in Internet memes. It was assumed that as interest in memes intensifies, perception of communication utilizing memes deteriorates. The hypothesis was rejected. Marketing messages employing memes exhibited significantly higher effectiveness among respondents belonging to humorous FB groups. Liking towards

advertising memes was also higher at a statistically significant level among the group. Furthermore, members of humorous groups who actively post in them demonstrated a statistically significant preference for advertising memes, as compared to non-publishing members. The result we get is exactly the opposite of what was assumed on the basis of the literature. It was assumed that the consumers' knowledge, which constitutes internal noise in the communication process (Stochniatek-Mulas, 2012), combined with their acknowledged skepticism towards advertising memes within meme culture (knowyourmeme.com, 2022), would lead to a potential aversion to this form of communication among those with a higher interest in Internet memes. The result was exactly the opposite. A possible explanation for the result obtained would be to recognize that the skepticism towards advertising memes is not a view shared among the majority of people interested in Internet memes.

H3 posited that the use of Internet memes in marketing communication positively affects attitude towards the brand. The hypothesis was rejected, as there was no statistically significant difference in attitude towards brands between the group exposed to the experimental stimulus in the form of a meme and the control group. The obtained results contradict what was assumed based on the literature. Namely, it was assumed that satisfying consumers' ludic needs by means of memes, the nature of which is humorous, would result in improved brand liking (Iwańska, 2013; Nowak, 2013). A possible explanation of the fact is that the study used widely known brands. Consumers were likely to be familiar with the brands and have strong opinions about them. The messages presented in the survey might have been an insufficient stimulus to change the attitude towards the brands.

H4 proposed that the use of Internet memes in marketing communication positively influences brand personality. The hypothesis was rejected. Despite the fact that the average personality scale score was higher for each brand in the experimental group, the differences were not statistically significant. The obtained result contradicts the assumptions drawn from the literature. Specifically, considering the inherently humorous nature of Internet memes, it was expected that they would effectively convey brand personality, primarily through the emotions evoked by the advertising message (Keller, 2016; Nowak, 2013). A possible explanation of this would be to consider that advertising memes do not evoke sufficiently strong emotions.

The results obtained should also be discussed in terms of internal and external validity of the research. Despite the fact, that the real aim of the study was undisclosed, it was probably possible for the respondents to conjecture it while filling in the questionnaire (Babbie, 2008). Although this problem refers to experiments, it seems to be reasonable to assume, that it could also affect the survey part of the study due to the fact, that the respondents were asked to answer the same question multiple times, based on different marketing messages (Babbie, 2008). The mentioned fact poses a risk that the respondents might have been guided by what they

thought they should think (Babbie, 2008). However, the fact that only one of the four hypotheses was confirmed seems to indicate reliability, in this regard, of the results obtained. Regarding others factors affecting internal validity, the authors believe that applied procedures, as e.g. randomization, guarantee a high level of reliability of the results.

In spite of the fact that hypotheses assuming casual relationships were not confirmed, external validity of the experimental part of the study should also be commented (McDonald, 2005). As it was mentioned previously, one of the elements of the process of communication is its context (Wiktor, 2013). The questionnaire obviously differed from social media interfaces, where the messages used in the study were originally placed. There is no certainty that the assumed causal relationship does not occur in the natural context of such type of marketing communication.

6. Conclusions

The main issue in the paper was to answer the question about effectiveness of marketing communication using Internet memes. Addressing the question was significant because the literature encourages incorporation of humor or Internet memes in marketing communication, but it also includes critical perspectives, including those voiced by consumers themselves.

In order to answer the main question in the paper, four research hypotheses were formulated. The analysis of the results of the conducted study led to the rejection of the assumptions about the influence of Internet memes on attitude towards brand and brand personality. However, the high potential of Internet memes as marketing messages was recognized. Internet memes proved to be more effective than marketing messages without memes. The level of consumer interest in Internet memes proved to be a differentiating factor of the effectiveness of the type of marketing communication – Internet memes used as the marketing messages are perceived better by consumers who are assumed to be more interested in Internet memes.

The results of the study seem to make an important contribution to the rather limited literature on the subject of the use of Internet memes in marketing activities. The paper turns the spotlight onto the characteristics of consumers who are the potential target group of the type of communication. Contrary to what was assumed based on the literature, the potential target group seems to be wide. Interestingly, the influence of consumers' level of interest in Internet memes on their perception of marketing communication using Internet memes turned out to be positive. In the light of the finding, the study results suggest that the voices criticizing advertising memes may not reflect the majority of consumer opinions.

The paper provides valuable insights for practitioners, equipping them with the knowledge needed to enhance the efficiency of their marketing

communication efforts. According to the results obtained, comparing to the marketing communication without memes, marketing messages using Internet memes are more effective in social media environment, where consumers expect to be entertained (Iwańska, 2013). For this reason using Internet memes should be considered while pursuing marketing communication in social media. The results should encourage social media managers to use Internet memes especially when the target group is interested in them. However, considering the fact that a few Internet memes seems to be an insufficient stimulus to improve attitude towards brand or its personality, using them in marketing communication should only be a part of a larger promotional strategy.

Important limitations of the study should also be noted. The main limitation of the study is the fact that participants of the study were selected using non random sampling, which can be treated as a statement of the unrepresentativeness of the research sample. Despite the authors' efforts, it was also not possible to maintain equal sex ratios between the control and experimental group. Moreover, the vast majority of the respondents were born between 1997 and 2006.

The study could be an inspiration for those interested in the topic of Internet memes and the possibility of using them in marketing activities. An interesting direction of research could be a reconduct of the study using prepared marketing messages of fictional brands, so that it would eliminate the influence of the opinions already held by the consumers on their declarations about their attitude towards brand. In order to ensure greater external validity, the experimental part of the study could also be repeated using simulated social media interfaces. Qualitative study would also be an interesting direction for future studies. The study could be conducted with the participation of members of the above-mentioned Facebook group or active members of knowyourmeme.com. It would allow better understanding of the communities criticizing the use of Internet memes by brands. The other interesting direction would be answering the question of what characteristics an advertising meme should have in order to maximize its effectiveness as a marketing message. An attempt to answer the question of how to manage a situation in which a brand becomes the subject of memes created by Internet users, both negative and positive, also seems to be an important and interesting direction.

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The authors declared no potential conflicts of interest with respect to the research, authorship, and publication of this article.

Endnotes

- ¹ In the literature it is often pointed out the existence of one more instrument of promotion, namely direct marketing (Hajduk, 2019). However, Jan W. Wiktor (2013) claims that the functioning way of understanding the concept makes it more a part of the problem of the distribution.

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Collaborative Performances of Wine Tourism Destinations in the Northern Rhone Valley

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Abstract

Purpose: The main aim of this article was to identify the wine tourism destination models set up on collaborative performances driven by Tourism Offices (Destination Marketing Organization, DMO) and wineries (private enterprises) from the appellate areas in the Northern Rhone Valley.

Design/methodology/approach: The ethnographical methodology was used, including methods of participating observation (applied by a mysterious tourist method), study tours (to explore the study field), expert analysis (based on knowledge exchange with Tourism Office Managers) and official interviews (with Mangers of small and large wine producers from the areas).

Findings: Two of the three surveyed wine tourism destinations from the Northern Rhône Valley (Vienne Condrieu and Rhône Crussol) are distinguished by the very active role of tourism organizations in building collaborative wine tourism offerings, in particular with small wineries. The third destination surveyed (Ardèche Hermitage) is more oriented toward collaborations with large wine producers and their independent role in leading wine tourism marketing.

Research limitations/implications: Managers of tourism organizations should be oriented toward collaboration with both: large and small wine producers. Large wineries are helpful in raising the visibility and image of a wine destination. Small producers, on the other hand, offer a distinctive and individual wine tourism experience.

Originality/value: The key aspect of wine tourism marketing is the building of collaborative wine tourism offerings led by DMO's collaboration with both large and small wineries from the destination.

Keywords: wine tourism destination, wine tourism marketing, destination marketing organizations, wine tourism experience, Northern Rhone Valley.

JEL: M31, L83, L32

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Kolaboratywność destynacji turystyki winiarskiej w Dolinie Północnego Rodanu

Streszczenie

Cel: głównym celem artykułu było zidentyfikowanie modeli marketingu turystyki winiarskiej stworzonych w oparciu na współpracy lokalnych organizacji turystycznych (*Destination Marketing Organization, DMO*) i winiarni z apelacyjnych obszarów winiarskich z północnej części Doliny Rodanu.

Design/metodologia/podejście: zastosowano metodologię etnograficzną, w tym metody obserwacji uczestniczącej (tajemniczy turysta w biurze informacji turystycznej oraz winiarniach), badań terenowych oraz analiz eksperckich (wywiady z menedżerami organizacji turystycznych oraz małych i dużych producentów wina).

Wnioski: dwie z trzech badanych destynacji turystyki winiarskiej z Północnej Doliny Rodanu (Vienne Condrieu i Rhône Crussol) wyróżnia bardzo aktywna rola organizacji turystycznych w budowaniu kolaboratywnej oferty enoturystycznej w szczególności z małymi winiarniami. Trzecia z badanych destynacji (Ardèche Hermitage) jest bardziej nastawiona na współpracę z dużymi producentami wina oraz prowadzenie przez nich samodzielnych działań marketingu enoturystyki.

Ograniczenia/wnioski z badań: menedżerowie organizacji turystycznych powinni być zorientowani na współpracę zarówno z dużymi, jak i z małymi producentami wina. Duże winiarnie są pomocne w zwiększaniu widoczności i wizerunku destynacji winiarskiej. Mały producenci oferują natomiast bardziej indywidualne doświadczenie enoturystyczne.

Oryginalność/wartość: kluczowym aspektem marketingu turystyki winiarskiej jest budowanie kolaboratywnej oferty enoturystycznej (współpraca DMO tak z dużymi, jak i z małymi winiarniami z destynacji).

Słowa kluczowe: destynacja turystyki winiarskiej, marketing turystyki winiarskiej; organizacje turystyczne, doświadczenie enoturystyczne; Dolina Północnego Rodanu.

1. Introduction

Collaborative destination performance matches two theoretical perspectives: wine tourism marketing and tourism destination collaboration. The two closely interfere by taking collaboration in the centre of tourism destination marketing, which, according to the recent literature, can develop a unique network of wine tourism offerings (Fyall et al., 2012). Although it seems natural to collaborate for the sake of common win-win relationship within a wine tourism network, it rarely happens due to the very competitive wine business ecosystem. From the producer point of view, wine tourism is a tool of marketing strategy and brand awareness, whereas the destination context treats the wine tourism ecosystem as a condition to co-create collective products such as wine routes, by which a destination recognition can be strategically strengthen (McGregor & Robinson, 2019; Sigala & Robinson, 2019; Williams, 2001). Yet, to do it, territorial actors must engage into the collective actions integrated by the DMOs (Destination Marketing Organization) (Bornhorst et al., 2010).

Therefore, the wine tourism collaboration can be viewed from the perspective of engagement of tourism actors into a network as well as from collaborative initiatives, actions or projects (Pinto & Kastenholz, 2011). The main point is

to co-create a win-win relationship in the wine tourism ecosystem between wineries and/or wine producers (Carvalho et al., 2021). DMOs in France are usually public bodies govern by the administrative areas such as Regions, Departments and Agglomerations which perform destination marketing actions on the international, national and local level, respectively. So, the multilevel French system plus the very competitive local market of wine business makes the wine destination management a very complex game (Fyall et al., 2012).

In the wine researches, wine tourism collaboration has been divided into the marketing and destination aspect, but, in practice, they can be linked by the idea of destination collaboration for a successful marketing performance. For this reason, the research goal of the study was to explore the reciprocal approach that encompasses the aforementioned aspects in one collaborative performance of wine tourism destination. The conceptual manoeuvre is, thus, the result of the research gap in the literature dedicated to Wine Destination Management in which marketing actions are analysed either through performances of DMOs based on the destination governance' approaches (e.g., Pechlaner et al., 2012; Festa et al., 2015; Guedes, 2022) or through performances of wineries based on the wine consumer-service and experience approaches (e.g., Mitchell et al., 2009; Joy et al., 2018; Madeira et al., 2019). To exemplify destination collaborative performances understood as a collective action implied into a wine destination market, there were conducted analysis of three case studies from the Northern Rhone Valley in France: *Condrieu Côte-Rôtie*, *Ardèche Hermitage*, *Rhône Crussol*. In terms of wine destination images, the three wine-growing areas are similar by being recognised as the world-famous Grand Cru appellations according to the AOC accreditation system (*Appellation d'origine contrôlée*) of the Rhone Valley wines. But in terms of destinations collaborative performances, they tend to make dissimilar relationship models which affects their setup of wine offerings, events, products and communication.

2. Literature Review

When wine tourism marketing is discussed, various elements are examined. Wine tourism can be performed by both, in destination and at wineries (Getz et al., 1999). Therefore, surveys based on researching the marketing approach are focused on consumer behaviour, wine tourists' perceptions and segmentations as well as on wine experiences.

The meaning, types, and contexts of wine tourism experience have been explored by many different ways. It can be discussed in the strict sense as a combination of quality of wine, service and experience (Getz et al., 1999; Santos et al., 2019) or, more recently, in the wider sense as the hedonistic (Bruwer & Alant, 2009; Quadri-Felitti & Fiore, 2012), cultural (Mason & O'Mahony, 2007), interactive (Carvalho et al., 2021) and holistic (Cuomo et al., 2016; Cubillas et al., 2017) nature of time spending at a wine destination.

Approaches related to segmentations, motivations and the purchasing power of wine tourists are another direction in the wine tourism researches (Alebaki & Iakovidou, 2011) helpful to design wine offerings, marketing & communication channels and type of wine experience which should be modelled adequately to consumers profiles and visions (Madeira et al., 2019).

While there is a large number of studies deliberating the consumer side, far less scholar attention is put on how wine tourism offering is co-created within a destination (Sigala & Robinson, 2019). In the insofar literature can be found the successful factors of wine region promotion in which wine visits, guided tours, wine festivals and wine activities become an important component of policy-making (Getz et al., 1999; Mitchell et al., 2009).

Collaboration and cooperation in wine regions is, however, the way of building destination branding and regional image (Hamlin & Watson, 1997; Carlsen & Dowling, 1998; Williams, 2001; Bruwer & Johnson, 2010). Therefore, the collective actions which are leading to integrate food and wine service providers into a collective body are needed (Hall & Mitchell, 2005; Cavicchi & Santini, 2014). The particular issue has been discussed in the literature in two contexts: regional and networking collaboration. As for the regional aspect, collaboration is absolutely essential to influence, shape and perform regional tourism strategies (Getz & Brown, 2006; Carlsen & Charters, 2006) or develop institutional support (Hall et al., 1997) as well as to position destination image (Williams, 2001). While the network approach focuses on leading a well-balanced coordination and cooperation within the ecosystem of wine tourism business (Baggio, 2011; Hashimoto & Telfer, 2003).

The product of wine destination collaboration should involve wine tourism-related stakeholders in a networked wine route (Bregoli et al., 2016). The collaboration in a wine route requires, however, to set up beneficial relationships between wine tourism stakeholders (Pinto & Kastenholz, 2011). While the barrier of vertical collaboration (between restaurants and wine producers) is the result of lacking a strong integrator (Hall, 1997; Mitchell & Schreiber, 2006), the low horizontal collaboration (between wine producers) is caused by insufficient understanding of common benefits and interest (Lewis et al., 2015). Therefore, successful collaboration is, on the one hand, a matter of relationship coordination managed by DMOs which is considered as an integrator and/or intermediated organization of a tourism network (Bornhorst et al., 2010), and on the other hand, a well-integrated wine route projects which are able to obtain concrete business effects appreciated by wineries. Briefly, territorial network collaboration should include the interest of tourism stakeholders and coordinate a network in adequate manner (Brás et al., 2010).

Thus, a wine route should involve complementary wine products (Hall & Mitchell, 2005) and offer attractive activities for different segments of

wine tourism experience (Corigliano, 2016), and only then can there be a stimulus of synergy-network effect for the destination stakeholders (Bregoli et al., 2016). But wineries do not evince similar attitudes in engagement and collaboration for wine tourism branding (Koch et al., 2013). Their participation depends on wine tourism or wine industry focus (McGregor & Robinson, 2019). Thus, coordination of relationships with different wine business models is a high-importance task for the network integrators within a wine destination (Hall et al., 1997). Moreover, coordinators must pay attention to the role of particular winery towards a wine tourism ecosystem. Iconic wineries have greater potential to be a driver for promoting wine tourism, and so DMOs can use their image to increase destination visibility and tourists' interest. On the other side, familiar producers need more support in marketing but can deliver more customized experience.

3. Research Objectives and Questions

As forementioned, wine offerings can be created and promoted collectively, in collaboration with DMOs and/or individually, by wine producers. Scholars have pointed out that while the body of knowledge is well-developed in the latter context, there is little known how wine tourism product is co-created, managed and integrated within a tourism network. Therefore, the aim of the article was to explore the issue how wine tourism events and activities are performed in collaboration with Tourism Offices (which play a role of DMOs) in three wine destinations from the Northern Rhone Vally in France.

One of the main problems which has been identified in the literature is the difficulty in coordination tourism stakeholders (wineries) relationships (Pinto & Kastenzholz, 2011; Bregoli et al., 2016). Some wineries are highly engaged in collaboration and others are not interested in being a part of wine tourism (Hall et al., 1997; Koch et al., 2013). The discrepancy in their attitudes can be explained by the fact that large wineries usually possess wine tourism facilities and thus, are able to offer independent wine products, events or activities. But small producers often deal with a lack of basic resources, facilities and most of all, staff dedicated to wine tourism service. That is why, they do not offer wine tasting or open doors as a regular offer, but rather organize special events irregularly.

In the specific context, the main role for a tourism network's coordinator is to balance collaboration with all wine tourism partners and take an advantage from diversity of small and large wineries' offerings. In France the role is played by Tourism Offices (TO), they are in charge of tourism development and destination branding within a territory. As a public body, however, they ought to support all actors being their official partners (touristic sites, products & events) to evolve an attractive destination image (Légifrance, 2020; Offices de Tourisme de France, 2020) and position it

on travel markets (Williams, 2001). Moreover, in order to be successful in wine tourism destination, additionally a value co-creation model should be defined and performed collaboratively (Festa et al., 2015; Festa et al., 2020).

It means, however, that, the Tourism Offices in France as local DMOs, have far more active role in creating a destination network which can be considered as a network orchestrator (Hollebeek & Brodie, 2009; Corigliano, 2016; Nilsen & Gausdal, 2017). The French tourism system is especially interesting in the matter due to the fact that Tourism Offices can also provide a commerce service (e.g., ticket sales, product sales) which enables them to lead a wine tourism network more effectively and avoid the problem of tourism network inertia caused by an intermediate organization (Westering & Niel, 2003).

The main research goal of the study was aimed at exploring the phenomenon of destination collaborative performances incorporated into collective wine offerings and their marketing and underpinned by territorial relationships between DMOs and wineries. Therefore, detailed research goals can be divided into two parts: collaboration (regarding relationship model between the Northern-Rhone Tourism Offices and territorial small/large wineries) and collective performances (regarding wine offerings, products and events organized or promoted in collaboration). In consequence the following research questions were inquired about the two parts:

- I. With regard to the aspect of collaboration:
 - How collaboration of DMOs (Tourism Offices) and territorial wineries was set up in the researched wine destinations?
 - Can any differences in collaboration be identified of Tourism Offices and territorial wineries in the researched wine destinations?
 - What is the researched TOs' collaboration model with small and large wineries?
- II. With regard to the aspect of collective performances of wine marketing:
 - Which wine tourism products, events and activities (shortly wine offerings) were co-created in collaboration between TOs and territorial wineries?
 - How the organization and promotion of the collaborative offerings were shared?
 - How did it impact the wine tourism branding for the researched destinations?

Wine destinations from the Northern Rhone wine-growing areas are stimulated by Tourism Offices which play fundamental role in the wine tourism marketing. So, in this case the successful creation of wine tourism products mainly depends on how collaboration between TOs and wine producers is performed. If the wine tourism marketing is performed collaboratively, then the synergy effect can be achieved by competence sharing (e.g., wine offering is proposed by a wine producer but communicated by a Tourism Office).

Moreover, collaboration with large producers can be easier for TOs than with small ones. The previous usually possess better facilities (e.g., professional wine house, hotel or gite, own restaurant etc.), are able to promote and provide independent wine events, and finally are prepared to welcome business and international groups as well as have a tasting room open permanently for individual tourists who visit them by surprise at the place. For small producers, it is often more problematic. They do not have enough staff and/or financial potential to provide wine tourism services. For some a spontaneous wine tourist can be considered as an “intruder” who distracts them from the main job (wine production).

Therefore, we’ve assumed that the way TOs of the area collaborate with each group of wine producers needs to be specified according to their capabilities in wine tourism. The more diversified and individual approach of co-working with them is represented by TO Managers, the more attractive wine tourism activities can be performed and delivered.

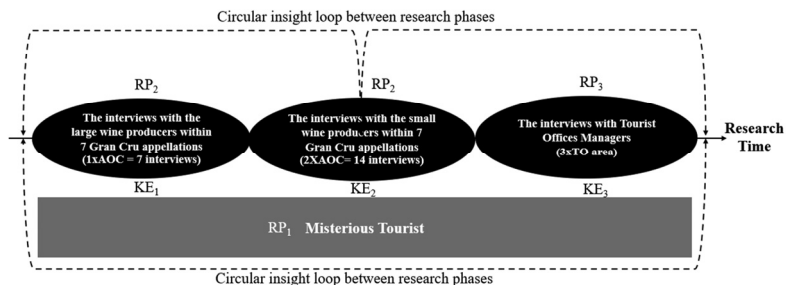
4. Research Process and Methodology

The research methodology was designed in accordance with the ethnographic approach in tourism studies in which qualitative methods are used to explore a phenomenon in its specific context until it allows to conduct the critical discussion based on the double-reflexivity analysis (Kostera et al., 2012). It requires checking and re-checking the subjectively gain knowledge in order to reduce the individual situation and its unreplicative nature (O’Gorman et al., 2014). Therefore, the ethnographical case studies are time-consuming and demanding for researchers (Prince and Ioannides, 2017; Clark et al., 2009).

The research was designed according to three research phases of data collection, discussion & analysis (Fig. 1). At the beginning, a shadowing technique (Czarniawska, 2014) was used in order to get out the implicit knowledge of understanding wine tourism specification embedded in the local collaboration ties between the TO area and wine producers (Fig. 1 – Research phase no. 1 – RP₁). The next step included the re-thinking and expert analysis methods phases which were used simultaneously through having the interviews with both sides: wine producers and TOs (Fig. 1 – Research phase no. 2 – RP₂ – and Research phase no. 3 – RP₃).

Overall, there were 24 semi-structured interviews conducted: 1 with the large producer from each AOC (in total 7), 2 with the small producers from each AOC (in total 14), and 3 with the managers of each TO area (in total 3). The semi-structured interviews were conducted during the participatory field-study so that they allowed to conduct the interview in the time of having wine tourism experience at the place. The manner has mitigated the perception of “a suspicious researcher” and build up the trustful space for discovery the issues that a discussant wants to reveal

Figure 1
Ethnographical and participatory methodology applied in the research process



Legend:

KE₁₋₃ – knowledge exchange,

RP₁₋₃ – research phases.

(Schmidt, 2004; Magaldi & Berler, 2020). Thus, each research phase was developed through the knowledge exchange and meaningful interaction which have enriched the contextual understanding of the wine tourism actors' perspectives. The following research action were undertaken during the period of 3 months (research time):

Phase 1: Exploration of TO marketing strategies through the conversation between a mysterious tourist and contact person at the place of the TO. The following issues and research questions were identified:

- wine tourism offerings promoted by maps & brochures (What kind of wine tourism brochures were given to a tourist? How much importance was put on wine tourism?),
- content analysis of wine tourism brochures (Were wine tourism products, events and activities from the brochures explained in detail? Are there wine products promoted on the regular basics? Is there any calendar of wine events? How many wine events were regular and irregular? What events were about to happen and proposed for the moment being?),
- wine tourism service (How significant was to present wine tourism offerings in comparison to other tourism proposals e.g., of heritage, leisure & events during the conversation with a mysterious tourist?).

Phase 2: Conducting semi-structured interviews with small and large wine producers from each researched AOC (21 in total) to verify:

- wine tourism offers (What is your wine tourism offering? Do you offer it permanently and/or temporarily in the season? Do you organize wine events? Which events are supported by collaboration with a TO?),
- wine tourism customers (What type of tourists participate in your wine events/products? Are they usually national, local or foreign tourists? What is the most attractive in your wine tourism offerings?),

- wine tourism strategy & development (Why did you decide to do wine tourism? Is wine tourism important for you wine business at the moment? Are you going to invest more in wine tourism facilities to extend your offerings?),
- wine tourism collaboration (Which wine tourism associations are you a member of? Are you satisfied with the alliances? Are you a member of your local TO? Which initiatives worked out and which didn't? What do you think about wine tourism network in your destination? Do you consider a TO as a supportive integrator of such network? What are your expectations towards wine tourism collaboration with a TO? Why do you/don't consider your destination as a competitive wine tourism destination?).

Phase 3: Conducting semi-structured interviews with TO Managers from each wine destination (3 in total) to verify:

- wine tourism position among other priorities in the tourism development strategy performed by TOs (What are tourism and wine tourism potentialities in the TO area?),
- collaboration with wine tourism producers (How many wine producers are the official co-partners of a TO and how many of them collaborate in frame of the label “*Vignobles et Découvertes*”? Is wine tourism important for promoting themselves or the area?),
- design and delivery of wine products and events (Which offers are the most attractive in the season? Which offers are available at the moment?),
- co-shared communication of wine tourism offers (Which wine events/activities do TOs and wine producers promote together and individually?).

5. Results

The exploration research revealed that all three TO territories (*Vienne Condrieu*, *Ardèche Hermitage*, *Rhône Crussol*) consider wine tourism as a strategical priority of destination marketing. All of them are labelled “*Vignobles et Découvertes*”, a national label carried by “*Atout France*” (Atout France, 2020a) which is responsible for promoting France internationally. In the label, *Vienne Condrieu* label is called “*Condrieu Côte-Rôtie*” (Atout France, 2020b), *Ardèche Hermitage* is called “*D’Hermitage en Saint-Joseph*” (Atout France, 2020b) and *Rhône Crussol* is “*De Cornas et Saint-Peray*” (Atout France, 2020b). The names allow to expose and make advantage of having the AOC terroir in their promotion of wine tourism destination. Moreover, it underlines the fame and prestige of the Grand Cru appellations located in the Northern part of Rhone Valley.

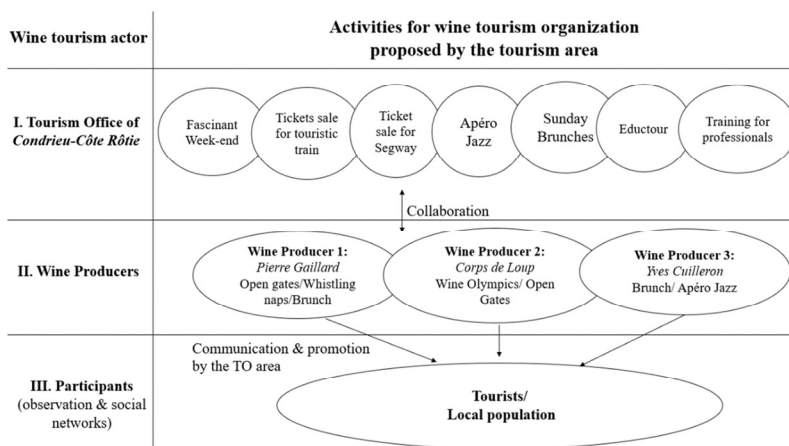
Surprisingly, although the wine destinations from the Northern Rhone have shown similarity in destination marketing through the AOC, their

wine offerings much vary and the models of wine tourism collaboration vary. While the cases of wine producers from the *Vienne Condrieu* and the *Rhône Crussol* destination claimed that they do not need to perform wine tourism, the *Ardeche Hermitage* producers declared that it is essential to contribute to the performances of wine tourism destination. The interview with the Manager of the latter destination has revealed the reasons. It is because of the Crozes-Hermitage appellation in which there are many young, small and unknown producers which need to develop the business in general, and wine tourism is for them a perfect tool of increasing brand awareness on local markets. So, it turned out that the appellation size and profile (including production and hectares) influence the potential of wine tourism performance.

5.1. Collaborative Performance of the Vienne – Condrieu Destination

Wine tourism in the area is based on three AOC: Côte-Rotie, Condrieu, the northern part of St-Joseph as well as on the Vitis Vienna appellation project. All of the main actions supporting wine tourism have been initiated around 10 years ago by the public administrations. At that time the goal was to promote three wine appellations (Côte-Rotie, Condrieu, St-Joseph) in collaboration with wine producers and other tourism actors (accommodations, restaurants, touristic sites etc.). The TO is an integrator of wine tourism and has been working with producers on wine activities intensively. Usually, they are performed by wine events and aim at attracting local groups from Lyon (small friends’ groups, touristic groups, local communities).

Figure 2
Wine tourism offerings in the Vienne – Condrieu destination



The TO of *Condrieu Côte-Rôtie* has plenty of actions just dedicated to wine tourism development and a fully-time Manager responsible only for that. As a tourist office worker, he does all activities related with wine tourism communication & marketing and as a special person dedicated to wine tourism, he also takes care of programming, organization and reservations for the co-shared wine events that take place at wineries. So, in the frame of the dedicated activities of TOs for wine tourism the following can be pointed out (Fig. 2):

- a) tickets sale for a tourist train: visiting vineyards and tasting at different winemakers
- b) ticket sale for Segway (reservations and sales of tickets)
- c) “*Jazz à Vienne*”: organizing a lot of small e.g., “*Apéro Jazz*” events in a big event
- d) Sunday Brunches: an open system of having brunches with wine tasting at the winery (to offer something on the “close” Sundays in the summer season)
- e) “*Eductour*” for professionals (organization of the study tours for winemakers and wine tourism makers from the area to get a better “know-how” of benchmarks of Europe)
- f) training for professional: workshops for staff working in the wine-related service, e.g.: English lessons for winemakers.

5.2. Collaborative Performance of the Ardèche Hermitage Destination

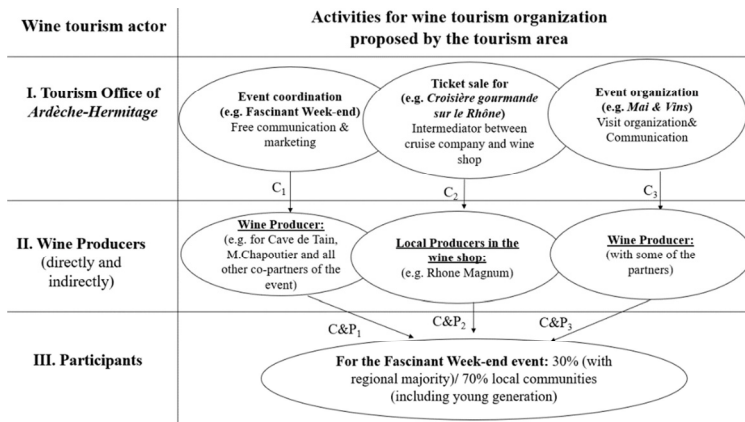
First priority of Ardèche Hermitage area concerns wine tourism. Wine destination is based on three famous wine-growing areas (Hermitage, Crozes-Hermitage and Saint-Joseph) what brings well-known recognition in France and even promotion at the international market. But in order to be able to co-work with the large wineries such as the Cave de Tain or M. Chapoutier, Managers of TOs have to offer unique competences that allow them to animate collaboration. Wineries with dedicated people and facilities to wine tourism are usually self-sufficient in performing wine tourism and so also more demanding in collaboration with a public-govern organization. In contrary, small and medium wineries in the Ardèche Hermitage destination are very innovative in creating wine experiences but do not have time or human resources to become more competitive.

The Ardèche Hermitage TO offers a large list of wine events especially during the summer, e.g., “*Di’Vin clair de Lune*” in the Tournon Castle, tastings with winemakers and lounge music for the “*Fascinant week-end*”. The first task of the TO for performing “*Fascinant week-end*” is to coordinate all the imagined animations proposed by winemakers, wine shops and touristic sites and make promotion in brochures, radio ads and journals, etc.

Secondly, the TO secures PR actions by inviting and welcoming wine journalist to the destination, and bringing them to meet winemakers. The relationship with the press and media is extra competence of wine marketing in the area and is more active than in the others.

The third key element of the Ardèche Hermitage' collaboration model is to be an intermediate between wine professionals. A good example is to do meetings arrangement between a wine shop and a boat company for wine tasting while taking boat sailing at the sunset called “*Croisière gourmande sur le Rhône*”). In this case, the TO also sells tickets for the product.

Figure 3
Wine tourism offerings in the Ardèche Hermitage destination



Legend:

C₁₋₃ – Collaboration,

C&P₁₋₃ – Communication & promotion.

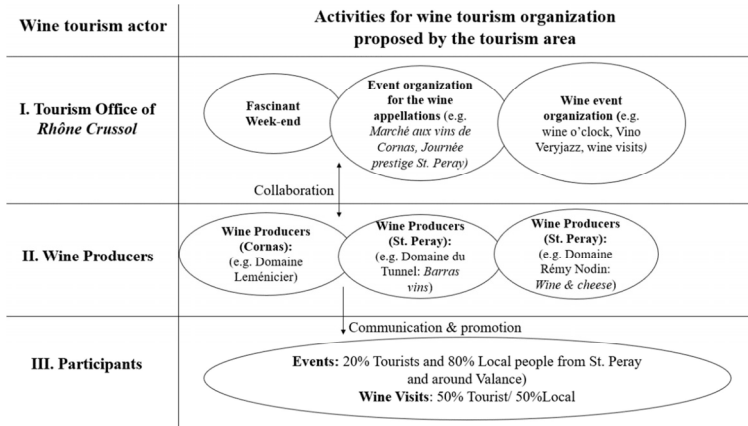
5.3. Collaborative Performance of the Rhône Crussol Destination

The TO area covers two main appellations: *Cornas* and *St-Peray* and the southern part of *St. Joseph*. But most of the wineries are small producers (average *Cornas* producers possess between 1 and 4 hectares of vineyards and the same for *St. Peray* even if some of them have more hectares) and there is none as large as is the *M. Chapoutier* from the Ardèche Hermitage.

Nevertheless, wine tourism is a very important competence in both meanings, by immersion with the events organized around the castle and by having an individual wine experience at the wineries. Both parts of wine tourism delivery are actively supported by the TO and developed through the following actions (Fig. 4):

- a) “Fascinate week-end” (TO is a moderator of all the actions: propose, stimulate and co-organize events with the wineries),
- b) Event organization dedicated for wine appellations (promotion & communication of “Journée prestige” – the event is co-organized with the brotherhood of *St. Peray* wine producers; and communication and organization of the “Marche aux vins de cornas” for *Cornas*).
- c) Wine events organization during the summer (tasting in the *Château de Crussol*, *Vino Veryjazz*, wine o'clock).

Figure 4
Wine tourism offerings in the Rhône Crussol destination



The wine producers from the destination are more known in the local wine consumer perception in terms of producing red Syrah from the slopes of Cornas and the sparkling wine of St. Peray than in wine tourism offerings. For that reason, they need more animation from their TO. Some of them have already developed few events, a wine shop in the town and cottages in the vineyard but it is not enough for developing a wine tourism destination. For the Managers of the area the greatest tourism and wine tourism proposals are based on the leisure and event activities around the Château de Crussol. It is mainly due to the fact that the majority of customers participating in the events (80%) are local people (from and around Valence) for whom the Château de Crussol is a very recognizable icon.

6. Theoretical Contributions and Managerial Implications

The study is a new proposal for researching the destination marketing performances which are, however, embedded in the specific context of wine destination management and wine tourism marketing. It offers the approach of collaborative performance of wine tourism destination which contributes to the two literature mainstreams: relational governance of wine tourism (Pechlaner et al., 2012; Festa et al., 2015; Fyall et al., 2012; Guedes, 2022) and performances of wine tourism marketing (Williams, 2001; Pinto & Kastholz, 2011).

The destination stakeholder theory speaks of an increase of destination competitiveness and awareness when mutual relationships between destination stakeholders and DMOs are well-understood (d'Angella & Go, 2009) and a broad stakeholders' involvement into marketing actions is observed (Festa et al., 2015; Lewis et al., 2015). Collaborative performance

specifies that the relationship can be even more successful in performances when DMOs (French TO) are able to provide a well-balanced collaboration with small and large wineries by knowing that the previous are capable to deliver customized wine experiences and the latter can be brand creators and visitors captures.

The paper contributes also to discussions of wine tourism marketing and branding. It has been already discovered that using the appellation marketing (called region-of-origin) is not sufficient to get an increasing interest of wine tourists and being successful in wine sales at the place (Hamlin & Watson, 1997; Bruwer, 2014). The study has explored that while it is essential to educate tourists of an appellation system which may enhance building a successful collective wine branding (e.g., AOC Hermitage for the *Ardèche Hermitage* destination), yet it does not develop an attractiveness of wine tourism offerings, which can be applied through defining key competences in collaborative marketing.

Due to the study period that took place during the Covid times, the research did not include any valuation of tourists' perception that could determinate the wine tourism attractivity of the Northern Rhone Valley from the consumer point of view. Yet, there can be drawn important implications for the wine destination stakeholders. Since the research was contextualized by the local aspects of managing the specific wine destination in the Northern Rhone Valley, collaboration between the DMOs (Tourism Offices) and wine producers can be divided into two groups: with large and small wineries, and it can be improved by the following applications:

- large wineries should enforce a TO's destination image: if a famous producer is located within the destination territory, it should increase the popularity of the area,
- large producers can create professional wine tourism products on a greater scale, so they should be recommended for bigger events and touristic groups,
- for large producers with facilities an organization of wine tourism products and activities does not require as much effort and assistance by TOs as for a small producer with no human resources for that,
- the advantage of wine activities performed by small producers is a possibility to have direct, open conversation with winemakers and customized experience,
- small producer' offers allow to alternate wine tourism (there are customers who expect to discover unknown producers in the atmosphere),
- evolution of wine tourism can happen only if both, small and large producers can adapt to the emerging expectations of wine tourists.

Furthermore, Managers of TOs have mentioned that collaborative performances in both dimensions, product creation and marketing, should be practiced in order to face the challenges of future wine tourism dynamics. Furthermore, wine tourism managers should take into consideration that:

- Wine tourism management should be integrated with respect to main missions of each of the public and business wine tourism structures. For a TO the main target is to attract people in general (public service without business orientation) and assist to make business for wine producers, whereas the objective of wine producers is primarily to increase wine sale and revenues. So, the two seemingly different visions have to find original ideas for promoting wine tourism on the collective level represented by TOs and individual level represented by wine producers.
- Building up wine tourism network structures institutionally (by public management) is time-consuming (the example of the TO area of *Vienne Condrieu* where it has taken more than 10 years to improve their wine tourism networking).
- Sometimes wine tourism development is a consequence of the bottom-up movement (wine business management), which is visible in the *Ardèche Hermitage* area where wine tourism was primarily inspired and dynamized by wine producers themselves.
- It is not obvious that the large structures are more active in performing wine tourism because, as two pieces of evidence have shown (e.g., *Corps de Loup* and *Domaine Pradelle*) that small wineries can be effective in wine tourism either. But the two types of wine tourism business cannot be compared in terms of returns and revenues numbers.

7. Conclusions

In the Northern Rhone Valley, there was not found a universal model of collaborative performance for wine tourism destination from the Northern Rhone Valley.

There is no one collaborative destination performance that can served as a role model, but in reality, it depends on how collaboration is managed by the DMO. What was observed in the area of *Ardèche Hermitage* cannot be transferred to the other two researched destinations and the other way round. For instance, the strategy of the *Vienne Condrieu* as well *Rhône Crussol* is much more focused on wine events, whereas the *Ardèche Hermitage* is to develop wine products. Nevertheless, some small inspirations can be taken from one area to another. For instance, the *Ardèche Hermitage* TO is going to re-think their support service for small wineries, otherwise they are not able to be active in wine tourism (the *Vienne Condrieu* example is a great inspiration for its application). Conversely, the *Rhône Crussol* and *Vienne Condrieu* can adopt the orientation on international tourism groups and work on extending possibilities for accommodation.

Therefore, each of the collaboration models should be assessed in relation to the individual stage of destination performance of wine tourism marketing and wine tourism products. The researched destination can be distinguished by the following final conclusions:

- (1) In two destinations of the *Vienne Condrieu* and *Rhône Crussol*, wine tourism is dominated by the active role of TOs. It brings about, however, a need to delegate a special TO Manager who is able to develop communication, reservation and organization of a wine tourism network. A slightly different phenomenon was identified in the approach of the TO of *Ardèche Hermitage* where wine tourism has been developing as the natural process of wine business evolution.
- (2) Collaboration and co-working with large producers are more efficient for the image of wine destination and professional wine experiences, while small producers are capable to enrich their wine tourism offer by its potential of proposing creative and individual wine experiences as well as giving an opportunity to have a direct contact with a wine-maker. Both wine experiences are complementary and necessary to alternate in the wine destination marketing in order to deliver a complex offer.

Declaration of Conflicting Interests

The authors declared no potential conflicts of interest with respect to the research, authorship, and publication of this article.

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Beyond the Digital Transformation in Omnichannel Transitions: A Scoping Review

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Abstract

Purpose: We aim to grasp the various facets of shifts towards omnichannel and identify the gaps uncovered by extant scholarship

Design/methodology/approach: The research approach is based on a scoping review to investigate the scope of literature on omnichannel transition. Promising avenues for future research were outlined based on the qualitative analysis of extant research.

Findings: Based on the scoping review, we identified and proposed further avenues of research. The first avenue explored what makes the transition from single channel to omnichannel a gradual process or

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an immediate shift rooted in managerial cognition. The second avenue was exploring the transformation process towards omnichannel from the perspective of a strategy-as-practice lens.

Research limitations/implications: The research is based on secondary sources. Further research and empirical studies are needed to confirm our findings.

Originality/value: We identified the need to address omnichannel transition and transformation separately in further research. We shed some light on these two areas by proposing the cognition perspective and strategy-as-practice theory as theoretical frameworks.

Keywords: omnichannel, e-commerce, research agenda, managerial cognition, strategy-as-practice.

JEL: L81

Transformacje w kierunku omnichannel – przegląd literatury

Streszczenie

Cel: celem artykułu jest identyfikacja luk badawczych związanych z charakterem i typem procesów transformacyjnych w ewolucji z pojedynczego kanału w kierunku omnichannel.

Metodologia: podejście badawcze opiera się na przeglądzie literatury w celu identyfikacji luk badawczych w zakresie transformacji omnichannel.

Wnioski: zidentyfikowaliśmy i zaproponowaliśmy dalsze kierunki badań. Pierwszy z nich dotyczy tego, co sprawia, że przejście od pojedynczego kanału do omnichannel jest procesem stopniowym lub natychmiastową zmianą zakorzenioną w menedżerskim postrzeganiu tego procesu. Drugim kierunkiem było zbadanie procesu transformacji w kierunku omnichannel z perspektywy strategii jako praktyki.

Ograniczenia badań/implikacje: badanie opiera się na źródłach wtórnych. Potrzebne są dalsze badania i studia empiryczne, aby pogłębić zaproponowane kierunki badań.

Oryginalność: zidentyfikowaliśmy potrzebę oddzielnego adresowania w dalszych badaniach transformacji i tranzycji omnichannel. Zaproponowaliśmy perspektywę poznawczą i teorię strategii jako praktyki w charakterze ram teoretycznych, które mogą zostać wykorzystane w dalszej eksploracji tego tematu.

Słowa kluczowe: omnichannel, e-commerce, agenda badawcza, poznanie menedżerskie, strategia jako praktyka.

1. Introduction

Rapid technological development (Taufik et al., 2021), changes in consumers' behaviors (Duarte et al., 2018) accelerated by COVID-19 (Euromonitor International, 2020), and increased customers' expectations (Chang & Li, 2022) are the main drivers that caused the shift observed recently in the retail industry, which prompts scholars to approach channel integration with multiple research perspectives and makes studies in the field flourish intensively. Those shifts bring several challenges that need to be addressed by the companies as they struggle with the growing value of customer retention (Cambra-Fierro et al., 2021; Yin et al., 2022) and the growing number of data needed to be analyzed as a result of increasing range of customer's touchpoints (Quach et al., 2022). Thus, applying an omnichannel strategy seems one of the alternatives to respond to those shifts

and challenges (Thaichon et al., 2022) as multichannel shopping becomes the so-called “new normal” (McKinsey&Company, 2021a).

The omnichannel concept is highly impacted by digital transformation and represents one of the stages of retail evolution (Park et al., 2021), where an omnichannel is an alternative to a multi-channel (Popa et al., 2019). Recently, the evolution of marketing channels in retailing has been gaining increased attention among researchers, as it has been accelerated by the growing digitalization of firms that were forced by pandemics to be present online (OECD, 2020), mainly due to customers’ pressure to increase the availability and consistency of online channels (Deloitte, 2020). Thus, the need to integrate the online-offline shopping ecosystem (Kantar, 2020) forced the companies to transform their processes and systems (Park & Yoo, 2022). The omnichannel shift is a transition between channels made by adding new functionalities and availabilities, where the omnichannel is treated as the next level of channel integration (Hajdas et al., 2022). However, the graduality of omnichannel shifts and the antecedences of decisions related to the pace of the omnichannel transition require further studies.

Even though scholars have often related omnichannel with digital transformation, investigating the omnichannel as an outcome of digital transformation must consider continuous navigation within a dynamic digital landscape. The omnichannel transition should be investigated not only within the digital scope of triggers or enablers but also more perceptual standpoint where various mindsets (described sometimes as so-called “silo mentality”) (Hübner et al., 2016; Picot-Coupey et al., 2016; Rouziès et al., 2005), strategy misalignment (Lewis et al., 2014) and inconsistency (Ye et al., 2018) are examined. As an omnichannel is a profound mental shift, it is worth exploring how it differs from other forms of channel integration and what routines or practices are used to implement such change. Although various issues have already been uncovered in the technology area, the literature on omnichannel transition change agents, their perception, and mentality is scarce (Costa Climent et al., 2022). Previous research on omnichannel transition revealed that integral and holistic approaches to implementing omnichannel operations are missing (Iglesias-Pradas et al., 2022). In fact, the transition to an omnichannel strategy should not be investigated using the standpoint of simply adding up additional channels, but instead aimed to understand the depth of technological, organisational, and mindset changes (Mirsch et al., 2016). Thus, the change transfers are more multi-level and cannot be investigated separately (Burton-Jones & Gallivan, 2007; Volkoff et al., 2007).

Constantly evolving digital business ecosystems bring the need to reshape the research following the dynamic surroundings (Hanelt et al., 2021), and instead of an episodic paradigm, use the continuous paradigm where organizations are seen as constantly adapting structures (Weick & Quinn, 1999). Even though the digital transformation is based on disruptions, their frequency and the lasting time are triggered and shaped by so many external factors (Garud et al.,

2020; Warner & Wäger, 2019) that it results in the need to adopt contextual conditions into the transformation examination (Hanelt et al., 2021).

We argue that although extant scholars have targeted various research themes within the omnichannel concept, what needs to be added is the perspective where the frameworks of transitions are addressed in research. We believe it's worth searching for the answer to the following research question: *How to address the omnichannel transition in further research?* In this paper, we aim to grasp theoretical lenses for exploring the omnichannel transition and identify the gaps that extant scholarship has uncovered. We want to reassess the existing understanding of channel transition as it is neither static nor single-dimensional. To accomplish the goal, we use a scoping review to collect and analyze the prominent research themes in the literature, and based on our analysis, we develop a comprehensive research agenda.

2. Method

This work adopts a scoping literature review to identify characteristics of omnichannel themes related to transition issues that could be an interesting topic of future research. We decided to use a scoping review because it is a valuable method for searching for characteristics related to a particular concept (Munn et al., 2018). It is also used to map the literature available in a specific field regarding its extent, range, and nature of research activity (Arksey & O'Malley, 2005). The scoping literature review is an appropriate solution when we try to assess the potential size and scope of available research literature (Grant & Booth, 2009). According to Peters and coauthors (2015), a scoping review can be applied when researchers want to identify research gaps and make recommendations for future research, which was our goal for this paper. As Arksey and O'Malley (2005) pointed out, the scoping literature review is not linear but iterative and requires researchers to engage at each step with reflexivity. The iterative approach means that some steps should be repeated, if necessary, to ensure that the literature is covered in a comprehensive way (Arksey & O'Malley, 2005).

2.1. Research Protocol

The main aim of the research was to determine the trends in omnichannel themes related to transition issues. We developed our research protocol with three main phases to conduct a scoping literature review.

During the *Identification phase*, we purposefully used only one database: Scopus, to locate papers finally used in this study. We decided to use only the Scopus database because it provides a broader coverage of scientific resource collections and has better metrics than other academic databases (Pranckutė, 2021). The approach in which only the Scopus database was used to conduct the literature review has been recently recommended by other authors (e.g., Andrews et al., 2023; Bastarianto et al., 2023; Vaishya et al., 2023). In our

study, we were interested in the latest trends in publications on omnichannel themes related to transition issues, so we decided to analyze the past five years. As a consequence of this approach, we used data from January 1, 2019 to October 31, 2023. We have investigated the transition from traditional forms of commerce to omnichannel. Following this the thread, we searched the Scopus database for publications where the word omnichannel and words including “trans” appear in the title, abstract, or keywords. We selected only publications in English. We managed to choose 260 publications meeting the above criteria.

In the phase of *Screening and eligibility*, we aimed at revealing only the newly explored themes. Thus, we focused on the latest published papers. However, it turned out that the collection of 260 publications contains works on, for example, transfer or transportation that were irrelevant to investigating the omnichannel concept. Thus, we narrowed the collection to articles containing the words “omnichannel” and “transi”. This step made it possible to select 36 articles related to the topic of transitions in the omnichannel context.

In the last phase (*final selection*), we included papers available as downloaded full-text articles. Of the 36 articles, 24 were available in the Scopus database as downloaded full-text articles. The remaining 12 articles were not available in the database as downloaded full-text. So, in the final phase, we have carefully investigated the 24 downloaded articles. We decided to take this step because we wanted to identify the research trends in omnichannel themes related to transition, and we believe that such exploration is provided by full-text articles rather than relying on abstracts only.

Table 1 summarizes the literature review process described.

Table 1
Conducting the review – data collection and selection

		Number of papers
Identification	Database search Database: Scopus Keywords: <i>omnichannel</i> , <i>trans</i> * Searched in Title, abstract, and keywords Selection criteria: English, published in journals articles, conference proceedings,	260
Screening and eligibility	Relevance Removal of papers that are not relevant to the subject of the article. Narrowing the collection to articles containing the word omnichannel and words including “ <i>transi</i> ” Removal of 224 papers	36
Final selection	Final number of papers included in the in-depth study Only the ones that have been successfully downloaded from the Scopus database	24

3. Results

We have investigated the selected papers carefully to identify valuable research inspirations. Researchers discussed diversified themes starting from the debate about marketing transformation practices, focusing on conceptual evidence of omnichannel marketing activities (Akgün & Celep, 2021). Other authors proposed a concept of a mental model integrating channel integration, customer experience generation, and economic value creation as three critical objectives in omnichannel management (Cakir, 2020). More recent papers outlined social media growth as a context of transforming the customer's journey, and social networking has been discussed as the driving factor behind the evolution of retail and customer behavior (Mittal et al., 2022). The study of Syaglova et al. (2022) investigated the evolution of marketing tools aimed at transforming customer experience and the digital transition of companies in various industries to address the arising challenges. Finally, Davis-Sramek et al. (2020) identified the sequence and rationale of different strategic and structural shifts in retailers' omnichannel strategy. By comparing their findings from analyzing several case studies, the authors revealed how the transitions take place, their driving factors, and why they differ across the stages of omnichannel shift.

In Table 2, we summarize the most noteworthy research perspectives and areas explored by the researchers.

Table 2

Most noteworthy research perspectives and research areas

Research perspective	Research areas explored	Sample references
Marketing transformation practices	transition from traditional marketing to digital marketing	Akgün & Celep (2021)
Retail industry transformation process, omnichannel retailing, and trade-offs in objectives	mental model arranging three critical objectives in omnichannel management: channel integration, customer experience generation, and economic value creation	Cakir (2020)
Transition from an offline focused retailer to an omnichannel	process of transformation toward omnichannel retail and the development of innovative solutions for transferring customer experience provided in offline retail to online platforms	Cakir et al. (2021)
Transition between touchpoints along the consumer journey to optimize consumers' experience	indicators to measure the extent to which controlled touchpoints are really integrated and oriented toward the consumer	Palazón et al. (2022)

Table 2 cont.

Research perspective	Research areas explored	Sample references
Evolution of transformations in marketing tools for the formation and transformation of customer experience	development of recommendations on the need to transform marketing tools for managing customer experience and digital platforms' characteristic	Syaglova et al. (2022)
Theoretical explanation of the strategic and structural changes occurring in omnichannel retail supply chains as well as consideration of how and why these transitions occurred.	Explanation of the business model transformation of the omnichannel order fulfillment process	Davis-Sramek et al. (2020)

Based on the results of our analysis, we identified two emerging research streams worth exploring further: *omnichannel transitions* and *omnichannel transformations*. By “transition” we mean the process of changing from one state (of channel integration in our case) to another, whereas by “transformation” we mean the process of internal changes covering a firm’s organizational structures, processes, infrastructure, mindsets, practices, etc. required to obtain a new state (of channel integration in our case). In the following section, we elaborate on *omnichannel transitions* and *omnichannel transformations*. To make our analysis comprehensive, we propose theoretical frameworks that could be used in further studies in both research streams.

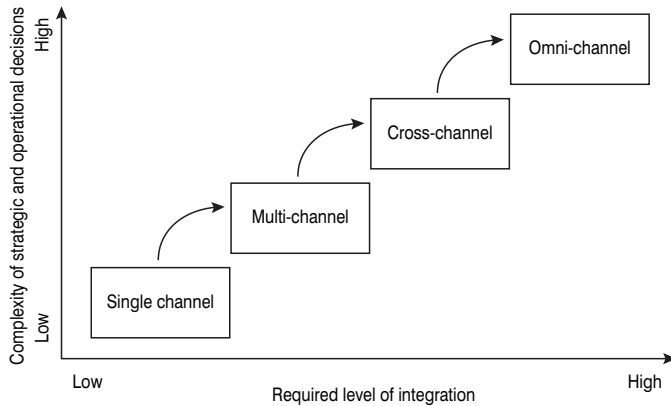
3.1. Omnichannel Transitions

Many scholars have investigated the process of transitions towards omnichannel (Cakir et al., 2021; Neslin, 2022; Ratchford et al., 2022; Reis et al., 2017; Rusanen, 2018; Saha & Bhattacharya, 2020; Salvietti et al., 2022; Stojković et al., 2021; Zimmermann et al., 2022). Hajdas et al. (2022) consider two dimensions: the increasing level of integration required and the growing complexity of managerial decisions (both strategic and operational), presenting the process of channel integration toward omnichannel as an evolution (see Figure 1).

The presented evolution is a step-by-step approach to transitioning from single channel to omnichannel. However, the dilemma arises as to whether this process should gradually move towards omnichannel or whether it should take the form of a direct shift instead (Salvietti et al., 2022). The main question we believe is worth exploring further in this vein is how managers make decisions about the nature of this transition. Future studies could bring managerial cognition as a theoretical framework and an in-depth qualitative inquiry as a research method. Using the cognitive lenses creates an interesting frame to investigate cognitive, affective, and behavioral aspects

of managerial decisions related to transition processes toward omnichannel. It would allow to understand how managerial attention and interpretations of environmental factors impact the channel transition (Yang et al., 2019), how the transition sensemaking process is shaped (Penttilä et al., 2020), and finally – how a firm performance is affected by managerial behaviors (Czakon & Czernek-Marszałek, 2021; Niittymies & Pajunen, 2020).

Figure 1
Evolution of channel integration: transitional approach



Source: Hajdas et al., 2022.

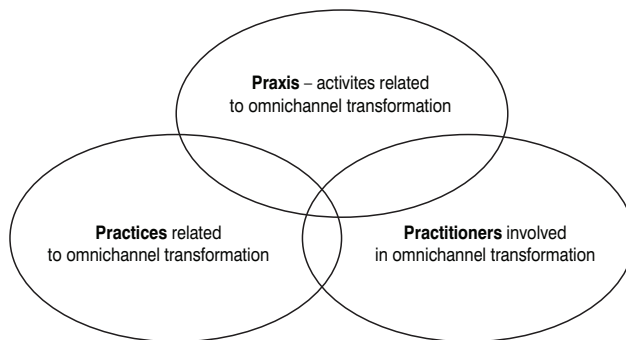
3.2. Omnichannel Transformation

The second theme worth exploring further is the transformation process towards omnichannel transition (Mirsch et al., 2016) once the transitional decision is made. When investigating the transition required for omnichannel adoption, scholars often refer to the concept of digital transformation. Digital transformation is one of the perspectives under organizational transformation studies (vom Brocke et al., 2021; Cha et al., 2015; Eynard & Cherfi, 2020; Mattila et al., 2011). Even though the term “digital transformation” lacks conceptual clarity (Kraus et al., 2021; Vial, 2019), the majority of scholars associate this term with technologically-driven major business improvements (Paavola et al., 2017; Piccinini et al., 2015) including business model transformations (Clohessy et al., 2017; Demirkan et al., 2016; Haffke et al., 2016) or digitization of sales and communication channels (Horlach et al., 2017). Despite the common agreement that technological inputs drive digital transformation (Kraus et al., 2021), scholars point out a broader scope of associated changes required within an organization, namely changes to a leadership structure of an organization (Vial, 2019) with an evolving role of CDO (Hansen & Sia, 2015) or a transformation of the existing processes, activities, and actors (Hagberg et al., 2016).

Scholars highlight that such transformation requires a profound change in technological infrastructure and organizational practices (Hansen & Sia, 2015), including establishing critical partnerships with channel partners, which poses challenges of inter-organizational issues. However, despite seeing such transformations as those that should go beyond the technological realm, scholars suggest CDOs or CIOs as leaders of such transformations (Hansen & Sia, 2015). Canterino and coauthors (2013, p. 59), based on the work of Mitki et al. (2008), claim that “*transformation is always an all-pervading, holistic, and extended process*”. There are many challenges to this process, involving such areas of the organization as strategy, structure, culture, leadership, processing, and personnel (Gallego & Calderón Hernández, 2021; Malhotra & Hinings, 2015). According to Korova (2021, p. 7), the main goal of transformation “*is not just to execute a defined change, but to reinvent the organization and discover a new or revised business model based on a vision for the future*”. The RQs that we think it is worth addressing in this vein are: How managers perceive the depth and the scope of transformation towards omnichannel, how the strategic partnerships are established and maintained, who the change agents in such processes are, what roles they hold, and what their key competencies are? Those questions could shed more light on the issue, especially if the transformation should cover not only technology infrastructure but also the intra-organizational perspective and organizational practices and mindsets.

We argue that those issues could be studied from strategy as practice standpoint (Vaara & Whittington, 2012) (Figure 2).

Figure 2
Evolution of channel integration: transformational approach



Source: based on Lavarda & Bellucci, 2022.

We suggest that future studies elaborate on those issues using the strategy as a practice theoretical lens and an in-depth qualitative inquiry. We believe the strategy as practice creates an interesting theoretical frame to investigate practices, praxis, and practitioners embedded in transformation processes

toward omnichannel management. It allows to go beyond declarations related to strategic intentions of omnichannel or their outcomes and focus rather on strategy as something that people do (Burgelman et al., 2018; Prashantham & Eranova, 2020; Whittington et al., 2017; Whittington & Cailluet, 2008). Following previous studies in organizational transformation, we suggest applying a longitudinal case research approach to investigate this issue.

4. Conclusions

In this paper, we identified the need to address the omnichannel transition and transformation separately in further research. Although much has already been written about the evolution of the channels (Cakir et al., 2021; Hajdas et al., 2022; Neslin, 2022; Ratchford et al., 2022; Reis et al., 2017; Rusanen, 2018; Saha & Bhattacharya, 2020; Salvietti et al., 2022; Stojković et al., 2021; Zimmermann et al., 2022; Watson et al., 2015), still little is known about the graduality of the omnichannel shift and the practices that are embedded within the transformation process. We highlight those two areas by proposing the cognition perspective and strategy-as-practice theory as the theoretical frames for further research. We believe that our work may serve as a trigger in the ongoing debate on channel transformation, as digital advancements bring not only rapid but also fundamental challenges that need to be addressed by companies (i.e., the discussion on how ChatGPT will transform the retail, Toumazou, 2022) and studying two facets of omnichannel shift – transition and transformation may help to understand the underlying mechanisms of managerial decisions and adopted practices. We propose applying two approaches towards the omnichannel shift: managerial decisions (analyzed within the cognitive frame) to investigate the antecedences of choice between gradual or rapid transition and practices adopted to implement the omnichannel shift seen as multilevel and comprehensive transformation (strategy-as-practice frame).

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Redesigning the Employer Value Proposition in Times of Crisis

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Abstract

Purpose: The purpose of the paper was to explore how the largest companies in Poland responded to the changing socio-political situation (the COVID-19 pandemic, the war in Ukraine, the inflation) in their employer branding communication, with potential candidates for jobs, especially in the aspect of their Employer Value Proposition (EVP) building.

Methodology: The research examined whether the 50 biggest Polish enterprises changed their external employer branding communication via their web pages between 2019 and 2023. In the study, the online content analysis technique was used to review “Career” and relevant web pages.

Findings: The presentation of changing expectations of candidates, as well as analysis of the content of the entrepreneurs’ web pages lead to the conclusion that not many Polish enterprises have changed their Employer Value Proposition (EVP) in the last four years to adjust to expectations of potential employees (about 30% in the sample), although, due to their scale of operation their marketing budgets are probably higher than in the case of the rest of the market. There may be many reasons behind that situation, including the specificity of different industries, as well as unpredictability, and suddenness of changes in their environment. The expectations of employees have changed significantly in the last four years, due to COVID-19 and some political and economic occurrences, and the process has not finished yet. Consequently, the situation in the labor market is dynamic, although, as observed, some companies react expeditiously to meet the expectations of potential employees.

Research limitations: In the case of the study, the employer branding communication channels analysis was limited only to web pages and communication with external audiences, although, web pages and the “Career” bookmarks are indicated by Polish employers as one of the most frequently used tools to communicate with candidates. Another problem can be identified when any overall assumptions are made in the area of employer branding. The companies chosen for the study operate in different sectors and the specification of their performance and situation in the labor markets they target is different.

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Originality/value: The paper contributes to the discussion on employer branding in Poland. The topic is extensive and provides many opportunities for analyses conducted from various perspectives.

Keywords: employer brand, employer branding, Employer Value Proposition (EVP), crisis.

JEL: M3

Zmiany w propozycji wartości pracowniczych w kryzysie

Streszczenie

Cel: celem artykułu było zbadanie, w jaki sposób największe firmy w Polsce zareagowały na zmieniającą się sytuację społeczno-polityczną (pandemia COVID-19, wojna w Ukrainie, inflacja) w swojej komunikacji employer brandingowej z potencjalnymi kandydatami do pracy, szczególnie w aspekcie budowania propozycji wartości pracowniczych (EVP).

Metodologia: badaniem objęto 50 największych polskich przedsiębiorstw i przeanalizowano, w jaki sposób w latach 2019–2023 zmieniła się ich zewnętrzna komunikacja employer brandingowa realizowana poprzez strony internetowe, np. w zakładkach „Kariera”. W badaniu wykorzystano technikę analizy treści publikowanych online.

Wnioski: prezentacja zmieniających się oczekiwań kandydatów, a także analiza treści stron internetowych przedsiębiorców prowadzi do wniosku, że niewiele polskich przedsiębiorstw zmieniło w ciągu ostatnich czterech lat swoją propozycję wartości pracowniczych (EVP), aby dostosować się do oczekiwań potencjalnych pracowników (około 30% w próbie), choć ze względu na skalę działania ich budżety marketingowe są prawdopodobnie wyższe niż w przypadku reszty rynku. Powodów takiej sytuacji może być wiele. Najważniejszymi wydają się specyfika różnych branż, a także nieprzewidywalność i nagłość zmian w otoczeniu. Oczekiwania pracowników zmieniły się znacząco w ciągu ostatnich czterech lat, ze względu na COVID-19 oraz niektóre wydarzenia polityczne i gospodarcze, i ciągle jeszcze podlegają zmianom. W konsekwencji sytuacja na rynku pracy jest dynamiczna i, jak zaobserwowano, są firmy, które szybko reagują na oczekiwania potencjalnych pracowników, i są w stanie dostosowywać swoje propozycje wartości pracowniczych (EVP) do zachodzących zmian.

Ograniczenia badania: w przypadku niniejszego badania analiza kanałów komunikacji employer brandingowej została ograniczona jedynie do stron internetowych i komunikacji z odbiorcami zewnętrznymi, choć strony internetowe i zakładki „Kariera” są wskazywane przez polskich pracodawców jako jedno najczęściej wykorzystywanych narzędzi komunikacji z potencjalnymi pracownikami. Kolejnym problemem jest trudność w uogólnieniach wniosków, analizowane firmy działają w różnych branżach, a specyfika ich funkcjonowania i sytuacji na rynku pracy jest odmienna.

Oryginalność/wartość: artykuł stanowi kolejny głos w dyskusji na temat budowania marki pracodawcy w Polsce. Temat jest bardzo obszerny i daje wiele możliwości analiz prowadzonych z różnych perspektyw.

Słowa kluczowe: marka pracodawcy, budowanie marki pracodawcy, propozycja wartości pracowniczych (EVP), kryzys.

1. Introduction

In times of uncertainty, when the world is still recovering from the COVID-19 pandemic and needs to face several problems that have occurred due to the situation in Ukraine, expectations of employees and customers towards brands have changed. The whole world was forced to transition towards an unknown and unpredictable future that has affected many aspects of societies' functioning.

The research indicates that in a turbulent environment, people tend to look at how companies react and their perception of the actions undertaken by organizations directly determines their attitude towards them and their offers (Maurer, 2020; Mendy et al., 2020). Internet and the development of available forms of communication have affected a wide range of aspects of marketing performance. It provided marketers with the means to adjust communication to the expectations of customers on a scale never available before. At the same time, customers by using internet sources of information have learned how to collect information, where it can be verified, and where to find people sharing the same problems or searching for answers to the same questions.

The basic assumption behind any marketing approach is to provide customers with what they expect and react to changes in their expectations. Among many others, one of the areas of interest of marketing is employer branding which helps to create the desired image of an organization and its employers among society, investors, potential employees, and people employed at the moment.

2. Interpretation of Employer Branding

Employer branding is a reflection of the approach towards employers and potential employers as customers of organizations expressed at the end of the XX century by authors introducing and researching the concepts of relationship marketing and internal marketing as its integral element that assures the effectiveness of overall marketing strategies (for example (Groonross, 2000; Otto, 2004). At the beginning of the XXI century, the concept was developed intensively by researchers as well as practitioners who started to introduce it in their HR efforts to increase the effectiveness of recruitment, by making the presentation of an organization as an employer more attractive to potential employees. Effective employer marketing affects three main groups of organization's stakeholders: employees, clients, and investors who expect unique, inspiring, personalized values (Wojtaszczyk, 2010). It determines decisions of potential employees and helps in talent acquisition (Aaker, 2002; Ciscio & Graham, 2016). It also influences morale, helps in the onboarding procedure of new employees, and affects many aspects of work life (Sokro, 2012; Sakka, 2020) by building an identifiable and unique employer identity to differentiate from competitors (Backhaus & Tikoo, 2004). It has been proven that people who work for employers with a recognizable and positive image are more effective (Kunerth & Mosley, 2011; Yalim & Mizrak, 2017; Staniec & Kula, 2021).

Employer branding is strongly related to and connected with many aspects of an organization's functioning, so only performance based on the integration of different departments when it is designed, instead of leaving it only under HR departments supervision, can produce more lasting and far-reaching results (Kozłowski, 2016). The interrelations are very strong and interdependent and

they influence not only clients’ decisions but also decisions of other groups of stakeholders (Mosley, 2007; Sehgal & Malati, 2013; Abdullah et al., 2017). Brands perceived as strong, innovative, prestigious, and modern influence the perception of an organization among potential employees who would search for attributes of strong brands in job offers (Dąbrowska, 2014). Thus, employer branding should not be interpreted separately from the organization’s brand and its products’ brands. Still, only about 30% of the biggest Polish companies combine their employer branding strategies with the promotion of products’ brands what indicates that the potential of that synergy is not fully recognized even by large companies (HRM Institute, 2023)

There are different approaches towards employer branding and it is perceived from many perspectives (Table 1) but the core in the case of each definition remains the same – the key to successful employer branding is to react to changing expectations of target groups.

Table 1
Different approaches towards the concept of employer branding

		Models of Employer Branding		
		Outside-in (external EB)	Inside-out (internal EB)	Corporation brand (EB internal + external)
Models		Model by Backhaus, Tikoo; Model by Martin; Model by Moosley	Model by Wilden, Gudergan, Lings; Model by Miles, Mangold	Vision-Culture-Image Model; Model by Hatch, Schultz; Model by Aggerholm, Andersen, Thomasen
Main goals of the approach and characteristic		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Unique identity of the employer, • Brand recognition, • Positive perception of the brand, • Brand loyalty. In the situation when organizations must court employees/ talents, employers are perceived through their brand perception.	The brand of the employer is perceived as a result of service quality, organizational culture, social acceptance, level of wages, benefits offered, prestige, recruitment procedures, etc. – so all the internal procedures influence the perception of a business as an employer. Employees are internal consumers of the company.	Combination of internal and external branding.

Source: Backhouse & Tikoo, 2004; Szafrński et al., 2009; from: Łazorko, 2019, p. 19.

The models presented in Table 1 are divided depending on the groups of factors that influence employer branding strategies. Outside-in models focus on external factors that affect employer branding strategies, inside-out ones analyze internal factors that affect the brand, and corporation brands are related to the overall brand of employer creation (Dąbrowska, 2014).

Discussing different aspects of employer branding the concept of employer value proposition (EVP) arises. It can be defined as a strategy of managing employees with a unique set of benefits employees receive in exchange for their services. It is a core of the employer branding message affected by society, the organization's values, initiative, environment, reward, and talent programs (Benazić & Ruzić, 2023). EVP should be shared within an organization and communicate emotive and discerning benefits to current and potential employees (Pawar, 2016). In the process of EVP sharing and overall employer branding, the role of employees is crucial. They are a target market and at the same time act as brand members, advocates, co-creators, representatives, and influencers (Kozłowski, 2016; Näppä et al., 2023). The EVP and generally employer branding should respond to the needs and expectations of present and potential employees and highlight the elements that are important to the audiences, to enable the perception of an organization as an employer caring about the needs and expectations of employees.

The creation of a positive image as an employer should include specific measures to be undertaken in critical moments of the organization's functioning or problems that occur in the closer or further environment of a business. Employees observe how employers react to crises and as a result, they form their own opinion about the employer. That is why it is so important to observe and follow the tendencies in the environment, as well as communicate internally and externally the efforts and measures undertaken to solve problems or to overcome the effects of a crisis.

3. Changing Expectations Towards Employers

In the case of employer branding, the same path is followed as in the case of external clients. Recognition of expectations is key. Thus, before designing content that would attract potential employees and be attractive to people who are employed at the moment, organizations should have a closer look at the expectations of the potential and present personnel. There is some research conducted by different types of entities operating in the labor market regarding changing expectations toward employers that have taken place as a result of the pandemic and political disturbances.

The American "Inside Employees Minds Study" revealed that expectations towards employers have changed significantly recently due to the pandemic, the war in Ukraine, and economic problems related to inflation. As the authors of the report point out, it is not possible anymore

to return to the pre-pandemic mindset in the area of human resources or employer branding, because the whole range of aspects related to them have changed. First of all, expectations of employees are different (Table 2), and the change is significant and sudden. Moreover, the general attitude towards work has changed. "It's clear more than ever that employees are not living to work – they're working to live" (Mercer, 2022, p. 5).

Table 2
Shifts in workers' needs

	2021	2022
1	Physical health and fitness	Covering monthly expenses
2	Workload/life balance	Being able to retire
3	Mental/emotional health	Workload/life balance
4	Personal fulfillment & purpose	Physical health and fitness
5	Being able to retire	Mental/emotional health
6	Personal safety	Personal fulfillment & purpose
7	The pace of life/free time	Job security
8	Personal relationships	Personal debt
9	Covering monthly expenses	The pace of life/free time
10	Job security	Personal safety

Source: Mercer, 2022, p. 11.

The data presented in Table 2 is based on research conducted among American employees but research conducted in Poland also revealed that the level of wages is a main determinant of the decision to change a job, before lack of possibilities for further development. Those two elements played the most significant role also in 2022 (PARP, 2023). In Poland, as the research by HRK indicates, potential employees, especially in groups of professionals, tend to look for offers that would assure a conducive work environment, as well as high income. In case of jobs requiring relocations, localization of a company, facilities such as schools, etc., training programs available, home office, and flexibility are primarily evaluated. According to the cited research, work-life balance is also very important, and even 75% of respondents found that factor as one that could influence their opinion about the potential employer (HRK, 2021).

Moreover, representatives of Gen Z, entering the labor market, indicate the level of wages, followed by flexible working time and a friendly

atmosphere at work as the main determinants of their decision to choose a particular employer (Konkel, 2023; PwC, 2022).

The shift in expectations of employees has been observed for a few years now, and it has directly affected businesses. At the times of the COVID-19 pandemic, as job seekers expected stability and the benefits that could provide them with a sense of stability, and organizations that were led with empathy, prioritizing health and flexibility could observe increasing commitment, productivity, and engagement (HBR, 2021). Due to crises caused by war and inflation, Polish employers have faced a new situation in the area of employment. Growing costs of staff, changing expectations of new generations entering the labor market, and shrinking pools of available talents due to demographic changes have resulted in changes in expectations toward potential candidates making the process of recruitment more demanding (HRM Institute, 2023). At the moment, punctuality, self-organization skills, easiness of learning, and creativity are declared by employers as the most desirable qualities of job applicants (PARP, 2022). Most businesses perceive wage level and benefits just before working atmosphere as the most important attributes of an employer's brand in the process of talent acquisition (HRM Institute, 2023).

4. Method

The research was conducted to examine whether the biggest Polish enterprises had changed their external employer branding communication conducted via their web pages between 2019 and 2023, and to what extent the content of their "Career" or related web pages was adjusted to the changes of potential employers' expectations as a consequence the crisis caused by the COVID-19 and its outcomes, and other challenging situations that have occurred just recently.

In the study, the online content analysis technique was used because it was proven to be stable and possible to be applied in dynamic environment (McMillian, 2000), moreover it enabled comparison of research results from 2019 and 2023. Following the procedures presented by Mc Millian (2000), the following research question was formulated: How and if the biggest Polish companies changed their external employer branding messages communicated through their "Career" web pages or related ones between 2019 and 2023.

The research was conducted on 50 biggest Polish enterprises (listed by Wprost in 2019). The corpus for the research was chosen this way, mainly due to the largest budgets of the companies, including marketing budgets¹, as well as the fact that they represent very different industries what could enable generalization of the results to some extent, although the sample was statistically random, it has been a common problem reported by scientists conducting research online (for example by Herring, 2010).

Comparison of the research was possible because in 2019 the author conducted similar research to indicate main elements communicated by the

biggest Polish enterprises at that time. Then, the following research questions were formulated: 1. Does the “Career” or relevant site exist? Does it promote job offers? Does it promote innovation of the organization? Are elements related to job safety communicated? Are the training options promoted? Is work stability promoted? Are there any other elements, benefits communicated? The questions were formulated basing on the set of expectations towards employers reported by different research at that time (Łazorko, 2019). The content of the “Career” websites was analyzed, and coded, into a dedicated excel worksheet. The same procedure, following online content analysis was again performed in January 2023 and the key elements were searched for again at the “Career” or relevant web pages of the same group of enterprises to identify the key aspects on which their external employer branding strategy was built to identify changes in the area as well as to examine whether the content was adjusted to the changed expectations of potential employees, as the result of the Covid-19 and its consequences. In 2023 the following research questions were formulated: 1. Does the “Career” or relevant site exist? Does it promote job offers? Does it promote work-life balance? Are elements related to job safety communicated? Is the job flexibility option promoted? Are there training options promoted? Is work stability promoted? Are testimonials used? Are there any other elements, benefits communicated? Again, the results were coded following the McMillian procedure.

5. Results

The key results of the research are presented in the table 3. It illustrates the results of the qualitative analysis of the content that could be found on the “Career” web pages or relevant ones of Polish biggest enterprises.

Table 3
The content of the “Career” bookmarks in 2019 and 2023

1	2019						2023					
	innovation	safety	training	development	stability	others	safety	work-life balance	flexibility	stability	testimonials	others
2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	
<i>PKN Orlen</i>						diversity of employment possibilities		+			+	
<i>PGNiG SA</i>	+										+	B
<i>Lotos</i>			+								+	
<i>PGE</i>						R					+	
<i>PZU</i>	+				+	honesty		+		+		

Table 3 – cont.

	2019						2023					
	innovation	safety	training	development	stability	others	safety	work-life balance	flexibility	stability	testimonials	others
1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13
<i>KGHM</i>		+				responsibility, bravery	+					cooperation with local societies, universities
<i>Tauron</i>						R						mobile newspaper for employees
Enea		+				honesty, responsibility	+					
PGL						-						R
<i>Energa</i>						R						B
<i>PSE</i>						R						B
<i>Azoty</i>				+			+			+		B
JSW		+			+		+			+		
PGG						R						R
<i>LPP</i>						R					+	
Neuca						R						B
<i>Synthos</i>		+	+					+		+	+	
Poczta Polska						R						R
<i>Farmacol</i>						web page “Help us discover your potential”		+	+			
<i>PLL Lot</i>						R						working environment
Boryszew				+		testimonials	+				+	
<i>PKP</i>						R				+		
P.Gr Farm.						R						B
PKP Cargo		+	+	+			+					R
<i>PGZ</i>						R	+			+		
Maspex				+							+	R
Mlekovita						-						-
SM Mlekpól						R						R
Stalprodukt						R						R

Table 3 – cont.

1	2019						2023					
	innovation	safety	training	development	stability	others	safety	work-life balance	flexibility	stability	testimonials	others
<i>Ciech</i>				+		experience	+			+		
Anwim						-						R
<i>Polenergia</i>						-						R
Tele-Fonika						R						R
Unimot						R						R
Cedrob						R						R
Impexmetal						-						-
Onico						brief information about company's approach towards employees						R
Grupa Kręty		+					+					
<i>Amica Wrocław</i>	+		+	+								B
<i>Polpharma</i>						EB projects		+		+		allocation support
TZMO						R				+		R
PSB						-						-
ZE PAK						-						-
Anwil						R						R
Farmur		+								+		R
Gobarto						R						R
Grupa Solid						-						-
<i>Pruszyński</i>						-						R
Wielton						-						R
ZGH Bol						Page under construction						-
<i>Press Glass</i>						R				+	+	retirement plans

– on the main site there is no 'Career' page or any related one.

R – recruitment site with job offers only, optionally some short information about benefits.

B – “traditional” benefits: healthcare insurance, promotion opportunities, sports cards.

Table 3 includes the main areas covered by employer branding communication in 2019 (2–7 columns), and an analysis of components that are related to the expectations of nowadays candidates (8–13 column). + was used to illustrate that the element could be found at the analyzed web page.

19 companies out of the 50 (marked in Table 3 with italics font) changed the content of the “Career” or relevant sites between 2019 and 2023, while 6 companies out of the 50 (PKN Orlen, PZU, Synthos, Farmacol, Polpharma, Press Glass) seem to understand changes that have taken place in the labor market and react to them adjusting their communication with their potential employees to their expectation. 18 companies have their “Career” web pages designed the way to present briefly some information about the working environment and job offers (indicated with the R letter symbol in Table 3). 6 companies focused their employer branding communication in 2023 on a “traditional” set of benefits including healthcare insurance, promotion opportunities or sports cards. As the research results reveal, out of the business that was researched within the study, most have “Career” sites that can be easily accessible from the main web page, but still, quite surprisingly, 5 companies do not have any special site dedicated to recruitment. When the research in 2019 was conducted, there were 6 companies out of 50 that decided not to communicate through the career web page with potential employees.

6. Discussion

When elements that are considered by employees and potential employees as attractive and incentive are analyzed, it can be observed that only some businesses seem to look closer to the expectations of the candidates and tailor their offers considering factors that are valued by prospective employees. 8 companies decided to mention safety at work on their “Career” web page (mainly the ones operating in the heavy industry sector or chemical sector), and 9 ensured the candidates about stability of employment in their companies. 5 companies mentioned ensuring the work-life balance as an important factor of human resource management in their companies. In the case of 1 business, flexibility of work was ensured.

When the factors that may be perceived as the ones that can be interpreted as reflecting expectation of nowadays candidates are analyzed, about 30% of the biggest companies in Poland decided to include elements related to the changing situation (as safety, life-work balance, flexibility and stability of employment) in their employer branding communication conducted via web pages dedicated to communicate with candidates. One company offered flexibility at work. That may be interpreted as a response to the changing expectations of candidates because the growing interest in hybrid and remote forms of employment has been observed in Poland (Radziukiewicz, 2021). Also, Polish entrepreneurs indicate that element

as one of their most significant attribute (HRM Institute, 2023), and as Glassdoor global research conducted between June 2019 and June 2021 shows, the share of searchers for remote positioning grew by 460% and in the opinion of labor market specialists, it will not return to the pre-pandemic level (Zhang, 2021). Moreover, high-level talented candidates are reported to have found the freedom to work remotely and manage their schedules attractive (HBR, 2021).

When looking at the research results it can also be observed that the analyzed element of the employer branding communication has not been to changing expectations of candidates in majority. Outcomes of the situation may be found among the changes of expectations that have taken place just recently due to the extraordinary situations in social lives (the pandemic) and economic and political aspects (the war in Ukraine, energetic crisis, inflation), and on the other hand in uncertainty that is faced by businesses at different levels.

It must be admitted that the study has some constrains that can be indicated. The main one is related to the employer branding communication channels analysis that was limited only to web pages and communication with external audiences. Although, web pages and the “Career” bookmarks are indicated by Polish employers as the most frequently used tool to communicate with candidates next to LinkedIn profile and job advertisements (HRM Institute, 2023), further research on the topic would require analysis of the whole content, for example in the aspect of its cohesion through different channels of communication. The task, although challenging, could draw to some more universal conclusions.

Another problem can be identified when any overall assumptions are made in the area of employer branding. The companies chosen for the study operate in different sectors and the specification of their performance and situation in the labor markets they target is different. Although some tendencies can be indicated, analyses more focused on specific groups of industries seem a reasonable direction for further research on employer branding in Poland.

7. Conclusions

Crises of different types require reaction. Their consequences are often deferred and difficult to predict at the moment of occurrence. Poland has recently faced some situations that can be identified as crises – the COVID – 19 pandemic and the outburst of the war in Ukraine. They both have caused a number of consequences that will influence the situation in Poland for years to come, for example in the area of labor market functioning.

The research results revealed that only a few of the biggest Polish enterprises have reacted quickly to changes taking place in the labor market between 2019 and 2023 adapting their external communication with

potential employees via web pages to their changing expectations. The HRM Institute (2023) research results indicate that declaratively bigger Polish companies see the need to adjust the content they communicate to attract the most valuable candidates, although the task is demanding due to turbulent environment and unexpected situations that can influence the whole range of their performance in the future. Changing expectations of potential employees due to the crises, are one of the challenges Polish entrepreneurs have faced recently that definitely make effectiveness of their employer branding efforts more difficult to be predicted. Observing their performance, in case of large companies or SMEs, the industries they operate in, and their target groups can provide scientists with many interesting research opportunities.

Declaration of Conflicting Interests

The author declared no potential conflicts of interest with respect to the research, authorship, and publication of this article.

Endnotes

¹ Marketing budgets are often calculated as a percent of total income.

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Understanding the Role of Sociocultural Influences on Entrepreneurial Activities: a Study of Ukrainian Women War Refugees in Poland

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Abstract

Purpose: The aim of the article is to identify the socio-cultural determinants of entrepreneurial activities of Ukrainian refugee women in Poland. The manuscript points out the complexity of the phenomenon of entrepreneurship as an important element of economic adaptation of women experiencing migration and presents the results of empirical research.

Design/methodology/approach: the research conducted was exploratory in nature, carried out using qualitative methods. Two focus group interviews were conducted with 16 female respondents.

Findings: The analysis of the collected research material reveals the multidimensionality of the socio-cultural aspects of the entrepreneurial activities of Ukrainian refugee women in Poland, particularly highlighting such factors as the value system, entrepreneurial traditions, risk propensity, social relations and entrepreneurial competences.

Research limitations/implications: despite significant findings regarding the importance of socio-cultural determinants of the development of entrepreneurial activities of Ukrainian refugee women in Poland, the presentation of the perspective of one group, as well as the cultural context, may be a limitation of the research conducted.

Originality/value: The data obtained were classified into groups of factors stimulating and blocking the entrepreneurship of Ukrainian refugee women. In addition, the results of the research made it possible to present a fairly wide spectrum of pro-entrepreneurial initiatives that can provide recommendations for aid organisations, institutions working for the adaptation of persons in a migratory situation, as well as employers who employ these persons.

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Keywords: socio-cultural determinants, entrepreneurial activities, Ukrainian female war refugees, focus group.

JEL: M10, J61, O15

Zrozumienie wpływu czynników społeczno-kulturowych na działania przedsiębiorcze: badanie ukraińskich uchodźczyń wojennych w Polsce

Streszczenie

Cel: celem artykułu jest identyfikacja społeczno-kulturowych uwarunkowań działań przedsiębiorczych ukraińskich uchodźczyń w Polsce. W manuskrypcie wskazano na złożoność zjawiska przedsiębiorczości jako istotnego elementu adaptacji ekonomicznej kobiet doświadczających migracji oraz zaprezentowano wyniki własnych badań empirycznych.

Projekt/metodologia/podejście: badania miały charakter eksploracyjny, zrealizowano je z wykorzystaniem metod jakościowych. Przeprowadzono dwa zogniskowane wywiady grupowe, w których uczestniczyło 16 respondentek.

Wyniki: analiza zebranego materiału badawczego ukazuje wielowymiarowość społeczno-kulturowych aspektów przedsiębiorczych działań ukraińskich uchodźczyń w Polsce, w szczególności zwraca uwagę na takie czynniki, jak: system wartości, tradycje przedsiębiorczości, skłonność do ryzyka, relacje społeczne i kompetencje przedsiębiorcze.

Ograniczenia/wnioski z badań: mimo istotnych ustaleń dotyczących znaczenia społeczno-kulturowych uwarunkowań rozwoju przedsiębiorczych działań ukraińskich uchodźczyń w Polsce, ograniczeniem prowadzonych badań może być prezentacja perspektywy jednej grupy, a także kontekst kulturowy.

Oryginalność/wartość: wyniki badań pozwoliły sklasyfikować czynniki społeczno-kulturowe w grupy czynników stymulujących i blokujących przedsiębiorczość ukraińskich uchodźczyń. Ponadto pozwoliły zidentyfikować szerokie spektrum inicjatyw proprzedsiębiorczych mogących stanowić rekomendacje dla organizacji pomocowych, instytucji działających na rzecz adaptacji osób w sytuacji migracyjnej, a także pracodawców zatrudniających bądź planujących zatrudnić ukraińskie uchodźczynie.

Słowa kluczowe: uwarunkowania społeczno-kulturowe, działania przedsiębiorcze, ukraińskie uchodźczynie wojenne, grupy fokusowe.

1. Introduction

The phenomenon of escalating population migration has taken a global character. This determines a number of changes both among the host society and the settling migrants. Since 2014, Poland has seen an increase in the number of Ukrainian citizens, their migration was mostly economic in nature. After the outbreak of the war in Ukraine, the situation changed rapidly. According to data published by the border guard, from 24.02.2022 to 18.11.2023, more than 17.194 million people were cleared from Ukraine to Poland, while in the opposite direction the number was 15.398 million people (300Gospodarka, 2023). Fear of oppression and hostilities has determined millions of people to flee and seek the so-called UKR status – war refugee with temporary protection in Poland. A survey report conducted in November 2022 and published in 2023 by the National Bank of Poland

indicates that migrants from Ukraine settling in Poland are mostly women (approximately 70% of the total respondents). Women dominate both among refugees (approximately 80%) and pre-war migrants (approximately 54%) (National Bank of Poland, 2023). With prolonged migration, the issue of economic adaptation of the experiencing migration is gaining importance, with entrepreneurship in the sense of starting a business and other forms of professional activity being its main targets. According to Brieger and Gielnik starting a new business has a positive effect on the immigrant entrepreneur (e.g. through socio-economic integration) and can also evoke positive societal effects within the host country (Brieger & Gielnik, 2021). One of the main challenges facing refugee host countries is to ensure financial independence and subjectivity for newcomers (Ganassin & Young, 2020). An important form of labor market integration is employment or the creation of new businesses (Predojevic-Despic & Lukic, 2018; Kooli & Muftah, 2020). According to the Polish Economic Institute, since the outbreak of the war in Ukraine, the number of business activities established by Ukrainian citizens in Poland has been steadily increasing (Businessinsider, 2023). In 2022, Ukrainian citizens opened around 16,000 businesses in Poland, and in the first half of 2023 another 14,000. The upward trend started after the outbreak of war in Ukraine (Polish Economic Institute, 2023). The context of settlement changed from economic immigration to war immigration, linked to the special protection of Ukrainian refugees, regulating, among other things, employment and the possibility of running their own business. Every sixth Ukrainian citizen in Poland (17%) is considering opening a business in Poland (or is already doing so). Every third respondent considering opening their own business in Poland plans to operate in the service sector (33%) (State Agency for Enterprise Development, 2023, p. 20). A significant percentage in this group are women. According to data in the Central Register and Information on Economic Activity from March 2022 to January 2023, Ukrainian women represented 41% of the registered companies (Businessinsider, 2023), which makes them an attractive subject for research on the entrepreneurship of foreigners settling in Poland. The phenomenon of entrepreneurship itself is the result of many complex economic, legal, social, cultural, etc. factors, which include both challenges and opportunities (Duan, Kotey, & Sandhu, 2023). The key to success lies in understanding the factors and accessing appropriate support and resources. In particular, factors of a cultural nature, grown out of the values, beliefs, attitudes and norms of behavior emerge as an interesting aspect of entrepreneurship research covering the field of activities at the crossroads of different cultures. As Dabić et al. (2020) argue, the concepts of cultural embeddedness and cultural context analysis provide a natural base for research on immigrant and minority entrepreneurship. It is also indicated by the findings of Shahraki and Heydari (2019), Steensma et al. (2000) or Dauletova and Al-Busaidi (2022). In our research, it is overlaid by another dimension – the migration

of women. The changing migration context of Ukrainian women – from economic immigration of a voluntary nature to refugeeism of a forced nature, determined the choice of the research subject. Our study is therefore an attempt to fill in a gap in the existing research on the socio-cultural determinants of entrepreneurship among Ukrainian refugee women in Poland, thus responding to the calls by other authors, such as Volery (2007), regarding the fact that research on immigrant entrepreneurship should take into account the changing nature of migration or Dabić et al. (2020) pointing out that national contexts pose a significant challenge for research on migrant entrepreneurship, as well as Brush and Cooper, 2012; Henry et al, 2016; Rashid and Ratten, 2020, indicating the need for a more in-depth, insightful and inductive approach to the study of women’s entrepreneurship. It is worth noting that the phenomenon of refugee reception in Poland (and on such a large scale as in the case of refugees from Ukraine) is a relatively new phenomenon, as is the refugeeism of women of Ukrainian origin. And although they are becoming an increasingly frequent subject of research (Pędziwiatr & Magdziarz, 2022; Andrews et al., 2023; Duszczyk & Kaczmarczyk, 2022; Długosz, 2023), the entrepreneurial aspect has so far received little attention. Hence, the article fills the research gap on the topic of entrepreneurial activities undertaken by Ukrainian refugee women in the atypical situation for them, emphasizing the importance of cultural and social factors. The theoretical analysis presented in the article is illustrated by an empirical study. We adopt an exploratory approach to capture and discuss the contextual factors that influence entrepreneurship of Ukrainian refugee women in Poland. The empirical contribution of the article relates to answering the research questions posed:

- What are the key socio-cultural determinants affecting the entrepreneurship of Ukrainian refugee women in Poland?
- Which factors stimulate and which factors block the development of entrepreneurial activities?
- What actions/initiatives are needed to develop entrepreneurship among Ukrainian refugee women in Poland?

Seeking an answer the above questions, the research was conducted in the form of two focus group interviews with a purposively selected research sample. Consequently, the research presented in the article provides insight into Ukrainian refugee women in Poland’s understanding of entrepreneurship and also allows for the identification of the socio-cultural determinants of their entrepreneurial activities. In both the theoretical and empirical parts, the study identifies factors that stimulate and block entrepreneurial activities of Ukrainian refugee women in Poland. In addition, it allows for the identification of measures that will enable the development of entrepreneurship in the group of women. The collected results thus contribute to the expansion of knowledge in the area of three intersecting yet underdeveloped strands of literature: refugee entrepreneurship, women’s

entrepreneurship and socio-cultural determinants of entrepreneurship. In addition to adding content to previous research in the area, our study provides useful practical implications related to the development of entrepreneurship among Ukrainian refugee women. The remainder of the article is as follows. Firstly, the theoretical rationale for the importance of socio-cultural determinants of entrepreneurship is presented, focusing on the specific subject of war refugee women from Ukraine who have settled in Poland. An attempt was also made to classify the factors, identifying those which stimulate and block the development of entrepreneurship. On the basis, an empirical research framework was developed and a methodology was presented. Subsequently, research results and discussion are presented. The final part of the manuscript contains conclusions regarding theoretical and practical implications, limitations and future research paths.

2. Theoretical Background

2.1. Migrant Entrepreneurship and its Determinants

Entrepreneurship can be defined in a number of ways – as the perception of business opportunities and the readiness to benefit from them, the search for all the necessary factors that enable production and economic activity and the development of the strategies needed to optimize the opportunities, and as a certain process of actions directed, under given conditions, to the use of innovative ideas to generate benefits in the market or to the development of a new enterprise or venture (Sułkowski, 2022). Eckhardt and Shane (2003) and Chmielecki and Sułkowski (2017) point out that entrepreneurship is not only about the actions of an individual, but also about the potential inherent in the culture of a society that can stimulate or constrain it. According to Wronka-Pośpiech and Kraśnicka (2010), out of the many strands of research output on the essence of entrepreneurship, focus on the role of the subject, i.e. the entrepreneur, the exposure of the process of creating new ventures (including new organizations) and the focus on the process of discovering/creating and exploiting entrepreneurial opportunities stand out quite clearly. Based on the assumption that entrepreneurship is a basic condition for development, it should be seen as a process in which individual factors, such as entrepreneurial attitudes, subjective norms and perceived behavioral control, are in constant interaction with each other and influence entrepreneurial intentions and the influence entrepreneurial behavior (Ajzen, 1991; Kurczewska, 2010; Rachwał & Wach, 2016; Rueda et al., 2010).

The discussion of migrant entrepreneurship draws attention to its specific characteristics. It is due to the institutional, economic and socio-cultural context in which the processes take place. As Glinka (2018a, 2018b) argues, their complexity is, at least potentially, greater, as the host country context is overlaid with knowledge, rules, habits and norms of behavior brought from

the country of origin. Meanwhile, entrepreneurial processes are an important part of economic adaptation, which is crucial in the adaptation of people in a migratory situation in the host country. It affects both the migrants' living conditions and their propensity for social integration, creating a certain feedback loop with, for example, cultural adaptation. According to Budyta-Budzyńska (2011, pp. 50–51), adaptation in the economic dimension can take place in four different ways:

- 1) complete withdrawal from the labor market or employment in an immigrant company,
- 2) under-qualified work, described in the literature as “3D” (dull, dirty, dangerous),
- 3) a job in a profession, compatible with one's qualifications, which involves knowledge of the language of the host society,
- 4) a job offering a promotion not possible in the home country.

The first solution involves the use of welfare assistance and indicates poor adaptation skills, a kind of marginalization from the local community. A common economic adaptation of migrants (reported in the initial stage of settlement) is also the performance of low-paid work, with low social prestige and below qualifications. For people in a migratory situation, the third and fourth options indicated by the author are particularly desirable. They are largely related to individual predispositions to learn, build social capital and entrepreneurial behavior, which can play an important role in their professional activity (including the propensity to open businesses), in the new place of settlement, form the basis for professional development also (if not especially) among those experiencing migration. According to Evansluong et al. (2019), when migrants perceive themselves as socially excluded and/or discriminated against in the labor market, they are more likely to try new business ventures in their host countries. Migrants' entrepreneurship can be a key factor in their labor force participation, also in the nature of starting their own business in their new place of settlement. However, entrepreneurship of people in a migrant situation is determined by a number of factors, both external and internal. Livanos (2009) and Piróg (2014) pay particular attention to factors such as individual characteristics of the person, social capital/social conditions, competence-qualification potential (education and experience) and external conditions (macroeconomic context). Czapińska (2020), on the other hand, emphasizes the importance of external conditions, especially economic and social conditions and conditions understood as individual characteristics of the person, his/her education and experience. Proponents of the cultural perspective point to the importance of socio-cultural factors for the development of entrepreneurship. They include the system of values and norms, traditions of entrepreneurship in a given society, attitudes towards entrepreneurial attitudes, the family model, competences and social trust capital (Hryń, 2003). The social context in which individuals are immersed influences their personal motivations,

knowledge, intentions and actions (Ismail et al., 2022). Accordingly, entrepreneurial decisions may be influenced by the values that dominate the social context in which they are involved (Hayton et al., 2002; Pinillos & Reyes, 2011). Hence, the social value structure of the cultural environment may play a significant role in explaining the entrepreneurial activity of its members (Ortega Irizo et al., 2020). Indeed, culture shapes cognitive maps of individuals, programming behavioral patterns that are consistent with the cultural context (Hofstede, 2003; Gadomska-Lila, 2016). According to Ortega Irizo et al. (2020), culture can influence the entrepreneurial spirit through two main mechanisms. Firstly, a supportive culture leads to social legitimacy, making the entrepreneurial career more valued and socially recognized, thus creating an enabling institutional environment. Consequently, more people try to start a business, regardless of their personal beliefs and attitudes. Secondly, the so-called pro-entrepreneurial culture leads to more people displaying psychological traits and attitudes that are compatible with entrepreneurial activity (Liñán et al., 2011; Davidsson, 1995). Consequently, more people seek to become entrepreneurs (Mueller & Thomas, 2001). According to Sahin, Nijkamp and Baycan-Levent (2007) the cultural, social and psychological attributes of migrants can influence their entrepreneurial behavior, but to some extent and in different ways (2006). They can be either enabling or hindering in nature, which is sometimes referred to in the literature as “push and pull” (Bhoganadam, 2015). Socio-cultural factors determining entrepreneurial activities of people in a migratory situation relate to both the cultural inventory of migrants and the social conditions in the new place of settlement. The change in the nature of migration from voluntary to forced migration due to warfare may influence the reinforcement of certain determinants of refugee entrepreneurship.

2.2. Determinants of Entrepreneurship for Ukrainian Women War Refugees

Under the law on assistance to Ukrainian Citizens in Connection with the Armed Conflict on the Territory of Ukraine (Official Gazette, 2022), the legal provisions concerning the Ukrainian minority have been significantly liberalized. People declaring to have fled the hostilities and arriving in Poland after 24 February 2022 have gained the right to employment without the need for a work permit, as well as the right to open and operate their own businesses. The factor seems to have significantly fostered increased entrepreneurial aspirations among Ukrainian migrants, the majority of whom are women. Czaplińska (2020) draws attention to the relevance of the spatial scale in considering the entrepreneurial process, which may vary not only due to the individual's characteristics and experience and the socio-economic processes taking place in their environment, but also due to the diversity of the space in which the individual functions. Transferring the assumptions to the subject matter of the research, the subjective ways of perceiving

entrepreneurship, growing out of experiences in the home country – showing the social and cultural optics of the outlook on running a business, as well as the current sense of empowerment, of responsibility for one's own economic situation – become interesting. In the context of the migration, individuals often have to cope with dissonance resulting from their experiences, inflated expectations, deprofessionalization, which in practice requires demonstrating resourcefulness, acquiring new professional qualifications and/or economic education to match the opportunities of local labor markets. According to a report by the Polish Agency for Enterprise Development, half of the war refugees working in Poland (51%) admit that the job they have taken does not match the qualifications they have acquired (PARP, 2023). A significant obstacle to take up a job in line with qualifications among migrants from Ukraine is the lack of recognition of diplomas and the difficult (lengthy and costly) procedures for their nostrification. As reported by Lazarczyk-Bilal and Glinka (2021), the prevailing view in academic discourse is that it is more difficult for refugees to start a business than for economic migrants. One of the reasons cited for the situation is the lack of strong social networks, which is an interesting issue in the context of the situation of Ukrainian migrants in Poland (Hargrave, et al., 2023). It is worth remembering that the sudden increase of refugees (mainly women), is preceded by years of intense economic immigration. In practice, it may imply an ambiguous residency situation and migration intentions of Ukrainians. According to Lazarczyk-Bilal and Glinka (2021), unlike economic migrants who built long-term migration chains, refugees cannot use strong social networks to establish themselves in the host country. Moreover, they can neither return to their country of origin nor benefit from transnational linkages useful for potential economic activity. They are accompanied by a high degree of uncertainty about their future stay in the host country, and it may affect their propensity to become self-employed (Fuller-Love et al., 2006; Portes et al., 2002; Gold, 1988). In addition, refugees are much more likely than economic migrants to perceive obstacles to starting a business in the host country, such as a lack of investment capital, bureaucracy (Wauters & Lambrecht, 2006), or a lack of confidence and belief in self-efficacy (Zhao et al., 2005; McGee et al., 2009).

Research on women's entrepreneurship suggests that migrant women face greater obstacles than men when starting a business, problems in raising start-up capital and benefiting from relationship networks, resulting in a lower percentage of women-owned businesses (Brieger & Gielnik, 2020; Lazarczyk-Bilal & Glinka, 2021). Socio-cultural determinants seem to play a particular role here, as economic activity is still strongly influenced by social stereotypes that determine the division of labor and social gender roles (Szepelska, 2017). Traditional perceptions of women as mothers and caretakers of the household often reinforce a scenario in which a migrant woman does not enter the labor market and the job holder is

a man (Lazarczyk-Bilal & Glinka, 2021; Aure, 2013; Andrejuk, 2018). This may be common especially among migrants coming from societies with traditionally perceived gender norms (Abadli et al., 2020). In patriarchal societies, socio-cultural factors also significantly influence the construction of social networks that are so important for entrepreneurial development. It is more difficult for women entrepreneurs to develop effective networks as they have limited access to them (Kalafatoglu & Mendoza, 2017). Women's entrepreneurial motivations and intentions may also be influenced by gender roles and stereotypes (Perez-Quintana et al., 2017; Guo & Werner, 2016). Research suggests that higher levels of entrepreneurship, including female entrepreneurship, can be observed in countries where public perception reinforces the position a society gives to its entrepreneurs and whether people perceive entrepreneurship as an attractive career choice (Chhabra et al., 2020).

3. Research Design

Empirical research has been carried out to identify socio-cultural determinants of entrepreneurial activities of Ukrainian refugee women in Poland. Due to the exploratory nature of the research, as well as sensitivity to possible cultural differences which may manifest themselves, e.g. in different ways of understanding and defining concepts, the research was carried out using qualitative methods. Issues included in the research questions were the subject of the study, in particular issues concerning values, beliefs about gender roles, family, and running a business, which may constitute a socio-cultural inventory of the women surveyed that is transferable to entrepreneurial attitudes and behavior from Ukraine to Poland. In addition, issues concerning education, competences possessed, including language and social competences influencing the building of social capital of refugee women were of interest. In order to understand the attitudes, motivations and assessments made by refugee women, it was decided to use a focus group interview (Gawlik, 2012). It made it possible to find out the answers to the questions in the form of certain generalizations specific to the representatives of the minority under study. Reaching for memories, making reflections and interpreting each other's information, characteristic of the method, helped to obtain the broadest possible picture of the research subject. Moreover, referring to the migration experience and the current situation of Ukrainian refugee women, makes the subject of the study and the subjects themselves "vulnerable", and it is precisely focus group interviews that are often used to explore topics considered "sensitive" among groups perceived as potentially vulnerable (Barbour, 2011). The authors were also mindful that when using the method, one of the potential problems is to create group interactions that are engaging for both the researcher and the respondents. Indeed, the success of the

data collected depends on a lively and well-directed discussion between the participants (Berrondo, 2023). In the interest of obtaining valuable research material, the authors attempted to reach as large a group of Ukrainian refugee women as possible. However, due to the high sensitivity of both the subject and the object of the research, reaching a large research group was significantly hampered. Consequently, two focus group interviews were conducted, in two cities in the West Pomeranian Voivodeship – Stargard with 66,900 inhabitants and Szczecin with 391,600 inhabitants (Poland in Numbers, 2022), where there are thriving refugee support centers in the north-western Polish region. It was sufficient to achieve a saturation effect and reveal direct suggestions about the socio-cultural determinants of entrepreneurship. The research was conducted in May 2023. Interviews were arranged at facilities implementing aid activities for migrants and refugees from Ukraine. Participants were a purposive sample selected among the women reporting to the mentioned institutions, among others, to take part in various adaptation meetings and consultations. The total number of female respondents was 16, 8 in each group. The survey conducted in a smaller city showed a more difficult situation for women's economic adaptation. They all declared the length of their stay in Poland to be about 18 months, but during the time (at the time of the interview) only one of them had found permanent employment as a cleaner, one a casual job as a tutor, while the others described themselves as not working. Similarly, in the survey in a larger city, all women had been in Poland for 18 months or slightly less, and five of them had been employed. Respondents with tertiary education predominated in the study groups with 12 respondents and the remaining four had secondary education. All of them arrived in Poland after 24 February 2022 and were granted the status of a war refugee (UKR). All female respondents had worked professionally in Ukraine and four had experience of running a business. In Poland, all of the female respondents who were employed performed work below their professional qualifications. Detailed characteristics of the female respondents are provided in Table 1.

The research procedure was the same in both groups. One of the authors moderated the interview by asking questions based on a scenario in Polish. It served as a kind of signpost to deepen the knowledge of socio-cultural factors related to entrepreneurship among Ukrainian refugee women, including: understanding of the concept of entrepreneurship, the system of norms, values and traditions of entrepreneurship, acceptance of risk, understanding of entrepreneurial competences specific to a given nationality and situating oneself in relation to the aforementioned, as well as social relations. Questions were asked in Polish and translated into Russian by a cultural consultant present during the interviews. The choice of language was dictated by the researcher's experience of the Ukrainian citizens' language skills, i.e. not everyone is fluent in Ukrainian, but everyone speaks Russian very well. Both the researcher and the cultural consultant

Table 1
Overview of interviewees' characteristics

name	age	education	residence status	length of stay in Poland	occupation/work carried out in Ukraine	occupation/work carried out in Poland	length of employment in the current workplace
Focus Group 1							
Karina S1	40	higher	war refugee	approx. 18 months	accountant	not working	–
Larysa S2	39	higher	war refugee	approx. 18 months	economic engineer	not working	–
Tetiana S3	30	higher	war refugee	approx. 18 months	teacher	not working	–
Tetiana S4	38	higher	war refugee	approx. 18 months	Salesman-consultant	not working	–
Tetiana S5	41	higher	war refugee	approx. 12 months	lecturer in English	tutor	approx. 12 months
Larysa S6	42	medium	war refugee	approx. 18 months	seller	not working	–
Ludmila S7	40	higher	war refugee	approx. 18 months	economist	cleaning in the nursery	approx. 18 months
Olga S8	56	higher	war refugee	approx. 18 months	electronics engineer	not working	–

Table 1 – cont.

name	age	education	residence status	length of stay in Poland	occupation/work carried out in Ukraine	occupation/work carried out in Poland	length of employment in the current workplace
Focus Group 2							
Iryna Z1	49	secondary technical	war refugee	approx. 12 months	shoe factory worker	office cleaning	approx. 5 months
Viktoriiia Z2	40	higher	war refugee	approx. 18 months	paramedic	paramedic	approx. 4 months
Tetiana Z3	38	higher	war refugee	approx. 18 months	bank employee	not working	–
Lidiia Z4	52	secondary technical	war refugee	approx. 18 months	a glover in a factory	not working	–
Nadiia Z5	51	higher	war refugee	approx. 6 months	entrepreneur	cleaning	approx. 4 months
Oksana Z6	44	higher	war refugee	approx. 18 months	entrepreneurial assistance	not working	–
Alona Z7	39	medium	war refugee	approx. 1 month	company employee	employee	approx. 1 months
Nataliia Z8	34	higher	war refugee	approx. 18 months	psychologist	cultural consultant, psychologist	approx. 15 months

were interculturally competent and showed great sensitivity, also in the context of working with war refugees. Interviews were recorded, transcribed and analyzed using deductive and thematic coding. The collected material was categorized according to a key dividing responses in the area of socio-cultural determinants of entrepreneurship, including the dominant system of norms and values, entrepreneurial traditions, attitudes to risk and failure, entrepreneurial competence and social relations.

4. Findings

The collected research material made it possible to identify the socio-cultural determinants of entrepreneurial activities undertaken by Ukrainian refugee women settling in Poland after the outbreak of war in 2022, and furthermore to classify them into two categories – factors favoring and hindering entrepreneurial activities. The starting point was to identify how the respondents understood the concept of entrepreneurship itself. It is significant that all the women interviewed were in agreement on how they define and understand entrepreneurship. They inextricably link the concept with running their own business, financial independence and the freedom that comes from not having superiors. The remaining data is structured according to five concepts identified during the research, related to socio-cultural factors concerning entrepreneurial activities, i.e.: declared norms and values concerning entrepreneurship, entrepreneurial traditions in a given society, acceptance of risk and tolerance of failure, characteristics of entrepreneurial competences, as well as social relations and feelings of trust towards entrepreneurial activities and entrepreneurs (and sometimes also related to feelings of security in the new country of settlement). The results presented here relate to all identified aspects. They have been categorized as factors that favor entrepreneurial activities and those that hinder such activities. What is particularly conducive to entrepreneurial activities of Ukrainian refugee women in Poland is the vision of financial gain. Indeed, the financial aspect is very important to them and is a key value. The desire to improve their standard of living is so strong in them that they declare that they are willing to work long and hard, even at the expense of family and leisure time. It can be assumed that this is rooted in Ukrainian culture, as, according to the respondents, Ukrainian people are capable of making sacrifices when properly motivated. Moreover, in Ukrainian culture, entrepreneurs are ascribed a high status – they inspire admiration and even envy. It could even be heard in the tone of voice of the female respondents. The very prospect of benefits associated with maintaining close contacts, acquaintanceships with people running their own businesses is attractive.

A factor conducive to the entrepreneurial activities of the surveyed refugee women is the perception of Poland as a country where doing

business is transparent and honest, and where society and the authorities are open and supportive. It is of particular importance given their experiences in Ukraine, where, according to the women, there is a lack of support from state authorities, and corruption and illegal practices force entrepreneurs into various informal and even illegal activities. A great support for decisions related to entrepreneurial activities is the presence of husbands for the women interviewed. It includes financial support as well as motivation and encouragement for professional development. An important impetus for the entrepreneurial activities of the female respondents is their competences and especially their attitudes, such as a sense of responsibility for both their own and their family's fate, resulting from the experienced migration situation. Most of the female refugee respondents describe themselves as resourceful and determined to stabilize and improve their situation. It is also evidenced by the activities they undertake, including learning Polish language, seeking and making use of assistance offered by institutions such as a district employment office or aid organizations, as well as seeking employment and making use of opportunities that arise. Participants in the survey declare a desire for further learning and development. They mostly perceive Poland as a country of greater opportunities and perspectives, as well as challenges, also in terms of economic adaptation.

The analysis of the gathered material also revealed some socio-cultural factors that hinder entrepreneurial activities and actions of Ukrainian refugee women. One of them is the perception that entrepreneurial activities incur huge physical and psychological costs, which most of them are not yet ready for. The mentality of Ukrainian mothers, who, through the prism of their life in Ukraine and the norms and customs prevailing there, perceive motherhood (especially in the first three years of the child's life) as an obstacle to any professional activity, may also be a problem. The migration situation forces them to change their attitude, but they lack support in their parental duties from their relatives. The patriarchal family model prevalent in Ukraine, in which child-rearing rests mainly with the woman, appears as a significant barrier. Professional activity is a heavy burden due to an excess of responsibilities and the need to combine social roles.

The ambivalent attitude towards honesty, the way of dealing with official matters and other practices to which Ukrainians have become accustomed in their home country may also be a specific impediment to the implementation of possible entrepreneurial activities in Poland. There were differences of opinion among the women interviewed regarding the promotion of entrepreneurial people in Ukrainian culture. On the one hand, there were statements suggesting support and even admiration for such people, while on the other hand, female respondents said about annoyances experienced from friends and social envy. In the new place of settlement, they are accompanied by a lack of self-confidence, as well as fear of risks, unfamiliarity with regulations and related fears of the Tax Office or Border

Table 2
Summary of focus group findings

Code	System of values and norms	Traditions of entrepreneurship in a given society	Risk acceptance and failure tolerance	Entrepreneurial competencies	Social relations and trust
Factors that foster entrepreneurial activities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • very high importance of financial factors • desire for a better standard of living 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • prospects of financial benefits associated with maintaining contacts with people running their own businesses • Ukrainian entrepreneurs are accompanied by admiration, but also envy, for the fact that they have succeeded in 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • importance of the husband by the side as an important support, while at the same time the woman's desire for professional development • differences in openness to such challenges between Poles and Ukrainians – the perception that in Poland people are not afraid to open businesses and are more open to such activities • belief that having a financial background offsets the difficulties of starting a business 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • resourcefulness • cleverness • responsibility for one's own migration situation • sense of empowerment, knowing "what I can do and how I can do it", knowing the purpose for a job, using language, looking for the assistance of the District Labor Office • openness to participate in adaptation workshops • determination to improve one's situation 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • it is worth maintaining relationships with entrepreneurial people to have acquaintances and take advantage of discounts and discounts resulting from these contacts • appreciation of people who run big businesses, especially if they share their profits, for example, with the weak (charity work) • perception of Poland as a more developed country, open to entrepreneurial people

Table 2 – cont.

Code	System of values and norms	Traditions of entrepreneurship in a given society	Risk acceptance and failure tolerance	Entrepreneurial competencies	Social relations and trust
Factors hindering entrepreneurial activities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • running a business is associated with making money, but at the cost of lack of free time, high stress and physical and mental effort • ambivalent attitude to honesty, e.g., concealing part of income • having young children – lack of care (family and friends helped in Ukraine) • conviction that running a business involves lack of state support and the need to “play the game” • lack of a clear position on the honesty of banks providing services to entrepreneurs 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • patriarchal model of the family and the associated excess of responsibilities resulting from the need to combine professional roles with the role of wife and mother • lack of a clear position on supporting entrepreneurial people in the culture of Ukraine • discouragement of entrepreneurial activities they faced in Ukraine, demotivation by the environment 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • fear of risk • fear of tax authorities, border guards • lack of self-confidence 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • no recognition of diplomas • lack of opportunity to practice one’s profession • age 50+. • ignorance of the law • lack of knowledge about the rules of running a business in Poland (how/where to start a business), lack of counseling in this area • unfamiliarity with the market • lack of knowledge, e.g. how to promote their activities, on what terms to sell your services • lack of self-confidence • lack of knowledge how to effectively seek employment in Poland 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • illegal practices of larger companies blocking activities of smaller ones in Ukraine • fear of war may be holding Ukrainians and Ukrainian women back from entrepreneurial activities • fear of the cost of living and operating in Poland • little social capital

Table 2 – cont.

Code	System of values and norms	Traditions of entrepreneurship in a given society	Risk acceptance and failure tolerance	Entrepreneurial competencies	Social relations and trust
Desired activities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> personal development workshops cultural adaptation workshops 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> cultural adaptation workshops 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> support for Ukrainian women's entrepreneurial activities (information, education to reduce fear of risk) education about possible financial support for foreign entrepreneurs 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> professional development courses free Polish language courses (also at higher levels) opportunity to supplement professional knowledge and recognition of diplomas 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> use of trusted advisors to help you set up your businesses helping to build social capital with business people advertising activities supporting foreigners' entrepreneurship in immigrant groups on FB, assistance centers, distribution of leaflets near Lidl and Biedronka stores publicizing successes
Examples of statements by interviewees	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> "(Ukrainians) are ready to work day, night and even without a weekend to earn money", "they want fast, less effort, more money" [Tetiana S4]. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> "In our region it is often the case that the man works abroad and the woman runs the house" [Natalia Z8]. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> "In Ukraine, we are still like under communism, where everyone was supposed to be equal" [Tetiana S5] – i.e., a focus on collective preference 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> "We feel more responsible for ourselves and our family here" [Natalia Z8]. "I was an engineer in Ukraine, and here I don't work in my 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> "Here in a new country, it's scary to start something" [Natalia Z8]. "The war makes us think that it can also come here and we don't know what

Table 2 – cont.

Code	System of values and norms	Traditions of entrepreneurship in a given society	Risk acceptance and failure tolerance	Entrepreneurial competencies	Social relations and trust
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • “There is a saying: you want to live, you need to be witty” [Lidia Z4]. • “Authorities force to cheat and get something for them” [Viktorii Z 2]. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • “In our region there are still such stereotypes: the woman sits at home with the child. There is no such partnership. Although it's better now, young people are more (partnered).” [Tetiana S3]. • “here [in Poland] there is such a simple way, i.e. you produce, sell, pay out; in Ukraine you have to make something out of nothing”, “the problem is that you don't know what to expect tomorrow.” [Lidia Z4]. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • rather than individual action. • “In Poland, running a business is associated with legality, compliance with laws, etc. (so it is better to run in Poland)” [Nadia Z5]. • “In Poland it is easier to take an honest business loan than in Ukraine” [Tetiana Z3]. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • profession (strong emotion). (There was) 500 + aid, now not. I am 56 years old and I don't have a job. In the Labor Office made a CV, I went around and spread myself, but to no avail. I don't engineer; I just don't have any job.” [Olga S8]. • “I'm putting all my efforts into finding a job. I have 5,6 websites bookmarked on my phone, and every day I search for information and look at offers. And I send my CV, but for those jobs what I send I can't find (a job).” [Tetiana S3]. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • will happen” [Nadliia Z8]. “It could be like that” [Viktorii Z2]. • “(There is a need for) more workshops where information and contacts can be exchanged” [Nadliia Z5]. • “I manage here because I live together with my sister” [Tetiana S5].

Guard, they block their motivation for increased activity and entrepreneurial activities. Among the main barriers, the participants of the study pointed out the lack of competences, such as the lack of knowledge of Polish, the lack of knowledge of the law or the lack of information on the applicable rules of social functioning, affecting the level of social and economic adaptation. The lack of recognition of diplomas and the undervaluation of education is a significant problem. Problems in finding employment and low levels of social education cause frustration and financial problems among refugee women. At the same time, they are constantly accompanied by the fear of war and that hostilities will reach Poland. This has a negative impact on their sense of security and is not conducive to entrepreneurial activities.

It clearly indicates the need for activities aimed at strengthening the entrepreneurial activities of Ukrainian refugee women and prompts the search for effective solutions in this regard.

The results gathered during the interviews on the determinants of entrepreneurial activities of Ukrainian refugee women, including cultural determinants – the dominant system of norms and values, entrepreneurial traditions, attitudes to risk and failure, and social determinants – entrepreneurial competence and social relations, with representative quotes, are summarized in Table 2. It also identifies proposed activities suggested by female respondents to strengthen entrepreneurial activities of Ukrainian refugee women. Particularly noteworthy are counselling and educational forms of support, as well as assistance in building social capital including the exchange of experiences and gaining valuable acquaintances.

5. Discussion

The results gathered confirm the importance of socio-cultural determinants for entrepreneurial action. Similar conclusions were reached by Chhabra et al. (2020) indicating the importance of the dynamic interaction of cognitive, social and cultural factors. Also, the results of Lazarczyk-Bilal and Glinka (2021) confirmed the importance of the cultural aspect, as well as the entrepreneurship model and previous self-employment. The factors seem to be particularly important for the surveyed Ukrainian refugee women in Poland. Classified as conducive and hindering entrepreneurial activities in terms of the dominant system of norms and values, the tradition of entrepreneurship in a given society, attitudes to risk and failure, entrepreneurial competence and social relations, they provided extensive knowledge in the area of socio-cultural conditions. At the same time, despite many cultural similarities, they highlighted the differences between Poland and Ukraine that are relevant to entrepreneurial endeavors. Among them is the belief in the transparency of regulations governing business and fair practices resulting from the absence of corruption, giving a greater sense of security to entrepreneurs in Poland. In addition, there is an aspect of

differences in the acceptance of risks and possible failures characteristic of entrepreneurial activities between Poles and Ukrainians. They blend in with the results of previous comparative studies of the cultures (Gadomska-Lila & Moskalenko, 2019). For example, the lower power distance that characterizes Polish culture, as compared to Ukrainian culture makes entrepreneurship more promoted, as individuals feel more independent (Hofstede, 2013). Indeed, it turns out that culture can promote specific values related to entrepreneurship. Among them, there are, especially valued by Ukrainian employees, financial factors that can stimulate entrepreneurship, as identified by Machtakova (2012) in her research. Our respondents identified the financial aspect as a particularly important value, even at the expense of time, physical and mental effort or stress. This also composes with the results of Blyznyuk (2017), who enriched the perspective of the youngest generation of Ukrainians valuing success in business and career development. Self-reliance and innovation also appear to be important values, as well as ethical behavior and the degree to which it is accepted in business. The very idea of what constitutes success in business and how to achieve entrepreneurial goals is rooted in the value system. That entrepreneurship is a values-based activity was argued by Morris and Schindehutte (2005), giving numerous examples of principles and practices within the entrepreneurial activities of migrants from Asian countries including Japan, Vietnam, China and Korea that reflected their values and beliefs.

With regard to entrepreneurial traditions and norms, it has been confirmed that in some cultures entrepreneurship is traditionally valued and developed from generation to generation. In other cultures, such tradition may be lacking. Added to this is the important role of a supportive environment, which to some extent reduces the barriers migrant women may face when starting a business (Brieger & Gielnik, 2020). Meanwhile, in Ukrainian culture, it has been perpetuated that women will be focused on the family and fulfilling domestic responsibilities. And this, as Roomi et al. (2009) conclude, may cause family obligations to dampen women's desire to see innovative opportunities and willingness to start businesses. Our findings on risk acceptance and failure tolerance, suggesting that in some cultures risk is well tolerated and even promoted, while in others it is avoided, confirm that the group of women studied tends to have a fear of risk and a fear of failure. This point is also referred to by Begley and Tan (2001) conducting research in ten Asian and Anglo-Saxon countries, indicating that shame about business failure may be a predictor of interest in entrepreneurial activity. To this catalog of constraints, based on other studies, one can also add attitudes toward the use of sources of financing – reliance on personal savings and loans from family, friends, and reluctance to use external sources of financing (Maysami & Goby, 1999; Chhabra et al., 2020). Differences in sourcing between immigrant and native entrepreneurs due to the impact of cultural context are also pointed out by Sui et al. (2015).

Across a wide range of competencies, it is pointed out that a lack of language skills, and relevant experience, can make it difficult to start a business (Dabić et al., 2020), as well as what has been studied by Lazarczyk-Bilal and Glinka (2021) and Smyth (2010) – namely the high risk of “deprofessionalisation” in the host country as a result of national entry requirements for a particular profession, lack of access to local professional networks or discrimination. It is compounded by low levels of entrepreneurial and management education, lack of training and career guidance, and limited access to information on business development (Davis, 2012; Chhabra et al., 2020), in addition to the lack of prior experience in self-employment (Wauters & Lambrecht, 2008).

In some cultures, social relationships and networks play a key role, as entrepreneurs can then rely on each other’s relationships to help them succeed. Research findings also indicate that being surrounded by entrepreneurs increases the likelihood of having entrepreneurial intentions (Wauters & Lambrecht, 2006). Meanwhile, as Lindvert et al. (2017) found, women tend to be confined to their family networks, and their networks are less diverse in composition (Renzulli et al., 2000). This is corroborated by the research of Chhabra et al., 2020, according to which entrepreneurial women often suffer from weak entrepreneurial networks and a lack of female entrepreneurial role models, as our research also showed. Polychronopoulos and Nguyen-Duc (2023), conducting a systematic review of the literature on migrant entrepreneurship in Europe, point to implications for further research in areas including the building of personal and social capital, the sharing of necessary information on entrepreneurial opportunities, and the active participation of migrants themselves in the preparation of entrepreneurial support programs. Our research confirms such a direction and reveals socio-cultural factors among Ukrainian refugee women that, with appropriate support, can significantly influence their increased entrepreneurial activities.

A clear need emerged to step up initiatives that would stimulate or allow the development of entrepreneurial activities of Ukrainian refugee women. This is especially true of educational activities, including more opportunities for free Polish language courses, workshops on the principles of running a business, providing at the same time opportunities for knowledge exchange and contacts between participants, development of knowledge on market principles, market access opportunities, etc. It is of great importance to undertake integration activities. Programs of such activities should take into account long-term needs of refugees (and immigrants more broadly). Opportunities should be created to learn and understand Polish culture, traditions, administrative structures, as well as to create and deepen social ties. In doing so, it is necessary to remember the difficult experiences that refugees have gone through and help them return to “normality”. A major role in this regard can be played by mentoring and personal support, inclusion in various spheres of life in Poland, building a sense of equality,

creating opportunities for involvement in the life of local communities, in new environments. The issue of wide dissemination of information about the activities undertaken, including in social media, aid centers and, retail chains (such as Biedronka and Lidl) often visited by the recipients of the activities, is very important.

6. Conclusions

Our study focused on the perceived importance of socio-cultural determinants for the development of entrepreneurial activities of Ukrainian refugee women in Poland. Due to the fact that previous research in this area is limited and selective, we conducted an exploratory study based on focus group interviews. The results of the study provided answers to the research questions posed. They identified key socio-cultural determinants that influence the entrepreneurship of Ukrainian refugee women in Poland. They made it possible to classify the factors into two groups: stimulating factors, including the attribution of great importance to financial incentives, determination to improve one's situation, readiness to learn, perception of Poland as a country conducive to the development of entrepreneurship, seeking opportunities for competence development, etc., and factors blocking the development of entrepreneurial activities, including difficulties in balancing social roles of entrepreneur/mother (childcare constraints), fear of risk, lack of self-confidence, lack of recognition of formal qualifications or low social capital. In addition, they identified a broad spectrum of activities and initiatives for the development of immigrant entrepreneurship. Regarding cultural determinants, they showed that cultural values such as family, community and tradition influence entrepreneurial decisions. The Ukrainian refugee women participating in the research are guided by the values, which influences their choices. In particular, the patriarchal family model determines the entrepreneurial activity of female respondents. Among cultural factors, sheer familiarity with business culture in Poland, ethical standards, customs in business relations, and adaptation to local norms and expectations are important. Also important, rooted in the culture, is the attitude to risk. The high uncertainty avoidance characteristic of Ukrainian culture corresponds with the surveyed women's fear of risk and adopting a more conservative approach for fear of failure. Among social determinants, competence and social relations, especially social acceptance, countering negative stereotypes and sensitivity to migration issues, as well as access to education and resources, play an important role.

Taking into account that the scope of research on the determinants of entrepreneurship of Ukrainian refugee women in Poland is limited, our study contributes to the development of knowledge in the aspect. Firstly, it shows how important socio-cultural factors are for refugee women's entrepreneurial activities. It shows that despite significant similarities

between Polish and Ukrainian culture, such as an adherence to social norms, concern for interpersonal relations, valuing equality, solidarity, a sense of security and belonging, it is not easy to overcome women's limitations in undertaking entrepreneurial activities. Secondly, it points to the multidimensionality of cultural aspects, especially the importance of the value system, the entrepreneurial tradition in a given society and attitudes to risk, and social aspects, especially the importance of competences and social relations. Furthermore, it contributes to the understanding that in order to develop entrepreneurial activities among Ukrainian refugee women, their difficult experiences, memories or fears cannot be ignored. At the same time, there is a need for broad initiatives to address barriers and stimulate entrepreneurship. The enrichment of the literature with the results of research on Ukrainian refugee women in Poland, including their perception of entrepreneurship and the importance of socio-cultural factors in its development, as well as the identification of activities conducive to entrepreneurial endeavors by the group of migrant women provide theoretical implications for the research presented. The collected results also indicate practical implications of our study. They are dedicated to both aid organizations and institutions serving the interests and needs of refugees, as well as to employers employing, or planning to employ, Ukrainian refugee women. They revolve around key values, competences and social networks for strengthening entrepreneurial intentions, attitudes and behaviors, consequently leading to the development of entrepreneurship understood as starting/running one's own business. Our study shows that representatives of the institutions can/should undertake a range of activities to foster entrepreneurship among Ukrainian female war refugees in Poland, particularly in the areas of education and training as well as economic and cultural adaptation. It provides guidance for policy makers in designing more effective programs to promote female entrepreneurship by taking into account socio-cultural and contextual factors related to entrepreneurship.

Despite providing various findings that we believe are important, we are also aware of some limitations. One of them is the fact that they present the perspective of one group. It would therefore be worthwhile to also explore the point of view of Ukrainian refugee women who are successfully running their own businesses in Poland. Limitations are also related to the cultural context, as the study was conducted in one cultural region (Poland). Due to the above, the results cannot be generalized. Nevertheless, they can provide a good starting point for further in-depth research and quantitative studies to test our findings.

Declaration of Conflicting Interests

The authors declared no potential conflicts of interest with respect to the research, authorship, and publication of this article

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Economic Aspects of Cash Access Problems

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Abstract

Purpose: The aim of the article is to examine if difficulty of access to cash may influence the financial exclusion in Poland.

Design/methodology/approach: The analysis was performed using microdata collected in the survey on payment habits of Polish consumers and spatial data on ATMs locations. Estimated distance to points where cash can be withdrawn together with feature of respondents of the state of possession of a payment account helps to identify relationships between access to cash and financial exclusion. To prove significance of the relationship, a statistical test is used.

Findings: The Covid-19 pandemic has highlighted the existence of a real risk associated with the problem of the physical availability of cash, which is caused by the systematic reduction of the network of ATMs and commercial bank branches handling cash, which are the main points where consumers can withdraw it. This may consequently lead to financial and social exclusion of certain groups of consumers for whom cash is the main, or even the only, means of making payments. Results support the thesis that payment account without (real) option of easy access to cash may discourage consumers from opening the account and contribute to increased financial exclusion. It is especially visible in rural regions and small towns where we observe high level of exclusion (lack of payment accounts) and longer distance to the nearest ATM.

Research limitations/implications: The presented results were based on simple statistical analyses. Further research should include econometric modeling using logit/probit models.

Originality/value: The obtained results are the first on the impact of access to cash on financial exclusion in Poland and consistent with the situation in other European countries. The results allow to show the importance of access to physical money in a broader context than just having means of payment to pay for purchases.

Keywords: physical money, access to cash, financial exclusion, ATM network, demand for cash.

JEL: D12, E41, E42, G59, O18, R21

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Aspekt ekonomiczny problemów z dostępem do gotówki

Streszczenie

Cel: celem artykułu jest zbadanie czy trudność w dostępie do gotówki może wpływać na wykluczenie finansowe w Polsce.

Projekt/metodologia/podejście: do analizy wykorzystano mikro dane zebrane w badaniu zwyczajów płatniczych polskich konsumentów oraz dane przestrzenne dotyczące lokalizacji bankomatów. Oszacowana odległość do punktów wypłaty gotówki wraz z charakterystyką respondentów dotyczącą stanu posiadania rachunku płatniczego pozwoliła na identyfikację związku pomiędzy dostępem do gotówki a wykluczeniem finansowym. Aby wykazać istotność tej zależności, zastosowano test statystyczny.

Wyniki: pandemia Covid-19 uwydatniła istnienie realnego ryzyka związanego z problemem fizycznej dostępności gotówki, co jest spowodowane systematycznym zmniejszaniem się sieci bankomatów i oddziałów banków komercyjnych obsługujących gotówkę, będących głównymi punktami, w których konsumenci mogą ją wypłacać. Może to w konsekwencji prowadzić do wykluczenia finansowego i społecznego niektórych grup konsumentów, dla których gotówka jest głównym, a nawet jedynym środkiem dokonywania płatności. Wyniki potwierdzają tezę, że rachunek płatniczy bez (rzeczywistej) opcji łatwego dostępu do gotówki może zniechęcić konsumentów do otwierania rachunku i przyczynić się do wzrostu wykluczenia finansowego. Jest to szczególnie widoczne na obszarach wiejskich i w małych miastach, gdzie obserwuje się wysoki poziom wykluczenia (brak rachunku płatniczego) i większą odległość do najbliższego bankomatu.

Ograniczenia/wnioski z badań: prezentowane wyniki bazowały na prostych analizach statystycznych. Dalsze badania powinny uwzględnić modelowanie ekonometryczne z wykorzystaniem modeli logit/probit.

Oryginalność/wartość: uzyskane tutaj wyniki są pierwszymi w obszarze wpływu dostępu do gotówki na wykluczenie finansowe w Polsce i spójne ze stanem w innych krajach europejskich. Wyniki pozwalają na wykazanie ważności dostępu do fizycznego pieniądza w szerszym kontekście niż tylko posiadanie środków płatniczych służących do dokonywania płatności za zakupy.

Słowa kluczowe: pieniądź fizyczny, dostęp do gotówki, wyłączenie finansowe, sieć bankomatów, popyt na gotówkę.

1. Introduction

The history of the last few decades has shown the unflagging role of cash in economies around the world. Despite the growing importance of cashless forms of payment, banknotes and coins are characterized by significant demand, the motives of which, as defined by Keynes (1936), are transactional, precautionary, and hoarding. While the transactional motive is increasingly losing its importance, the other two motives are beginning to play an increasingly important role, especially in times of crisis. The demand for physical money is highly influenced by the unique characteristics of cash.

Cash is universal because it does not require a bank account, specialized equipment, or knowledge from parties of a transaction. It does not discriminate with respect to age, gender, wealth, or ethnicity. Cash covers a wide range of transactions in terms of value, channels used, and parties to transactions. According to (Rösl & Seitz, 2022a; Krueger & Seitz, 2017), universality is an important feature from the point of view of financial inclusion.

Cash is resilient to events such as IT system failures, counterfeiting, and extraordinary events, they include various types of crises, etc. Cash often provides protection in the event of failures or other problems that prevent cashless purchases (Pietrucha & Maciejewski, 2020).

In an era of algorithms, cybercrime, and the restriction of individual freedom (e.g. the 2020 pandemic), our privacy is increasingly more at risk than ever. Financial privacy is also a fundamental human right. Tracking by the state or corporations of our payment behavior can threaten our civil liberties and, consequently, democracy.

Banknotes and coins are the only forms of public money available to the general public. They are not linked to private companies, and no transaction fees or exchange of personal data is required. Cash is part of the critical infrastructure of the state. It creates a system of control and balances between central banks, governments, financial institutions, and citizens. People's confidence in cash is based on responsible monetary policy and good governance. Cash guarantees competition, which prevents financial institutions from charging excessive fees for their services and acts as a hedge against negative interest rates.

The increased importance of the precautionary and hoarding motives causes a change in cash withdrawal habits: there are fewer withdrawals, but with higher values. It leads to a reduction in revenue, especially for ATM operators. Furthermore, rising costs are forcing cash service providers to optimize costs. As a result, the number of bank branches with cash services is decreasing and the ATM network is shrinking. It creates the risk of difficulties in accessing cash, especially in rural areas. It may consequently cause and/or financial exclusion of certain social groups.

The article looks at the problem of access to physical money payment infrastructures from a spatial perspective. The main goal of the paper is to prove the existence of relationship between difficulty of access to cash and financial exclusion. As a consequence, we can formulate the following research hypothesis: payment account without an (a) (real) option of easy access to cash may discourage consumers from opening the account and contribute to increased financial exclusion.

To prove the above hypothesis the author used two kinds of spatial data. The first one comprises the microdata collected during survey on payment habits conducted by NBP in 2020. The second one includes geographical locations of ATMs as a main point of cash access gathered during realization of the National Strategy for Cash Circulation Security.

Geographical locations of respondents and ATMs allowed us to estimate the distance to points where cash can be withdrawn. Additional features of respondents describe the state of possession of an payment account and help to identify relationship between access to cash and financial exclusion. A statistical test is used to prove significance of the relationship between the level of access to cash *via* ATMs and possession of payment account.

In order to prove the correctness of the above hypothesis, the following structure of the article was proposed. In the first part, the role of cash in the present day is presented, paying particular attention to the problem of access to cash and its impact on local communities and businesses. The second part describes an issue with access to cash with relation to phenomenon of financial exclusion. In the third part, the current state of access to cash in EU and Poland was presented. In the last part, the results of the hypothesis verification are discussed stating that one of the important factors which may cause financial exclusion is the difficulty of access to points where both consumers and businesses preferring cash can make withdrawals and/or deposits.

2. Role of Physical Money in the Modern Economy

2.1. Essence of Interest in Cash

In Poland, the demand for cash is steadily increasing with a decreasing trend in the use of cash for payment purposes. According to Table 1, which contains the results of three surveys of Poles' payment habits conducted by the National Bank of Poland, since 2011 the share of cash in retail transactions has declined in volume from 81.8% to 46.4% with a cash in circulation (CIC) increase by 178.5%.

Table 1

Estimated share of cash transactions (trx) in the total number and value of transactions in the NBP surveys versus circulation growth rates since the end of 2011

	2011/2012	2016	2020
Share of cash trx in POS in the sense of (in %):			
volume	81.8	53.9	46.4
value	63.7	40.7	29.3
CIC growth rate since 2011 (in %)			
	–	67.5	187.5

Source: Share of cash trx based on the following research on payment habits conducted by NBP in: 2012 (Kozłinski, 2013, pp. 123–124); 2016 (Manikowski, 2017, p. 58); 2020 (Kotkowski et al., 2022, p. 80); CIC growth based on monetary and financial statistics of NBP (<https://nbp.pl/statystyka-i-sprawozdawczosc/statystyka-monetarna-i-finansowa/>).

Consumers are not the only group with a high preference for cash. Businesses also belong to the group. For example, according to a survey conducted by the ECB (2022b) among companies operating in euro area countries, 24% of companies prefer to pay in cash. Almost all companies accept cash (96%). Companies generally consider cash to be better in terms of overall cost, transaction speed, and reliability, as compared to

other payment methods. Vast majority of companies deposit cash (85%), while around a quarter of companies use the withdrawal option. It should be noted, that the sample comprises companies employing one or more persons mainly in the retail, accommodation, food, arts, entertainment and recreation excluding the financial sector and companies working within the cash cycle. The considered sectors include the most private customers.

The demand for cash increases especially during periods of uncertainty accompanying various types of crisis and is usually global in nature. According to Tamele et al. (2021), Rösl and Seitz (2021), cash is a safe haven during all crises. The phenomenon was first pointed out by Bailey (2009). He observed an increasing demand for high-denomination euro currency during the 2008 financial crisis with a decreasing share of cash in POS transactions. A similar behavior was observed in Poland, with an unexpected increase in demand primarily for the highest denominations of PLN 200 and PLN 100.

A similar phenomenon occurred during the Covid-19 pandemic, widely considered in the literature, e.g. (Goodhart & Ashworth, 2020; Chen et al., 2022; Caswell et al., 2020; BoE, 2020; Auer et al., 2022). The occurrence has become known as the banknote paradox and has been described in detail by Zamora-Pérez (2021). In the context of Poland, it has been exhaustively described by (Kaźmierczak et al., 2021; Gurgul & Suder, 2020; Manikowski, 2021). Manikowski (2021) showed that the Covid-19 pandemic caused an increase in the share of the hoarding part of cash circulation in Poland by almost 8 p.p.: from 61-68.3% in 2019 to 69.2-76.1% in 2020, with average annual increases of 2.3-2.5 p.p. in previous periods. For the euro area countries, Lalouette et al. (2021) showed that only about one-fifth of the circulation is the transactional part. The remaining part is held as an asset and is used only occasionally for payments (28-50%) or is circulated outside the euro area (30-50%).

The financial crisis of 2008, the Covid-19 pandemic in 2020 and the war in Ukraine in 2022 showed that a sufficiently flexible supply of cash helped stabilize the economic situation. Thus, for example, Rösl and Seitz (2022a) compared the crisis period (Great Depression) of 1929-1933 and the financial crisis of 2008-2009. They demonstrated the important role of physical money as a stabilizer of the total money supply. They also demonstrated the same role of cash in other crises, such as the technological crisis in 2000. The authors concluded that cash should be seen as public insurance provided by central banks in crisis situations. They supported the conclusions of their analysis with examples from India, where the demonetization process was poorly prepared in 2016, and from Greece with a series of crises starting in 2008 and ending in 2014.

According to Rösl and Seitz (2022a), one of the reasons for the important role of cash, especially in times of crisis, is related to the unique characteristics that make cash not fully substitutable for other instruments,

including central bank digital money (CBDC). Rösl and Seitz (2022b) concluded that since anonymity is categorically rejected by the ECB, the digital euro would rather circulate together with cash than replace it in transactions.

It is worth mentioning the public consultation commissioned by the ECB (2021) on the digital euro. According to the survey, the most important characteristics for households and businesses were privacy, security, and general usability. They are the characteristic features of physical cash that we can describe as a “trust” in privacy, security, and usability.

According to Lepecq (2022), the particular characteristics of cash make it an indispensable anchor of the values of our monetary system, but also a key foundation of democratic values, including social inclusion, protection of privacy, and the fundamental right to public money. Lepecq believes that there is no perfect substitute for cash. According to Lepecq (2017), among others, cash is the first step towards financial inclusion.

2.2. Impact of Cash Restrictions on Local Community and Business

The geographical distribution of bank branches and the structure of the local banking market have a significant impact on households and businesses.

In the case of businesses, financial constraints may increase with physical distance to bank branches (Alessandrini et al., 2009): loans tend to be more expensive (Knyazeva & Knyazeva, 2012) with contracts more restrictive (Hollander & Verriest, 2016). This is justified by the higher costs of transporting and obtaining the so-called soft information from the lender or local communities (Degryse & Ongena, 2009). Several studies have highlighted that, unlike hard information, soft information is difficult to store and transfer between individuals (Drexler & Schoar, 2014; Qian et al., 2015).

Furthermore, Nguyen (2019) shows that even in markets with dense branch networks, closures can have a large impact on local credit supply. Ho and Berggren (2020) find that due to the increased distance to branches, branch closures reduce new business formation. According to Garri (2019), branch closures increase the probability of terminating a lending relationship.

For households, there is a significant positive correlation between the number of bank branches and average income in the area (Okeahalam, 2009; Huysentruyt et al., 2013), that is, poorer households tend to live in areas with fewer bank branches. The lack of banks affects household financial inclusion (i.e. having accounts and access to credit). Distance to and density of bank branches significantly affect household demand for and use of banking services (Ho & Ishii, 2011; Brown et al., 2015), and ultimately consumer welfare (Dick, 2008).

3. Cash vs. Financial Exclusion – Preliminary View

Many studies show that cash *per* transaction is still one of the cheapest payment instruments (ECB, 2022c, Table 11). However, in general, costs associated with cash handling are not negligible. According to Przenajkowska et al. (2020), social costs of all payment instruments in Poland in 2018 amounted to 1.21% of GDP, of which up to 0.78% are cash. In such a situation, financial institutions optimize cash handling costs by moving cash handling to the area of self-service operations using ATMs. Equipping ATMs with deposit functions also increases efficiency of cash recirculation, making it increasingly cheaper. As a result, cash-serving branches are being closed or transformed. Therefore, many consumers are losing the ability to directly contact bank staff. And such contact is particularly important for people who do not necessarily know innovative digital technologies well. This is particularly true for older people and those who live in rural areas. In such a situation, the role of ATMs, among others, grows in importance as it helps the consumers better understand and control their finances.

It is important to remember that ATMs today are not just a cash withdrawal tool. They also have many other functions, such as the aforementioned deposits. It is also possible to check the balance of the bank account, change the PIN, make a transfer, or charge a card. In other words, the ATM network facilitates financial inclusion and, consequently, social inclusion for many consumers. Therefore, ATMs are a way for banks to optimize their costs and, on the other hand, they can provide a physical, and often for many consumers the only, reliable point of contact with banking. In the digital age, cash has an invaluable value related to its physicality and trust, and also the absence of any prerequisites required to use it. So, it plays an important role in moving underbanked and unbanked people into the banking system. It is also not insignificant that cash has been deeply ingrained in all cultures and monetary systems for centuries. Although the degree of dependency varies from country to country, which is reflected in the demand for cash (Kotkowski, 2022).

Before a deepened analysis of relationship between access to cash and financial exclusion it is worth focusing for a moment on the concept of exclusion. According to the World Bank, financial inclusion means that individuals and businesses have access to useful and affordable financial products and services that meet their needs – transactions, payments, savings, credit and insurance – delivered in a responsible and sustainable way. Access to financial products and services may be provided by bank account, other financial institution and mobile service provider. Consequently, we may define and use in the paper the term of financial exclusion in narrow sense as a lack of payment account (in a bank nor financial institution) which can reduce access to useful and affordable financial products and services.

According to the report of the World Bank (Demirgüç-Kunt et al., 2022, p. 9), 1.4 billion adults 15+ worldwide did not have an account in 2021, representing 23.8%. In developing economies, the share was higher, 29%. According to the World Bank, the lowest level of ownership of mobile money accounts, while the highest level of ownership of financial institution accounts is among the 51+ population. This may mean that this age group is more dependent on traditional money. The study also found a difference in account ownership status between rural and urban areas.

Having an account is a kind of gateway to use various financial services, including investing in health, education, and business (NCR, 2017). Therefore, the World Bank is strongly committed to financial inclusion through digitalization. According to Demirgüç-Kunt et al. (2022, p. 9), accounts allow their owners to safely and affordably store, send and receive money, meet daily needs, plan for emergencies, and make investments for the future. On the contrary, people without accounts have to manage their money through informal mechanisms, including cash.

According to the World Bank (Demirgüç-Kunt et al., 2022, p. 35), one of the reasons for financial exclusion (not having cash) among adults 15+ without an account is the distance to the nearest financial institution with 31% of indications following lack of money with more than 60% of indications and too expensive financial services with 36% of indications.

However, Demirgüç-Kunt et al. (2022, p. 136) state that installing a physical network of branches or ATMs in every location where they do not currently exist is not always a cost-effective way to reach an unbanked population. A common alternative is to form partnerships with post offices or retail stores to offer basic financial services in an agent-banking model. The benefit is that the agents (bank agent, mobile agent, or ATM) give account holders a way to deposit and withdraw cash safely, reliably and conveniently. Even if the final goal is to promote digital payments, cash will likely be part of the financial ecosystem for a long time. It refers to places where digital payments are not yet widely accepted for everyday purchases. A reliable cash-out service is the key to the success of digital payments.

4. Access to Cash in Europe and Poland

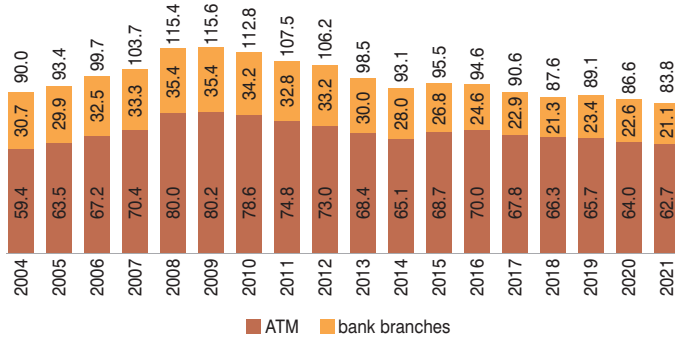
According to the study (ECB, 2022a, p. 50), the most common channel for cash acquiring in all countries in the euro area is the ATM with withdrawal shares ranging from 52% in DE and NL to more than 80% in FI, ES, PT and CY. In the case of Poland, the share of cash withdrawal operations in ATMs was 69.1%, which represented 54.5% in value terms (Kotkowski et al., 2022, p. 98).

However, the number of ATMs has been steadily decreasing for many years (since 2009); see Figure 1. Analysing Figure 2, it can be seen that

most European countries have a lower number of branches and ATMs *per* 100 K inhabitants than the middle of the range (MIN; MAX).¹

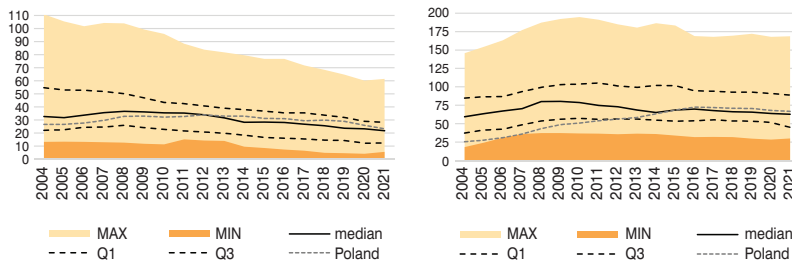
Poland looks relatively average with the number of bank branches and ATMs *per* 100 K inhabitants at the median level.

Figure 1
Number of ATMs and bank branches per 100 K inhabitants in the EU



Source: For ATMs: <https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/FB.ATM.TOTL.P5>; for commercial bank branches: <https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/FB.CBK.BRCH.P5>.

Figure 2
Number of bank branches (left) and ATMs (right) per 100 K inhabitants in the EU



Source: For ATMs: <https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/FB.ATM.TOTL.P5>; for commercial bank branches: <https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/FB.CBK.BRCH.P5>.

Let us take a look at the situation of perceived cash availability in a few selected EU countries, starting with the countries with the lowest use of cash at POS.

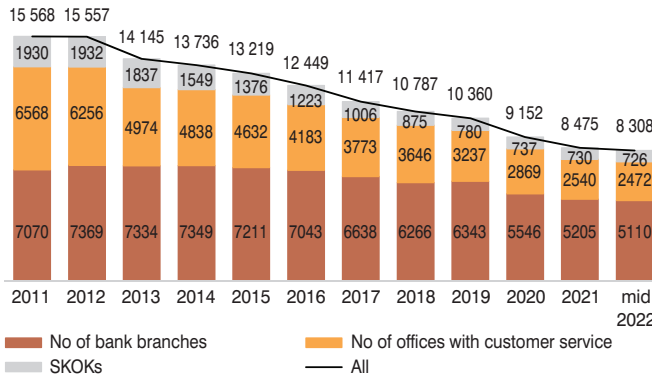
In Finland, the country with the most cashless economy in the eurozone, cash use at POS was 35% in volume terms in 2019 (ECB, 2020) and fell in 3 years to 19% (ECB, 2022a). However, according to the cited ECB SPACE survey of 2022, up to 57% of Finns consider it important to have the option to make payments in cash with the eurozone average at 60%.² The report (BoF, 2019) notes that the vast majority of Finns are satisfied

with access to cash. However, there is a perceived problem in rural areas, where 14% of Finns live.

On the other side of the ranking of cashless countries is e.g. Portugal with a rapidly ageing population. According to the ECB study (2022a), the use of cash in POS is 64% in volume terms. A shrinking network of ATMs and bank branches can also be observed. In 2022, ATMs were the dominant source of cash acquisition (86% of all withdrawals). It was noted that there are problems in rural areas with a tendency to deteriorate because banks increasingly encourage the use of cashless instruments, despite the relatively low cost of handling low-value cash payments.

In Poland, like in many EU countries, commercial banks and other financial institutions optimize the operating costs of their branch and office networks by reducing their number.³ This is shown in Figure 3, which illustrates the decreasing size of the branch and office network of banks and other credit institutions (e.g. SKOK institutions).

Figure 3
Number of bank branches and financial offices in Poland



Source: List of numbers and identifications of financial institutions assigned by the National Bank of Poland. EWIB 2.0 – <https://ewib.nbp.pl/>. Access on readers' request.

Another way to optimize costs is to eliminate cash handling in branches and offices and move it to the self-service area. In other words, banks relieve their staff of *strictly* cash handling activities by placing self-service devices, such as ATMs, in the branch. Additionally, equipping ATMs with a deposit option reduces cash processing costs.

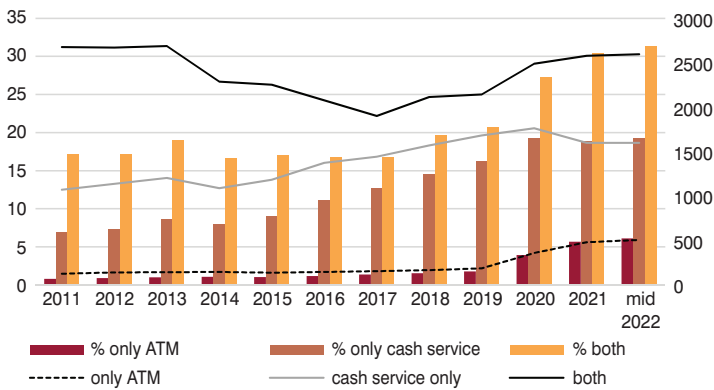
Figure 4 presents the number of units of banks and other financial institutions: only with ATM, only with cash service, and with ATM and cash service (right axis). In addition, the share of the units in the total number of units of banks and other financial institutions is given (left axis).⁴

From the graph presented in Figure 4 the following conclusions are to be drawn:

- during the last few years, the number of branches with ATM only (since 2019) and with ATM and cash service (since 2017) has been increasing,
- the share of branches with only cash services has been declining since 2020.

The observations confirm the minimization of operating costs by reducing the cash service offered by staff and transferring it to self-service devices such as ATMs. It has been particularly evident since 2020, a consequence of the Covid-19 epidemic, when the mobility of the population was drastically reduced. However, the process of equipping offices with ATMs has been evident since 2017.

Figure 4
Number of ATMs and bank branches with cash services



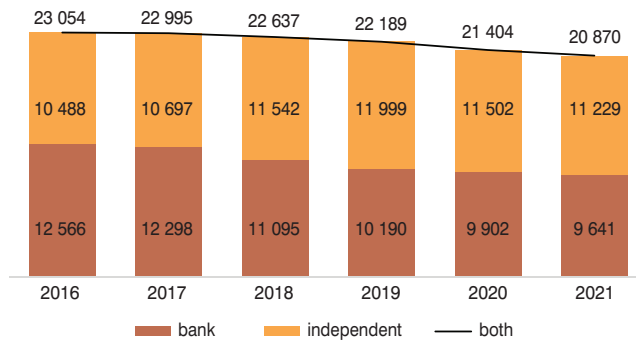
Source: Database of numbers and identification of financial institutions assigned by the National Bank of Poland. EWIB 2.0 – <https://ewib.nbp.pl/>. Access on readers' request.

Bank branches and offices of other financial institutions are not the only and most common cash distribution channels. They include ATMs. In Poland, they are owned by banks and independent providers, the largest of the latter is Euronet and IT Card. The number of ATMs is also decreasing, especially since 2016 with an increasing share of ATMs owned by independent operators – Figure 5. It is a consequence of the banks' policy of outsourcing ATM operations. This is another way to minimize costs by banks.

The main revenue for independent ATM operators in the card cash withdrawal segment is the so-called interchange fee, which was set by VISA and MasterCard in 2010 at the level of PLN 1.20/1.30 per withdrawal. For many years, a change in ATM cash withdrawal habits has been observed: a decrease in their number and an increase in the value of a single withdrawal.

This results in a decline in revenues for independent operators and leads to cost-optimization activities. In the case of ATM operators, we can see ATMs moving from areas of low demand (rural areas) to locations with higher population density (large cities). It affects access to cash in rural areas. The results can be seen in a study (Flash Eurobarometer, 2022) commissioned by the European Commission: 29% of the respondents, coming from rural areas of Poland, indicated difficult access to cash. This is confirmed by research carried out as part of the National Strategy for Cash Circulation Security – NSCCS (NSBOG, 2021). Using ATM location data from both bank and non-bank operators, the author of the article performed a spatial analysis of the ATM network from the point of view of distance from all population centers. The main results are given in Tables 2 and 3. Additionally, population density expressed in the number of people *per* 1 km² in individual communes and the number of ATMs in communes *per* 1,000 inhabitants is presented on Map 1. Table 2 shows the shares of the population located within 1, 5 and 10 km of the nearest ATM in the different types of communes. It can be seen that there is the worst access to cash in the rural regions, which includes rural communes and the rural areas of urban-rural communes.

Figure 5
Number of ATMs in Poland since 2016



Note: www.cashless.pl is the only source, where ownership structure of ATM network is presented; another source (<https://nbp.pl/system-platniczy/dane-i-analazy/karty-platnicze/>) includes only aggregate data of ATMs. The difference between data on aggregate level from the two sources is from 1.06% in 2017 to 2.46% in 2021. Consequently, in the Author's opinion, ownership structure of ATM network presented in the source used here is credible.

Sources: <https://www.cashless.pl/o-nas/sebastian-malarz>

Statistics on the distance to the nearest ATM are presented in Table 3, according to the size of the towns in which the population lives. The results confirm the existence of the worst situation in the towns with the smallest population.

Table 2

Population share of each type of commune within 1 km, 5 km and 10 km to the nearest ATM – as at the end of Q1 2021

Type of commune	% population up to (in %)		
	1 km	5 km	10 km
Urban	86.57	99.99	100.00
Rural	23.44	74.59	98.15
urban-rural:	54.64	84.15	99.04
– urban area	98.29	99.61	99.78
– rural area	7.01	67.28	98.24

Source: (NSBOG, 2021, p. 34) for 5 and 10 km and additional own calculation for 1 km based on the same data as used in NSCCS. Results presented in (NSBOG, 2021) have been obtained by the author of the paper.

Table 3

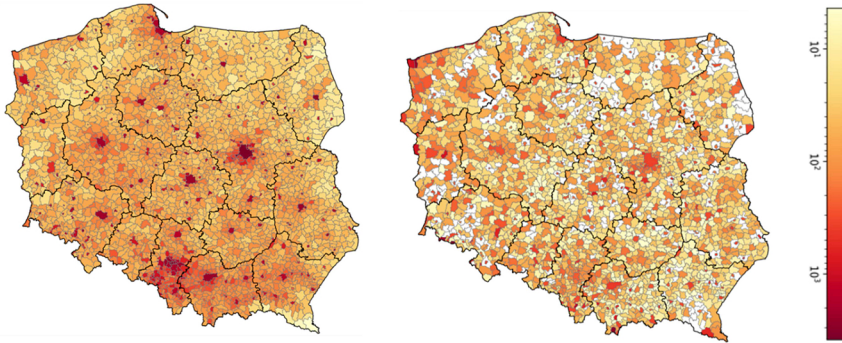
Statistics on the distance to the nearest ATM for towns and villages by their population size

No of residents	mean	min	max	median
(0–1000]	4.89	0.00	36.46	4.55
(1000–5000]	2.33	0.00	22.61	1.79
(5000–10000]	0.42	0.01	4.83	0.16
(10000–20000]	0.26	0.02	2.12	0.14
(20000–50000]	0.37	0.01	3.04	0.19
(50000–100000]	0.37	0.02	1.96	0.26
(100000–200000]	0.55	0.03	3.07	0.34
(200000–500000]	0.71	0.04	3.02	0.44
TOTAL	4.63	0.00	36.46	4.35

Source: Results presented in (NSBOG, 2021) have been obtained by the author of the paper (NSBOG, 2021, p. 35).

Map 1

Population density expressed in the number of people per 1 km² in individual communes (left map) and the number of ATMs in communes per 1,000 inhabitants (right map) – logarithmic scale



Source: (NSBOG, 2021, p. 34). Results presented in (NSBOG, 2021) have been obtained by the author of the paper.

5. Financial Exclusion in Poland From a Spatial Perspective

5.1. Data and Methodology

5.1.1. Data Sets

In the paper, we use two sets of data. The first set (named later as a *data1*) comprises spatial microdata gathered during a study entitled “*Payment habits in Poland in 2020*” executed by Narodowy Bank Polski in 2020. The study was carried out on a representative sample of 1 265 respondents, during the period from September 15 to October 15, 2020 (during the Covid-19 pandemic). The study consisted of two parts: a survey (completed using the CAPI method) and a 3-day payment diary (completed using the PAPI and CAWI methods).

The second set of data (named later as a *data2*) includes spatial data collected by the author of the paper during realization of the National Strategy for Cash Circulation Security – NSCCS (NSBOG, 2021). Pillar 1 “Cash availability and acceptance” demanded collection of data on ATMs’ locations among independent provider and banks. The data comprises geographical locations of 20 759 ATMs which is 97% of the population all ATMs in Poland- see (NSBOG, 2021, p. 32).⁵ Locations of respondents and ATMs are defined by GPS coordinates.

5.1.2. Methodology

Based on the above mentioned data the distance from the place of residence of each respondent of the study “*Payment habits in Poland in 2020*” (the set of *data1*) to the nearest ATMs (the set of *data2*) was estimated. For

the purpose, the Haversine formula was adopted. In the next step payment account status for every respondents in different type of location like rural and urban regions with different amount of population were identified.

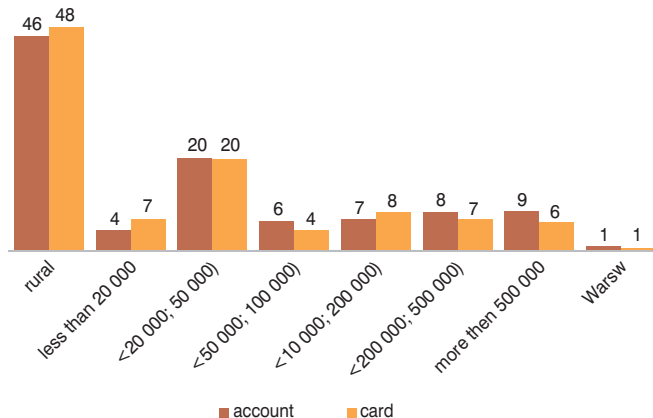
Thanks to such calculated data (distance and payment account status), it was possible to conduct statistical analysis to prove significance of the difference of distance average to the nearest ATM between respondents with and without an any account in every defined regions (by using the t-test with the null hypothesis that the true differences of mean distances between analyzed group is zero). The significance of differences in distances between such defined group of respondents can prove to exist relationship (but not causality) between access to cash and financial exclusion.

5.2. Results and Discussion

A study of the payment habits of Poles (Kotkowski et al., 2022, p. 38, Table 4), conducted in 2020, found that 11.5% of Poles do not have a payment account, while 18.3% do not have a payment card, including 6.8% who do have a payment account. It means that 11.5% of Poles 15+ in Poland were financially excluded. Spatial analysis of the microdata collected during the study (*data1*) allowed the author to identify rural areas and towns with fewer than 50,000 inhabitants with the highest levels of financial exclusion – Figure 6. A similar situation exists for payment cards.⁶ The highest level of exclusion just in rural region can be observed (46% for an account and 48% for a card).

Figure 6

Lack of payment account and card at different locations (weighted) in Poland (%)



Sources: Own analysis based on *data1*

It seems that one of the reasons for not having a payment account concerns the too long distance to points with cash. To prove the existence of a relation between financial exclusion and access to cash, the distances from the respondents' place of residence to the nearest ATMs were determined (based on *data1* and *data2*). The results obtained for respondents with and without a payment account living in a rural area and towns with fewer than 20K inhabitants are shown in Table 4.

Firstly, it can be seen that respondents of the payment habit survey with an account are slightly closer to ATMs than respondents without any account (according to averages of 1.36 km vs. 1.81 km). A statistical analysis showed the significance of the differences at the significant levels greater than 0.01 (p-value=0.0227). Secondly, in both rural areas and the smallest towns, there are also differences in favor of respondents with an account (2.74 km vs 3.13 km for rural and 0.89 km vs 2.23 km for less than 20,000). For rural areas, the difference in average distances is statistically insignificant (p-value=0.3046). But for rural areas together with towns with less than 20,000 inhabitants,⁷ the difference in average distances to the nearest ATM is statistically significant (p-value=0.0220).

Table 4

Base statistics of the distance of the respondent to the closed ATM (weighted)

	Mean	Median	Stdev	Count
With an account	1.36	0.49	2.09	1135
– Rural	2.74	1.96	2.66	402
– Less than 20K	0.89	0.44	1.44	148
Without an account	1.81	0.7	2.44	130
– Rural	3.13	2.32	2.93	58
– Less than 20K	2.23	1.29	1.78	4

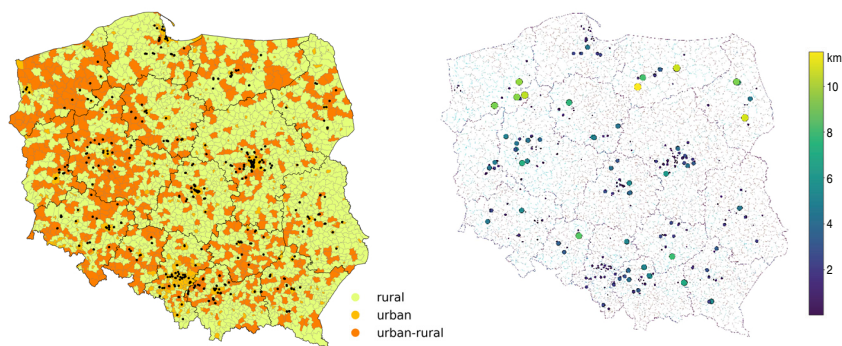
Source: Own calculation based on *data1* and *data2*.

Map 2 illustrates the location of the survey respondents in the different types of communes and the distance each respondent has to the nearest ATM. The results indicate that there is a relationship between access to cash and financial exclusion. That is, lack of easy (close) access to cash distribution channels, especially in rural areas, may be one of the reasons for not having a payment account. If the payment account of a cash user consumer does not have the option of easy access to cash, then the account for such a consumer may be useless (idea of the real option). As a result, it can lead to financial exclusion. Ultimately, it can also result in social exclusion.

Similar results were obtained by Beckmann *et al.* (2018), among others. They showed that in central and southern European countries, households without a bank account were significantly further away from bank branches (2.8 km) than households with a bank account (2.1 km). A significantly closer location to bank branches was also shown for the status of household credit. Thus, they showed the existence of a relationship in that a shorter distance to bank branches may induce households to establish a formal relationship with banks.

Map 2

Distribution of respondents in communes by type (left map) and distance from each commune to the nearest ATM (right map)



Source: Own analysis based on *data1* and *data2*.

6. Conclusions

A speculation since the 1970s about phasing out cash altogether has no sense in the current situation of high demand for physical money. The problem is quite different: What should we do to make cash more profitable?

Thus, for example, Finance Watch (2021) identified the need to make cash use more viable for POS payments, as well as for P2P transactions. The aim is to ensure availability of cash as a complement to cashless payment instruments in the ageing population of the European Union. They suggest paying attention not only to the geographical availability (proximity) of cash in rural areas via free-to-use ATMs, but also to other access points such as shops (cash back and cash in store), post offices, kiosks, etc.

According to the study conducted by BEUC (2019) – European Consumer Federation – consumers should have the right to choose how they can pay for goods and services. Each payment method has its advantages depending on the needs and preferences of the consumer. Cash has unique characteristics that provide financial inclusion. Cash is independent of power breaks or IT failures. Finally, it contributes to a more competitive retail payments market by preventing some payment card companies from dominating the market.

BEUC (2019) lists the possible consequences for consumers of the complete disappearance of cash as a realistic scenario: the financial and social exclusion of all those who, for whatever reason, are excluded from the digital society; no alternatives to electronic payments; the complete loss of privacy, as the cashless society is a fully traceable society; the full domination of the commercial sector in the payments market; the increased vulnerability of payment systems to IT failures or cyberattacks.

The analyses carried out in the paper support the thesis that difficult access to cash *via* ATMs may contribute to increasing financial exclusion. It is especially visible in rural regions and small towns where we observe high level of exclusion (lack of a payment account) and longer distances to the nearest ATMs.

In many cases, decisions to open a bank account and use it can be strictly related to the real options offered. For a cash-user (although not exclusively) such an option is easy access to cash. It means that, locally, the poor infrastructure of cash distribution/dispensing channels may discourage people from opening an account. Furthermore, in the current situation of cost reduction, cash stakeholders must find other solutions to avoid negative changes in access to cash. Past experience shows that efficient cash infrastructure in normal times is a prerequisite for its operational capability and resilience to future crises.

The studies presented in the paper justify the need for further analyses of access to financial services. They should include, *inter alia*, access to cash points like ATMs, bank branches, post offices, etc.

Additionally, we should pay attention on a main limitation of the adopted method. Namely, it is assumed to estimate distance to the nearest ATM from the place of the residence of respondent. However, consumers may withdraw cash close to work, during commuting, etc. Therefore, real distance needed to access ATMs may be lower than from the place of residence.

Another weak features of the adopted method is related to causality. The used statistic test of mean difference cannot point out the direction of causality. We would like to verify the thesis if difficult access to cash may cause lack of payment account. But the opposite direction may be possible: lack of willingness to open an account may encourage banks to close bank branches and ATMs in some regions.

Therefore, the obtained results should be expanded by a deepened analysis with adoption of the method which allows to prove the direction of causality.

Declaration of Conflicting Interests

The author declared no potential conflicts of interest with respect to the research, authorship, and publication of this article.

Declaration

The author used the AI tool ChatGPT to help check grammar (only) in the preparation of this article.

Endnotes

- ¹ With Finland, Sweden, the Netherlands, Lithuania at the min. level, and Bulgaria, Austria, Portugal, Luxembourg at the max. level.
- ² In Poland, this is approximately 62% – (Kotkowski et al., 2022, p. 57).
- ³ In general, cost-cutting is not the only reason for reducing the number of branches. Others include bank consolidation processes.
- ⁴ Unfortunately, in the case of EWIB 2.0 provided by NBP, financial institutions are not obliged to indicate additional functions offered in branches. Hence, Figure 4 should be analysed in terms of the dynamics of change.
- ⁵ All data is available upon request from the reader.
- ⁶ It is worth noting the problem of respondents' correct identification of the type of area (rural, urban), which was repeatedly pointed out, for example, by the World Bank in its aforementioned research. Namely, of the 460 respondents who indicated a rural area as their place of residence, in reality 296 (64.35%) live in rural communes, 157 (34.13%) in urban-rural communes, and 7 (1.52%) in urban communes. On the other hand, for the 152 respondents who indicated in the questionnaire that they live in a town of less than 20,000 inhabitants, 35 (23.03%) actually live in urban communes, 9 (5.92%) live in rural communes, while 108 (71.05%) live in urban-rural communes.
- ⁷ Of the 612 respondents living there, more than 93% live in rural communes or urban-rural communes (primarily in the rural areas of the communes).

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