

MEDIA RELATIONS IN POLISH POLICE – RULES AND TOOLS OF SOCIAL COMMUNICATION EMPIRICAL RESEARCH RESULTS

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Abstract

The existence of press offices in public administration, in uniformed forces, is not a new phenomenon – even in Poland. This profession did not appear in the nineties as it may have seemed, but had been present much earlier. The fact is that after the political transformation in 1989, it became less propaganda orientated and leant towards public relations. Nowadays, almost every uniform service has a smaller or bigger structure of media-related officers, who are capable of using strategies, tools and techniques from the field of social communication for the fulfilment of various goals. The Polish Police force is a service which was the first that started developing press services and built a system for managing media relations effects. Specific operation of uniform press services which is described in the article was based upon the internal police data and field research based on a research project “Marketing communication of uniformed forces in Poland”.

Keywords: media relations, public relations, spokesperson, press officer, police

Introduction

The implementation of media relations activity in the uniformed services has multiple functions. On the one hand, it is a tool for building social trust (Jackson and Bradford 2010; Goldsmith 2005; Cao 2015), it stimulates the cooperation of society with uniformed formations (Kääriäinen and Sirén 2012; Murphy et al. 2014), thus contributing to the objective improvement of public safety, as well as the perception of this state by citizens.

However, these activities should also be regarded as a system of building a positive image of uniformed services in the public opinion (Mawby 2001; Salmi et al. 2001), resulting in the favouring of various groups of the environment - representatives of public authorities, decision-makers, media people, and citizens who should be treated by uniformed services as the most important addressees of undertaken activities - specific clients, de facto justifying their existence and functioning (O’shea 2000; Frank et al. 2005).

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Skilful media relations, which have a result in public favour, also increase the level of officers' self-esteem, raise their morale, and build the image of uniformed formations as stable and valuable, and thus attractive employers (Gawroński 2011; Marshall and Fisher 2005). These are just some of the numerous goals pursued by the press services of formations operating in the internal security system.

Although the most commonly used forms of implementing marketing concepts still relate to brand building, business operations, sales of products and services, marketing is noticeably entering new areas. Marketing is no longer the domain of the economy and economic processes, and its interdisciplinary nature has a two-way dimension (Kotler and Lee 2007; Gawroński 2013). Political sciences, where marketing has taken a specific form of political marketing based on the achievements of marketing, play an important role.

A new area of using marketing activities related to faith, religion and the functioning of churches (church marketing) (Webster 1992; Moedinger 2001; Hjarverd 2011; Gawroński and Majkowska 2018) appeared several years ago in the United States and some Western European countries (mainly Protestant). Marketing, however, also entered other areas that had previously operated without its help. Marketing of places, non-profit organizations, marketing in the army, police or municipal (local government, territorial) marketing are new forms of economic treatment of an increasing number of non-business spheres of social activity (Kotler et al. 1993; Ward 1998).

Marketing of uniform services seems to be, however, a concept with several decades of history and established tradition (Mawby and Worthington 2002; Baker and Hyde 2011). However, it has a decidedly practical dimension, almost without theoretical background. Marketing communication used by uniform formations is focused on the implementation of various goals. Probably the most important aspect among them is the image aspect related to building a positive opinion about the functioning of a specific service in society.

This goal is achieved not only by conducting public relations activities, but also in the sphere of promotional, preventive and educational activities, elements of direct sales (promotion of uniformed schools, participation in job fairs), communication and visual identification management, sponsorship and even traditional advertising can also be found (Schultz et al. 1993; Yeshin 1998; Pickton and Broderick 2005).

The armed forces, especially the US Army, were the precursors of this type of influence, although, over time, these actions were adapted by the armies of other countries (Schyles and Hocking 1990; Kim and Crabb 2013). Their experiences were then copied by the uniform services of the internal security system. In Polish conditions, the situation was the opposite - the precursor of influences that could be classified as marketing communication was rather the Police, and that became an inspiration for other internal services, as well as for the Polish Army.

Despite the image-related goals of using marketing communication, the lobbying aspects should also be mentioned. A better image in the public opinion and a higher level of social evaluation of the effectiveness of a given unit emphasizes its existence and facilitates obtaining political support and public and non-public funds for its activities and development (Areh et al. 2007). Increasing officers' self-assessment and satisfaction as well as supporting the marketing personnel of the formation, by shaping its image as an interesting work place, and thus, acquiring competently attractive employees and officers, constitutes an important goal of marketing communication (Inzuna and Wikström 2019).

Methodology assumptions

The analysis of press services and spokespersons' organization in the Polish Police is one of the elements of a bigger project, realized by the authors in years 2010-2020. The project's aim was to evaluate the level of professionalization and ways of using social communication techniques by uniform formations operating in the area of internal security. The aim of the research was to diagnose, describe and evaluate the effectiveness of actions undertaken in the field of media relations by uniformed forces. The authors' intention was to search for answers why uniformed forces became interested in social and marketing communication. On the other hand, there was the question of practical aspects of communication of uniformed forces, which is not well known and it is barely described. The research contained the research of the Police, Fire Brigades, The Border Police, The Penitentiary Police and The National Security Agency. The research sample was reduced to central divisions of the described forces and some parts to lower divisions in the forces' structures. Due to the fact that research was to be qualitative, a purposive sampling has been chosen to establish the research group. The questioned spokespersons were open and eager to answer questions. A field interview was chosen as the main research tool.

Polices's press offices organization

The first uniform force which decided to develop its professional press service was the Police. According to the spokespersons with the longest work experience, press offices are not an invention of transformation times. Even "Milicja Obywatelska" (MO - police formation during communism) had some sort of press service. In those times spokespersons were not initiating relations with media. They were just responsible for answering questions. Their role was simply defensive. Only street patrols in the eighties were a bit more open. It was due to some planned policy. Some breakthrough took place in 1986 when a programme entitled "997" was first broadcast on Polish TV. It was not the effect of the Police's policy but due to changes in Polish media. The crime series "997" showed that mass media may be useful not only as a tool of propaganda, but also as a way to communicate and cooperate with citizens. It also had some positive effects on MO's operational work. It appeared that the Police work is interesting and that people were interested in the subject. Statistics showed that each episode was watched by 12-15 million viewers. Transformation period in Poland brought new challenges for the Police. It was due to changing social-political conditions and the need for trust which was necessary for the Police to fulfil their tasks. The bases for press service in the Police were created by Paweł Biedziak – a spokesman of the Police Chief in Szczecin (a city in the North of Poland) in 1994-1997 and since 1997 a spokesman of four following Head Chiefs of the Polish Police. In the opinion of his fellow spokespersons, who also started working in those times, he was the first offensive spokesman. He understood that sometimes he had to be the one who initiated relations with journalists. He knew that he had to prepare information for media and not only answer journalists' questions. Building professional press service has started since 1997. It was mainly based on West-European experiences and adapting solutions which had been working there. The development of a new system was run by P. Biedziak. Press service got some extra job positions, younger staff and access to the Internet. They worked out procedures for starting and keeping relations with the media. The image success of the Police was visible. The Police was present in mass media and that caused a growth in public trust for the force. The consequence of the success was that other uniformed forces copied the Police's procedures and solutions.

Regulations concerning the work of spokespersons, press offices and press officers were written officially in the Police Head Chief's ordinance number 1204 dated Nov 12, 2007 concerning forms and methods of press-information activities. The ordinance

specifically describes the ways of operating of spokespersons and press officers giving information to mass media. What is really interesting is the fact that the following people are responsible for information in the Police:

- Police Commander in Chief,
- province Chiefs and Capital City Commander,
- regional Chiefs.

Their relations with media are performed through press offices, but formal responsibility lays on them. In the official structure, there are full time spokespersons and press officers who may also do some other things not related to media. Other police officers may also talk to media, but due to Head Chief of the Police order from Nov 12 2007 they need special (one time or timeless) permission after attending special courses. The order also regulates terms of giving information in case of the event when the presence of a spokesperson is impossible. The Police Officer is allowed to inform on the spot, if asked, and after checking journalist's ID. If there is more than one officer, information is given by the one who is in charge or the one designated by him. According to Head Chief's ordinance information has to be of general nature. If situation is extraordinary and causes huge interest of mass media, information should be given by a spokesperson or a press officer. It is to guarantee professional cooperation with journalists in order to omit unnecessary emotions and mistakes. Due to a specific character of certain types of media (mostly television with the whole crew) the officer in charge (after consultation with a spokesperson) may grant a full or a limited access to the scene. This kind of permission is not necessary when a journalist is just gathering information, recording sound, making pictures or filming in an open access territory. In real life, the Police's press officers do not only grant permission but often do everything to satisfy media (of course following safety and investigation rules). If there is a need, the armed forces permission may be also granted but only after informing that the Police is not able to guarantee physical safety of journalists. In really dangerous situations, especially when anti-terrorists are in action, and journalists' life is in danger, the Police do not allow media at scene. In such situations the Police provide their own material to the media.

The functioning of the press services in the Police is not limited to the work of spokespersons and press officers. Depending on the needs and capabilities of individual Police units, press spokesmen have the support of several people (in the case of the Police Headquarters - more than a dozen) press teams, consisting of both officers and civilian employees. The Press Team of the Police Headquarters is an organizational unit located in the organizational structure of the Police Headquarters in the service supporting the activities of the Police in the organizational, logistic and technical scope, subordinated directly to the Police Commander in Chief. The head of the press team is the spokesman of the Police Commander in Chief. The KGP Press Team consists of 14 people.

Press teams in provincial police headquarters are, in most cases, located in social communication departments, inmates, like the Press Team of the General Police Headquarters, within organizational units in the service supporting the activities of the Police in organizational, logistic and technical areas. In some voivodship headquarters, social communication departments were created as a result of the transformation of presidential departments, and in some - they were created from scratch. The task of the emerging departments was to combine the impact of social communication both in relation to mass media and public opinion, as well as internal communication. In some headquarters (e.g. Provincial Police Headquarters in Kraków) press teams constitute separate organizational units, there are also cases of placing press teams in the structure of presidium departments (e.g. in the Provincial Police Headquarters in Katowice).

Press and information activities in social communication departments are carried out by press teams headed by press spokesmen of provincial commanders (Capital City

Commander) of the Police. Press spokesmen working in the structures of social communication departments are formally subordinated to the heads of these departments, but in terms of content they are directly subordinate to the provincial commanders of the Police. This placement in the organizational structure does not extend the official path between the press spokesman and the commandant, which is particularly important in the case of the need to make decisions quickly and respond to events characterized by high dynamics of changes, forcing the efficient determination of the information policy of the individual.

The official relations between the press spokesmen of the provincial police headquarters and the press spokesman of the Police Commander in Chief are not formal, and there are no typical relations of superiority and inferiority. The Press Officer of the Police Commander in Chief is not the formal superior of voivodship commanders' spokespersons, however, as he is responsible for the coordination of the press policy of the entire formation, he has an advisory voice in the field of giving opinions on candidates for spokesmen positions in voivodeship headquarters, as well as evaluating the work of the spokespersons themselves, suggesting possible staff decisions for provincial police commanders. With regard to the relations between the Press Officer of the Police Commander in Chief and the press spokesmen of voivodship commanders, there is a clear atmosphere of cooperation, information policy coordination and a mutual complementation in creating the Police media image.

Press officers performing their duties within the units subordinate to voivodeship police headquarters (in poviat, city and district headquarters) are also not formally subordinate to the press spokesmen of voivodeship headquarters. Candidates for press officers undergo a specific verification practice in the press teams of voivodeship headquarters. Press spokesmen of voivodship headquarters initiate and enforce ongoing contact between press officers and press teams of voivodship headquarters, they also conduct training for press officers.

Use of media relations tools

Tools used in media relations of uniformed forces offices do not differ from those used by companies and firms. Adapting the tools to the functioning of the police is a factor that makes them outstanding.

Media relation tools used by uniformed forces can be divided into the following categories:

- internal – of organizational character, concerning the flow of information between certain divisions and spokespersons; gathering information, analysis and selection due to the distribution to media; media monitoring and checking effectiveness of undertaken actions,
- external – directed towards mass media and journalists and, as a result, at public opinion.

Their typology is conditioned by the adopted division factors; thus, the following aspects can be distinguished:

- interactions based on direct and indirect communication,
- formal and informal activities,
- individual (focused on cooperation with a specific journalist) and group (related to cooperation with a large group of journalists - representatives of various editorial offices) influence,
- press and audio-visual tools - according to the specificity of media types,
- interactions of an ad hoc and regular/cyclical actions,
- initiating actions (anticipating journalists' interest) or reacting to them (resulting from

media interest).

The internal tools are used particularly intensively and regularly in formations with extensive press services of a hierarchical nature. The Police undoubtedly developed the most extensive system of internal communication within the press services. The daily work of the press services consists of gathering information, processing it, publishing it through mass media. Undoubtedly, the basis for the effectiveness of media relations in the Police is the professional way of managing the internal flow of information. It is a pattern-based, repetitive process which includes the following:

- a meeting of a spokesperson of province headquarter chief with orderly officer to check present situation, events and actions undertaken by policemen during evening and night hours,
- "press checkout" – analysis of press materials published during the day (due to constant media monitoring – global and local); analysis of cooperation with media so far and possible reactions to undertaken actions;
- taking part in everyday meeting - province chief with a spokesman. During this meeting the spokesperson reports about earlier actions,
- in some headquarters there is a teleconference between a province spokesperson and local press officers has been established.

The researched spokespersons underlined following advantages of this solution:

- completing information given by orderly officer,
- possibility of combining information from various sources and, as a consequence, making information for media more attractive,
- informing press officers of what is and will be happening in surrounding provinces,
- motivating press officers to search for information on their own.
- teleconference between a Main Headquarter Chief's spokesperson with province headquarters spokespersons – everyday at 9:00 am.

Such an extensive process of providing information within the press services allows a precise division of topics that are developed by individual units. One standard is to distribute bottom-up messages. Information prepared by press officers in poviát headquarters is prepared by them and published in information services in local media.

The police's website as an online press office, enabling not only the inclusion of any number of information, including attachments in the form of photographs, but also audio files for radio journalists and audio-visual materials used by TV and online journalists is the most frequently used tool in this area. Information is also sent by e-mail to the editorial offices and journalists cooperating with the spokesman or press officer. Announcements prepared by press officers from poviát headquarters are also sent to the press teams of voivodship headquarters, where they are categorized, filtered, sometimes re-edited and posted on news websites prepared for the needs of regional journalists and larger than-regional editorial offices.

The distribution is similar to the relationship between the press officers of poviát headquarters and local journalists cooperating with them. Some particularly important, spectacular or unusual messages, go to the information service of the Police Headquarters and are posted on the main page, at www.policja.pl. The effect of posting information on the Internet and sending it to the editorial office is usually a feedback loop in the form of visits by reporters and phone calls from journalists seeking to develop messages, additional information, as well as statements and speeches by press spokesmen or other officers directly involved in specific events. Afternoon hours are often calmer for press office members. Those hours are spent on radio and television interviews and searching for more information which could be used the next day to get journalists' interest. Everyday work of members of press offices is, in general terms, similar to working in press redaction. Thus, the daily work of press teams, to a large extent, resembles the

work of a press editorial office, based on similar activities and tasks that are repeatedly performed for the purposes of relations with journalists.

The most often used tools of communication between a spokesperson and journalists are phone and e-mail. Mobile phone is used to communicate important events – sending short information that something had happened. To do this a text message is mostly used. It is sent to a group of receivers – journalists that spokesperson cooperates with on regular basis. Mobile phones are of course the most useful tools to spread and complete information. They also allow journalists to do interviews when a personal meeting is not possible. E-mail is a tool used for sending press releases, news bulletins, developing information sent via SMS and sending all sorts of audio-visual materials.

Websites are commonly used to send data, they can also be applied as on-line press offices consisting of a part open for everyone and a part with a log-in in order to get information. The way a spokesperson uses tools of communication depends on a few various factors. It is not just about the level of professionalization of a spokesperson, but also about the financial limitations or activities in initiating relations with journalists, cooperation model and media environment expectations.

Press conferences are a relatively rarely used means of communication. They are organized by central headquarters, less often at a lower level. Press officers do not use this tool at all. Spokespersons being researched underline that this tool is reserved for the most spectacular cases and events – sensational or dramatic crises connected with a serious threat to formation image. Despite general opinion press conferences are not that important from journalists' point of view. Press conference gathers a huge number of journalists in one place and time. It saves time and allows to inform everyone at one moment. In most cases journalists prefer individual approach which suggests exclusiveness and shows difference to other media talking about the same subject. The researched spokespersons say that press conferences are described by journalists as unnecessary quite often. Press conferences seem very useful when independent experts are present. Those people, due to their position character, cannot be too exploited by journalists and a press conference provides an opportunity to get to know their opinion which may be very important for the case. Otherwise, journalists would not be able to get this sort of information.

Press offices, press officers and spokesperson's equipment – up to radio-television mini studios are also worth mentioning. A few of the researched units have specialized workers to operate the camera and other professional equipment. They are particularly useful in cases where journalist's presence is not possible and multimedia materials prepared by the police are the only source of information available for the media. Besides, the equipment is used for internal communication and preparation of various materials for inner use. Many of the researched units possess promotional materials enabling more effective media appearance.

Numerous media relation tools used by spokespersons in cooperation with journalists are changing dynamically together with the development of new technologies and evolution of media with which they are to cooperate.

There is also no doubt that spokesmen are increasingly trying to relieve journalists of their duties by providing comprehensively prepared and ready-to-publish information.

The most common arguments in favour of this practice include:

- willingness to meet journalist expectations,
- reduction of misinformation due to journalist's ignorance and incompetence and lack of time,
- necessity of competing with other subjects, which could be found more interesting by journalists, and as a consequence, be published instead of information important for the police.

Barriers in media relations

One of the research aims was to check what kind of barriers are there in relations of uniform force's spokespersons with mass media. Barriers that make it more difficult. It should be noted that the researched spokespersons were not willing to talk about this subject. They were even ready to say that there are none. They seemed not to see any journalist fault. Despite that they pointed out some difficulties in relations with journalists and media such as stipulating its incidental character. A vast majority stated that spokespersons play ancillary role in relations with journalists, so it is in their interest to adjust to mass media expectations. A sort of regularity could be seen in the research outcome – the longer one works as a spokesperson the more one feels dependent on media. The less experience on this position, the more negative comments on work of journalists could be found. The outcome of the research allows to create negative comments catalogue.

A vast majority of the researched spokespersons stated that presently journalists are poorly prepared to do their job – essentially and technically – especially the young ones. They all stated that the best cooperation is with old journalists who specialize in subjects such as: security, criminal law or justice. Those journalists, due to their experience, are far more competent and mature and such are their questions and comments in materials they publish. On the other hand, there are young and inexperienced, random reporters, asking infantile questions and, consequently, preparing poor publications, often requiring intervention and corrections.

The journalists with an earlier prepared thesis, which, despite facts and circumstances must be proven, are the true nightmare of the surveyed spokespersons. According to uniformed forces' spokespersons, television journalists form interventional programmes and those from tabloids seem to be dominating in this area. Their tendency to present only negative aspects of information and an ongoing search for scandals and sensational news is the other negative comment.

The other problem mentioned is laziness being manifested in the journalists' reluctance to learn about a given event, and sometimes even in the reluctance to leave their editorial office and embed the prepared publication in the information materials received. This laziness is closely related to the lack of inquisitiveness and insight, which are, after all, the essential features of a good journalist.

The other problem is a permanent lack of time or time pressure with which a spokesperson has to deal all the time. This pressure causes the fact that the journalists are being forced by supervisors who are trying to force press officers. In consequence unchecked and incomplete information may be sent. In many cases, time wins over publication quality.

To sum up, the barriers mentioned by the researched spokespersons may form a catalogue of weak points (to be improved in the future):

- raising the level of competence – especially among young journalists,
- increasing the journalists' level of knowledge of the subject matter,
- increasing the level of openness to information,
- reducing the number of cases of forcing spokespersons to send unchecked and incomplete information,
- increasing the ethical standards which would eliminate attempts to prove a thesis despite facts and arguments,
- openness for "good"/positive information reducing tendency for dramatic and sensational subjects.

Summary

Public communication of uniformed forces is performed with the use of techniques and tools of public relations, first of all – media relations. It is still relatively new for a vast number of people responsible for relations with journalists in Poland.

Professional and active attitude of the police spokespersons and press officers has a positive effect on the image of the Police force but also on effectiveness of operational actions. Probably that is the reason why structures and techniques used by the Police are adapted by other uniformed forces in Poland. It seems that professionalization of media relations in the Police will be stronger in the future showing not only transformation inside the internal safety system, but also proving its effectiveness and flexibility in the area of public relations.

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