

SUMMARY

Brand perception of insurance companies in the SME segment and its role in building customer confidence

The purpose of this paper is to study the impact of an insurance company's brand image on the decisions of intermediaries in the process of selling policies to SME customers. The author poses the question of how intermediaries understand the image of insurers and whether its perception affects their recommendations. In the era of globalization and digitalization, identity, image and reputation are becoming key elements of a company's competitive advantage, and their importance in terms of building customer trust cannot be overestimated. In both B2C and B2B relationships, building a positive image is becoming a strategic element of long-term success.

In the first chapter of his work, the author focuses on defining and analyzing the concepts of identity and corporate image in the context of a dynamically changing market environment. Identity is a set of attributes that define the essence, role and character of a company, its mission, values and vision. It is built both in the internal context, based on the potential of the people who make up the company, and in the external context, in relation to the competition. Image, on the other hand, is the subjective perception of this identity by external audiences, shaped by their individual experiences and expectations. Identity is influenced both by external conditions, such as market trends, legal regulations, social expectations, and internal changes within the company, such as changes in organizational structure, business strategy or organizational culture. The image, on the other hand, is shaped by the company's activities, communications, products and services, but also by the audience's opinions and experiences, reviews, social media comments.

The author emphasizes the volatility of image, pointing out that it is prone to fluctuation, just as audiences and their expectations change. A company's image can change over time, depending on its activities, the market situation and the opinions of its audience. In this context, the author also discusses the functions of image in a company, emphasizing its impact on the spread of opinions about the company. A good image promotes positive reviews and recommendations, which in turn translates into increased interest in the company's offerings and increased sales. Image affects the loyalty of customers, who are more likely to return to companies they perceive well and trust. Loyal customers are the foundation of a company's

stable growth. Another function of image is to build a company's market value. A company with a strong image is perceived as more valuable, which affects its market valuation and attractiveness to investors.

In the digital age, shaping a consistent image is becoming increasingly difficult due to the sheer volume of information and stimuli faced by the modern consumer. In the plethora of information, it is difficult to stand out and reach the audience with a clear and consistent message. An additional complication is the phenomenon of hate speech, which can have a devastating effect on a company's image. Negative comments and opinions on the Internet can spread quickly and affect the perception of a company among a wide audience. The author also highlights the growing role of social media, which has become an important channel for communication and opinion formation. Companies need to be present in social media and actively manage their image in this environment.

In the following section, the author compares image with reputation, pointing out that image is the perception of a company at a given moment, which can change, while reputation is a long-term assessment of a company, based on its history and credibility. Reputation is built up over years, more difficult to change, but also more resistant to temporary crises.

The second chapter of the thesis focuses on the impact of image on the distribution of insurance products, particularly with regard to products that are difficult to perceive, such as financial services. The image of a TU is crucial to building trust, which is the foundation of customer relationships in the financial sector. Customers are more likely to entrust their finances to institutions they perceive as reliable, stable and ethical. The author stresses that a positive image translates into greater demand for a company's offerings, which consequently affects the company's financial situation, and increases its resilience to crises. In addition, a good image can minimize the negative effects of possible crises, and even provide an opportunity to take advantage of them and strengthen market position.

The chapter also discusses the impact of digitization on image building, pointing to the growing role of the customer. In the age of the Internet, customers have greater access to information and more influence in forming opinions about a company. The trend of personalizing experiences is emerging. Customers expect personalized offers and communications, tailored to their individual needs and preferences. The author also points out the importance of content marketing, i.e. creating valuable content that engages the audience and builds the company's image as an expert in a particular field.

The author also emphasizes the importance of corporate social responsibility (CSR) activities for building a positive image. These activities help create a platform to foster a bond between

the brand and the consumer. They build the company's image as socially responsible, strengthen customer loyalty and attract new customers who identify with the company's values.

In the third chapter, the author characterizes the market for small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) in Poland, with particular emphasis on the specifics of the insurance sector. He discusses the definition and classification of enterprises, as well as the specifics of the B2B market. He stresses that Poland is dominated by micro, small and medium-sized enterprises, which are the foundation of the economy and generate more than 30% of Poland's GDP.

The author also analyzes the insurance market in the context of SMEs, discussing challenges and trends such as the impact of digitization, the importance of customer experience management and the growing competition from technology companies (InsurTech) that offer innovative insurance solutions. The author highlights the strong role of the intermediary in the process of buying property policies by SMEs, despite predictions that digitization will weaken their position. For SMEs, due to the complexity of insurance products, the role of intermediary, who helps customers understand the offer and choose the right solution for their needs, is crucial.

The fourth chapter is devoted to the analysis of the insurance services market in Poland in the SME segment, with a special focus on the impact of the pandemic on this sector. The author discusses the structure of the market, the diversity of entities operating in the market - from large corporations to small, family-run companies. He points out the main players, such as insurance companies, agents, brokers, multiagents, InsurTech companies. Presents data on written and collected premiums, analyzing market dynamics, upward and downward trends. Discusses trends and growth prospects, including the impact of digitization, the growing role of online insurance, personalization of offerings, and the development of insurance based on new technologies. Analyzes claims, discussing claims ratios in various segments of the insurance market, and the financial performance of the sector, discussing insurance sector profitability, net profit, efficiency ratios. He points out the market position of individual insurance companies, analyzing market shares, growth dynamics, development strategies. The author cites statistics on the brokerage market, including the number of brokerage licenses issued and the revenue structure of brokers.

In the final, fifth chapter, the author presents the results of an empirical study conducted to investigate how agents perceive the image of individual TUs and how this image affects their product recommendations to SMEs. The study showed that the image of TUs has a significant impact on agents' decisions, as well as on the recommendations they make to customers. Respondents paid attention to such aspects of image as the quality of service, including effective

claims settlement, speed of claims payment, efficient claims process. Prompt communication with TUs, good relationships with TUs, partnerships based on trust, regular meetings and consultations, stability of managers, and building long-term relationships with TU managers are important. Respondents paid attention to: product-price ratio, optimal coverage, flexibility in setting commissions, innovation, modern online tools and platforms, innovative insurance products, and origin of capital.

The author also analyzes TU's efforts to build a positive image, and identifies key communication channels: direct contact with the manager (personal meetings, visits to agencies, phone calls), website (professional website, easy to navigate, with up-to-date information about products and services), social media (active social media profiles, engaging content, quick response to comments and inquiries), expert articles (publications in trade media, a company blog, positioning the company's experts as opinion leaders), advertising (advertising campaigns in traditional and online media, tailored to the target audience), and conferences and training for agents (high quality content, practical workshops, networking opportunities). The author also explores the relationship between image and sales effectiveness.

The main findings of the paper indicate that TU's brand image has a significant impact on agents' decisions in the process of selling policies to SME customers. Agents pay attention to many aspects of the image - not only price and product quality, but also service quality, company stability, innovation, relations with TUs and CSR activities. It is important that TUs take care to build strong relationships with agents, use personalized communication strategies and ensure transparent processes. Investments in building a positive image bring tangible benefits in the form of increased sales and customer loyalty.

Keywords: image, identity, corporate reputation, insurance distribution, CSR, claims settlement, insurance agent network, multi-agencies, insurance companies,