

# Change of Brand Management in Social Media During the Russia-Ukraine War: Findings from Poland

Magdalena Grzanka

University of Economics in Katowice  
ul. 1 Maja 50, 40-287 Katowice, Poland  
Email: magdalena.grzanka@edu.uekat.pl

Artur Strzelecki

University of Economics in Katowice  
ul. 1 Maja 50, 40-287 Katowice, Poland  
Email: artur.strzelecki@ue.katowice.pl

**Abstract**—The research aims to explore the effects of the war in Ukraine in 2022 on social media and brand management, as well as the ways in which companies and users engage with each other on social media platforms. The study examines the strategies used by companies to engage with users on social media during the war, the role of social media in shaping public perceptions and responses to the war, and the impact of social media engagement on companies' relationships with users and consumers. The study employs a survey research method to collect data from a sample of Polish individuals using structured questionnaires. The results of the study provide insight into the changes in social media and brand management in response to the war and the ways in which companies and users engaged with each other.

## I. INTRODUCTION

IN RECENT years, social media has become an increasingly important platform for brands to reach and engage with their customers. With the proliferation of social media networks and the widespread use of mobile devices, consumers are now able to access and interact with brands in real-time, anywhere, and anytime. This has led to a shift in the way that brands manage their online presence and reputation, as well as the way that they communicate and interact with their customers.

In 2022, the outbreak of the war in Ukraine caused a significant shift in social media and brand management. By the end of February 2022, companies abruptly altered the content they were posting on social media. [14]. Companies that had not previously shared their social or political views on social media were required to take a side in the conflict - either the side of Ukraine or the side of the Russian state, which initiated the war [19]. The lack of involvement of a brand in helping Ukraine was often criticized by social media users, who had previously been willing to buy products from the company. During the war in Ukraine, social media users all over the world identified with the people affected by the war in Ukraine and demanded that brands withdraw from the Russian market.

In times of war, more and more social media users began to believe that companies should openly address social and political issues and share their own views on the actions of the Russian state. The start of the war in Ukraine forced

many companies to change the way they conducted their social media activities [1]. The war conflict required companies to adopt a new strategy and change the way they communicated with social media users, where consumer views of a particular brand are most often expressed. Numerous companies decided to limit their social media activity and give up their standard Internet activity. Many of them showed immediate help to Ukraine, and expressed their support for the eastern community with posts published on their social media. Companies began to organize aid campaigns and money collections, which they informed about on their social media. Those who had not previously published posts on social media were now forced to do so in order to express their support for Ukraine and to inform about the actions taken in this regard. The start of the war in Ukraine led to a change in the way brands communicated with their customers and the way they conducted their social media activities [23].

According to Wirtualnemedi.pl, in the first days of the war conflict in Ukraine, about 900,000 posts appeared on social media calling for help for the Eastern neighbors. The majority of these publications appeared on the social networking site Facebook - about 43%, and on Twitter - about 38% [26]. With the start of the war, social media was dominated by posts related to help for the Ukraine. After the Russian attack on Ukraine, a significant decrease in the number of ads published on Facebook was observed - on February 28, 2022, the number of ads on this social networking site decreased by 73% compared to the previous highest result in that month [25]. At the end of February 2022, ads on social media were mainly suspended, but posts that had been planned several months earlier and had to be published by brands on the internet could be still observed. These were posts from companies that had already been contracted in the past and had to be completed according to the company's regulations. These posts included the results of organized contests, planned events, or webinars [15].

There were also companies that completely suspended their social media business during the war crisis. These actions mainly resulted from the concern of brands about the reactions of consumers to the company's further actions on the internet

during the war in Ukraine. Some companies remained active on their social media platforms but chose to disable comments under their posts. Such behavior did not win the sympathy of consumers. These actions were perceived by social media users as insincere, and silence was treated as an attempt to mask the brand's opinion on the war in Ukraine. The situation changed at the end of March 2022, when companies began to publish posts on social media again, but they were mainly related to the company's involvement in activities supporting Ukraine. The war in Ukraine had a significant impact on the way brands communicated with their customers and changed their social media activities.

The war in Ukraine in 2022 had significant impacts on social media and brand management, as well as on how companies and users engaged with each other on social media platforms [21]. In this research, we will explore how social media and brand management changed in response to the war, how companies' social media posts and strategies evolved during this time, and how users' attitudes towards these efforts were impacted. Additionally, we will examine the role that social media played in shaping public perceptions and responses to the war and how companies' social media engagement during this time affected their relationships with users and consumers. The study relies on data from social media platforms such as Facebook, Instagram, and Twitter [13].

We have formulated the following research questions: 1. How did social media and brand management change in response to the war in Ukraine in 2022? 2. How did companies' social media posts change during the war in Ukraine in 2022? 3. How did users' attitudes toward companies' social media engagement change during the war in Ukraine in 2022?

## II. METHOD

For this study, we used literature review and survey research. Survey research is a method of collecting information from a sample of individuals using structured questionnaires or interviews. In order to verify consumers' opinions about the actions taken by companies on social media during the war crisis in Ukraine, we decided to conduct a study among the Polish community. This study took the form of a questionnaire survey in Polish language and aimed to identify consumers' feelings and observations about daily brand image management compared to the one during the war crisis, which affected Ukrainian community in 2022. The survey questionnaire was prepared using Google Forms software, and made available from March to April 2022. The survey was fully anonymous, and anyone interested could fill it out. In order to gather as many responses as possible, we made the questionnaire available on social media, especially on themed groups on the Facebook social networking site. The aim of the survey was to conduct a public opinion review on the perception of companies on social media and the activities of companies on social media during the war in Ukraine.

The study was conducted in accordance with the Declaration of Helsinki and approved by the Faculty Research Ethics Committee of the University of Economics in Katowice,

Poland; Approval code: 135890, and date: April 3, 2022. The informed consent statement of each participant was collected at the beginning of the survey. The statement was following: "By taking part in this study, you are agreeing to allow us to collect data about managing the brand image in social media during the war crisis in Ukraine. This data will be used to help us better understand brand management during this crisis and will be kept strictly confidential. You may withdraw from the study at any time by contacting us."

In the conducted survey, 150 respondents participated. The questionnaire was filled out by both women and men. The majority of the surveyed were women, 114 of them, which is 76% of the people. The questionnaire was published on social media platforms, which influenced a large percentage of the surveyed being young - they were mostly school or university students. The number of respondents aged under 18 and over 56 was minimal. The largest number of people who participated in the survey were those aged 18 to 26 - there were 85.3% of them, 128 respondents. The next largest group of people participating in the survey were those in the age range of 27-35 (16 respondents). Three people aged 36-55, two people under 18 - 1.3%, and one person over 56.

## III. RESULTS

### A. Brands' activities in social media during the Ukraine war crisis

The onset of the war crisis in Ukraine changed the way brands were managed on social media. In the early days of the war, companies were constantly seeking new ways to build their brand image on social media. They tried to help their eastern neighbors and kept the public informed about it on social media. Companies chose different ways to support Ukraine. Brands supported refugees, organized financial and material collections, fought against disinformation, and used social media profiles as a place to publish reliable information from around the world. Some companies also decided to withdraw Russian products from their own range, suspend production, or ultimately cease operations in Russia [20]. As the war in Ukraine began, companies from various industries began to engage in assistance for their eastern neighbors. Brands on social media platforms called for support for refugees and documented their efforts to help Ukraine. Similar strategies were adopted by well-known celebrities and influencers, who were often associated with a particular brand as a result of a campaign or promotion of goods. While helping their eastern neighbors, companies did not forget about keeping the good reputation of their brand [22]. An important step during the war crisis in Ukraine was the fight against disinformation. Many companies decided to run a certain type of news service on their social media platforms [5]. This activity was intended to eliminate fake news and reduce panic among people [16]. A new service called VPolshchi.pl was created by Virtual Poland in response to the onset of the war crisis in Ukraine [24]. The VPolshchi.pl service was intended to correct false information. VPolshchi.pl features current information on the military actions being carried out in Ukraine and the most

important news related to the ongoing war. The news in this service are conveyed in Ukrainian and are intended to be helpful to the Ukrainian community. This news focuses on delivering accurate information about the current situation in Ukraine and informing about the organized aid efforts [22].

During the war in Ukraine, a significant number of refugees sought shelter in various countries, including Poland. Both individuals and businesses extended their support to these refugees through financial and material assistance. Companies organized campaigns to collect funds, food, clothing, medical supplies, hygiene products, and children's accessories for their eastern neighbors. Special hashtags and discount codes were created, where the use of such codes resulted in a specified amount of money being donated for the benefit of aiding Ukraine. These campaigns effectively encouraged consumers to participate in helping the refugees. One notable example is Rossmann pharmacy, which actively supported its eastern neighbor since the war's onset. They organized an aid campaign by offering a special -40% coupon for selected products to those who wished to support Ukrainian refugees. The company emphasized that this campaign was not merely a promotion but aimed to raise awareness among consumers. The discount was provided to individuals who would donate the purchased products to the refugees. This coupon was valid until March 8, 2022, and covered various hygiene products and children's accessories. The coupon was exclusively available to users of Rossmann's mobile application and could only be used once. [10].

The coffee roaster KawePale also joined the aid action for Ukraine. A post appeared on its Instagram announcing the campaign organized by the brand. The company created a universal discount code for use in the company's online store [11]. The use of this discount code will contribute 15% of the sales of the company's ordered coffees to the Polish Humanitarian Action. The Polish Humanitarian Action supports both people in Ukraine during the ongoing war and refugees coming to Poland [18]. In order to help Ukraine, companies organized their own collections or transferred funds to the existing ones. Information about the ongoing campaigns was announced on the social media portals of companies and among employees of the network who had the opportunity to get involved in the assistance and show solidarity with Ukraine. Such activities were undertaken by one of the Polish banks - ING Bank Śląski SA. On their Facebook profile, the bank posted information about a fundraising campaign for the Ukrainian community in connection with the ongoing war [7]. In addition, the bank declared that it would not only transfer the collected funds to help Ukraine but also double the amount collected.

InPost, one of the main logistics and transportation operators in Poland, also decided to help the Ukrainian community. The company decided to use its resources to help with the delivery of products collected as part of the aid campaigns organized throughout the country for Ukraine. The brand informed about its decision on the Facebook social media platform [8]. The logistics operator InPost not only organized

product deliveries to the eastern border but also participated in numerous charitable collections supporting refugees from Ukraine. The company entered into cooperation with the Polish Red Cross. InPost helped the PCK in transportation of medical equipment, dressings, medicines, hygienic and medical supplies, as well as food products. Together with the Melissa brand, the company developed aid packages that were available for purchase through the InPost mobile application. Those willing to help the Ukrainian community purchased these packages, and the company delivered the goods to those in need in Ukraine. This transport was free of charge and was intended to support the Ukrainian community. In addition, in order to support refugees' lives outside their homeland, the InPost brand created a Ukrainian language version of the mobile application - InPost Mobile [9]. Communication service providers also supported people from Ukraine, initiating the creation of free starters for people from Ukraine. One of the mobile operators that supported Ukraine was the Plus Poland company [22]. The company announced on Twitter information about the organized action related to free starters for every person from Ukraine. This starter included a free package of 500 minutes and 10 GB for 30 days and required the person interested to show their residence card or passport at the sales point [17].

During the Ukraine war crisis, a group of companies emerged, that, after about two months of the war, still did not declare the withdrawal of their brand from the Russian market. This group included Leroy Merlin, Auchan, and Nestle. In April 2022, the opinions of internet users about these companies were critical. These brands were regularly boycotted on the internet, and previous customers of these businesses stopped purchasing products from their offerings [3]. The consequences of not leaving the Russian market, for example, affected the Leroy Merlin brand. Internet users were calling for a continuous boycott of this company on the internet, and social media users formulated a special hashtag #boycottleroymerlin, calling for the cessation of using the services offered by this company. Newer graphics appearing on the internet showed the disapproval of social media users. The Russian market was not abandoned by the Auchan hypermarket chain either. As a result of the companies' approach to the events taking place in Ukraine, a petition was issued by the National Boycott of Leroy Merlin, calling for the dismissal of the Polish management of the Leroy Merlin and Auchan chains [4]. Internet users described the attitude of these companies as cowardly and unworthy of imitation. Strikes were being organized under the stationary stores of the companies, calling for help for the Ukrainian community and the withdrawal of brands from the Russian market. Similarly to the company Leroy Merlin, the company Auchan tried to alleviate the tense situation it is facing. On March 11, 2022, the Polish branch of the company informed the social media site Facebook about the assistance organized for the Ukrainian community and declared that it has no influence on the decision of the parent company regarding the conduct of business in the Russian Federation [2]. In view of the expression of solidarity with

Ukraine, the company hoped for a gradual easing of the consumer boycott. The effect of the message shared online was the opposite, and about twelve thousand negative reactions and comments directed at the Leroy Merlin company were recorded under the published post [13].

### B. Survey study group

The respondents were asked about their attention to businesses' online activity during the war crisis in Ukraine and its impact on brand posts on social media. The survey items are presented in tables I to V. Out of the total number of respondents, 63 indicated paying attention to companies' posts during the war, with 36 showing significant interest. On the other hand, 31 respondents stated not paying attention to these posts, and one person explicitly ignored business posts during the war. Additionally, 19 respondents were uncertain and chose the "Difficult to say" response (Table I).

The respondents observed both the actions taken by companies on social media during the war crisis in Ukraine and the changes in their posts. Out of the respondents, 63 rather and 36 definitely noticed a difference in the behavior of brands on social media during the war. Only 32 respondents did not perceive any changes in the companies' social media posts following Russia's aggression against Ukraine. Additionally, 19 respondents found it challenging to provide a clear answer to this question (Table I).

Furthermore, the war in Ukraine led to the emergence of numerous negative consumer opinions about specific brands on the internet. Among the surveyed respondents, 104 individuals confirmed seeing criticism directed at companies on social media in relation to the ongoing war in Ukraine. Conversely, 46 respondents did not notice any negative opinions about companies on the internet concerning the war's impact on the Ukrainian community (Table II).

During the war in Ukraine, respondents noticed negative comments about companies on social media, but they rarely shared their own opinions or comments under brand posts. Only 14 respondents confirmed commenting on content posted by companies on social media regarding the war in Ukraine. On the other hand, 136 respondents stated that they did not express their views on the internet about the actions of companies during the war crisis in Ukraine (Table II). The respondents were also asked to provide their opinions on companies' social media activity during the war in Ukraine. A significant number of respondents (98) believed that brands should not engage in standard activity, while 21 had different views, and 31 marked the response as "Difficult to say" (Table III).

The respondents unanimously agreed that businesses should deliver continuous updates on social media regarding their actions in response to the ongoing war in Ukraine, including providing material and financial aid to refugees. This view was shared by the majority, with 97 respondents expressing this opinion. Additionally, 108 respondents believed that businesses should show support for Ukraine on social media, while only 12 disagreed with this statement (Table III).

The surveyed individuals also believed that businesses should inform on social media about the withdrawal of Russian products from their own offerings - 123 responses of this type were given. According to the respondents, it is also important for companies to involve their brand's consumers in actively helping Ukraine and its refugees. Companies should also pay more attention to comments made under posts by brands on social media, especially during the ongoing crisis in Ukraine (111 responses). As claimed by the respondents, businesses should feel obligated to help the Ukrainian community and appeal for help among the followers gathered on social media networks (96 responses) (Table IV).

The survey respondents showed a keen interest in the support demonstrated by companies on social media for Ukraine. Out of the respondents, 104 individuals expressed their concern and engagement with this issue. The respondents were aligned in their demand for businesses to provide assistance to Ukraine, but not all respondents were discouraged from purchasing products from brands that did not take decisive actions regarding the war in Ukraine. The responses were divided regarding the question of purchasing products from brands that lacked solidarity with Ukraine. Fifty-eight respondents indicated that they would still purchase products from such brands, while 51 respondents held the opposite opinion. However, the responses were almost evenly distributed regarding consumer reluctance to purchase products from companies that did not criticize Russia's aggression against Ukraine. For this question, 53 respondents answered affirmatively, while 72 respondents had a negative response. Furthermore, a decisive majority of the respondents expressed their intention to continue following the social media profiles of brands that do not show support for Ukraine, with 100 respondents confirming this. However, 28 respondents found it challenging to provide a definitive answer, and 22 respondents were prepared to stop following such businesses on social media (Table V).

## IV. DISCUSSION

The study addressed issues related to the change in brand image management due to the war crisis in Ukraine and the new reality that modern businesses had to find themselves in. The study on the activity of businesses and brand image management in social media was based on a developed questionnaire survey that was made available on social media portals. One hundred fifty people participated in the study, expressing their own opinions on social media and their impact on the brand image, even in the face of the war crisis in Ukraine. The analysis focused on the behavior and views of modern consumers in relation to the actions taken by companies in social media.

During the war crisis in Ukraine, businesses sought to provide assistance to their eastern neighbors and ensured support for refugees both materially and financially. The responses confirmed that consumers pay close attention to the activities of companies in social media, and these actions significantly impact the brand perception of customers. The surveyed individuals base their opinions on the products

TABLE I  
RESPONDENTS' ASSESSMENT OF POSTS BY BRANDS IN SOCIAL MEDIA DURING THE WAR IN UKRAINE

Statement	Answer				
	No	Rather not	Difficult to say	Rather yes	Yes
I pay attention to the actions taken by companies in social media during the war in Ukraine	0.6%	20.7%	12.7%	42%	24%
I notice a change in the posts published by brands on social networks as a result of the war in Ukraine	1.3%	18.7%	14%	40.6%	25.4%

TABLE II  
OPINIONS OF NETWORK USERS ABOUT COMPANIES IN SOCIAL MEDIA DURING THE WAR CRISIS IN UKRAINE

Statement	Answer	Count
I notice negative opinions about companies appearing in social media during the time of war crisis in Ukraine	Yes	69.3%
	No	30.7%
I comment on content posted by companies' relationship on social media with the war in Ukraine	Yes	9.3%
	No	90.7%

TABLE III  
RESPONDENTS' ASSESSMENT OF THE STATEMENTS ABOUT THE COMPANIES IN SOCIAL MEDIA AND THE WAR IN UKRAINE

Statement	Answer				
	No	Rather not	Difficult to say	Rather yes	Yes
During the war in Ukraine, companies should not conduct standard activity in social media	34.7%	30.7%	20.6%	10%	4%
Companies should inform via social media about the current actions of the brand taken in the era of the war crisis	4.6%	12.7%	18%	40%	24.7%
Businesses should show support for Ukraine on social media	2.7%	5.3%	20%	37.3%	34.7%

TABLE IV  
RESPONDENTS' ASSESSMENT OF THE STATEMENTS REGARDING THE ACTIONS OF BRANDS DURING THE WAR IN UKRAINE

Statement	Answer				
	No	Rather not	Difficult to say	Rather yes	Yes
Companies should inform on social networks about the withdrawal of Russian products from its own offer	2.7%	4.7%	10.6%	34.7%	47.3%
Companies should pay attention to comments posted by followers on social networks during the war crisis in Ukraine	4%	6%	16%	35.3%	38.7%
Companies should involve followers in aid for Ukraine	5.3%	6.7%	24%	40.6%	23.4%

offered by brands, and the reputation of the companies - on the opinions of other users. In addition, due to Russia's aggression towards Ukraine, respondents have experienced a significant change in the themes of posts published in social media and have encountered more negative comments directed toward contemporary businesses. These negative comments are mainly directed toward companies that have not yet decided to withdraw their brand from the Russian market and have not withdrawn Russian products from their own offerings (as of the date of the survey). Respondents confirmed that, in their opinion, businesses should not conduct their usual activities in social media during the ongoing war crisis in Ukraine, and some of those surveyed replied that they would refrain from purchasing products from a company that is not supportive of Ukraine.

We have found the following answers to the research questions. The war in Ukraine in 2022 had a significant impact on social media and brand management, as companies were required to take a side in the conflict and express their views on social and political issues. This led to a change in the way that companies conducted their social media activities and communicated with their customers (Research question

1). During the war in Ukraine in 2022, companies' social media posts changed as they were required to take a side in the conflict and express their views on social and political issues. Many companies also limited their social media activity or changed the way they communicated with their customers in order to show their support for Ukraine (Research question 2). Users' attitudes towards companies' social media engagement changed during the war in Ukraine in 2022, as they began to expect companies to openly address social and political issues and share their views on the actions of the Russian state. Social media users also demanded that brands withdraw from the Russian market and show their support for Ukraine through their engagement with companies on social media (Research question 3).

There are several limitations to consider for the conducted research. First is the time period. The study focuses on events that occurred in 2022, which may not be representative of the current state of social media and brand management. The second is geographical scope. The study focuses on the impact of the war in Ukraine on social media and brand management, which may not be applicable to other countries or regions. The third is the causal relationship. The study suggests that the

TABLE V  
RESPONDENTS' ASSESSMENT OF THE STATEMENTS ABOUT THE WAR IN UKRAINE AND THE ACTIVITIES OF BRANDS ONLINE

Statement	Answer				
	No	Rather not	Difficult to say	Rather yes	Yes
I pay attention to the support shown in social media by companies for Ukraine	8.7%	11.3%	10.7%	40.6%	28.7%
No firm action by the company in the relationship with the conflict in Ukraine discourages the purchase of products of a given brand	20%	28%	16.7%	20%	15.3%
I will resign from following the profile of a company in social media that does not show support for Ukraine	35.4%	31.3%	16.7%	9.3%	5.3%
I will resign from buying products of a specific brand that is not in solidarity with Ukraine	16.7%	22%	27.3%	22%	12%

start of the war in Ukraine caused changes in the way brands managed their social media presence, but it is not clear if this is the only factor that contributed to these changes. Other factors, such as changes in consumer behavior or the adoption of new social media platforms, may also have played their role. The forth is data sources. The study relies on data from social media platforms such as Facebook, Instagram, and Twitter, which may not be representative of the entire population or all social media activity.

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