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Sustainability in Public Relations Campaigns: Diagnosis of the Phenomenon Using the Example of PR Industry Research in Poland

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Abstract: This article is based on a study of the public relations environment in Poland and contains many references to the problems that Polish PR professionals have to deal with while performing their daily professional duties. The purpose of the article is to identify the factors that determine the frequency with which sustainable development elements are used in PR campaigns. The unit of analysis consists of the responses of 315 PR professionals who represent various organizations and provide services both to their clients and themselves, contributing to the PR structures of private and public companies. The main research technique was an online CAWI survey conducted in 2022. The main hypothesis of the article assumes that the professional experience of Polish PR professionals determines the frequency of using sustainable development elements in PR campaigns. In light of the above considerations, this article can make a valuable contribution to the discussion on the evolution of the PR specialist's role in the context of sustainable development.

Keywords: sustainability; public relations; public relations specialist; statistical analysis; work experience; sustainable development

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1. Introduction

PR professionals, as guardians of an organization's image, should be aware of the growing role of business ethics, corporate social responsibility, and environmental concerns. Accordingly, the concept of sustainability, based on balancing the demands of today's generations with the needs of future generations, is becoming an integral part of social communication strategies [1]. In the context of the work of PR professionals, a measurement focused on understanding the role sustainability plays in shaping positive social and environmental impact becomes important.

With growing public awareness of environmental and social issues [2], PR professionals must adapt their strategies to reflect these global changes. Therefore, it becomes crucial not only to identify and promote sustainable actions taken by organizations but also to develop communications that authentically reflect a commitment to environmental protection and social well-being. This requires PR professionals not only to have a profound understanding of sustainability concepts but also to be able to effectively communicate these values in a way that resonates with the expectations and values of their audience. In this aspect, it is also important to educate to increase the awareness of clients who use qualified PR services [3]. In this way, PR professionals can contribute to building lasting and positive change, both in the public consciousness and in business operations [4], highlighting the role that ethical and sustainable practices play in shaping the future of our planet.

The research conducted is crucial to achieving the goals set forth in the article, which focus on understanding and promoting the role of sustainability in the PR industry, along with a diagnosis of the scale of the use of its various components. This analysis not only provides valuable insight into the current practices and perceptions of PR professionals, but also serves as a starting point for further development and implementation of sustainability strategies in corporate communications. As a result, it is possible to better align PR activities with growing social and environmental expectations, which will contribute to building more responsible and conscious brands that actively support sustainability.

2. Sustainable Development—A Perspective of Theoretical Assumptions

Rapid economic growth has led to excessive consumption and use of natural resources [5]. This may be associated with the concept of social marketing and excessive consumption. Therefore, it is important to address the changes that this entails in the context of sustainable development strategies. This concept involves meeting the needs of the organization while maintaining environmental sustainability and employee and community well-being. It is a long-term strategy that considers the actions taken by companies responsibly and with future generations in mind. It responds to the problems of the modern world. It was created within the framework of the activities of the World Commission on Environment and Development, the so-called Brundtland Commission, established in 1983. Based on the UN document "Our Common Future" [6], it was stated that sustainable development is development in which the needs of the present generation can be met without diminishing the chances of future generations to meet them [7]. This is because civilization has reached a level of prosperity that can be sustained as long as environmental and climate resources are respected [8].

An important goal of sustainable development is to improve the quality of life, which is interpreted as a set of factors that determine objective living conditions and subjectively perceived well-being [9]. It is analyzed in three dimensions: economic, social, and environmental [10]. The economic goals are profit and financial growth, which are indispensable for the operation and success of a business. Sustainability implies that they should be achieved ethically and with respect for the community and environment in which the company operates.

Social goals include caring for the well-being of employees, creating quality jobs, promoting diversity, equality, and fairness in the workplace, and engaging with local communities. Companies should also consider the impact of their operations on customers and society, aiming to provide valuable products and services that meet the needs and respect the rights of consumers. Environmental goals are concerned with minimizing the company's negative impact on the environment. Companies should strive to reduce greenhouse gas emissions, use resources efficiently, protect biodiversity, reduce waste and pollution, and promote sustainable energy and water management. Implementing green practices in a company can include using renewable energy, reducing the consumption of raw materials, recycling, investing in clean transportation technologies, and many other measures.

Sustainable production and consumption, as understood in this way, should be based on ecological responsibility and the mutual benefits of international integration and the reduction of social inequality [11].

There are many approaches, dimensions, and interpretations of sustainable development: political, philosophical, anthropocentric, biocentric, economic, and ecological. The concept of sustainable development requires a multifaceted and multidimensional interpretation due to different fields of life and science [12]. It cannot be reduced to a single explication or to a single system in which it needs to be implemented. Therefore, some authors rightly postulate that the concept and practice of sustainable development should be viewed in the systems and areas in which they operate [13]. The treatment of sustainable development strategies as a panacea for economic crises, environmental degradation, and premature total exploitation of the planet's raw material resources can be noted.

The most important common features included in definitions of sustainability concern: the interaction between economic, ecological, demographic, and social factors of development; the need to anticipate and analyze the impact of current decisions on the quality of life of future generations; distributive justice; and the emphasis on the contribution of intangible aspects of quality of life in shaping well-being [14]. The supply side, or, in other words, sustainable environment business strategies, is increasingly discussed in the literature on stakeholders, corporate social responsibility, marketing, and strategy [15].

A consequence of the consideration of taking action to save the world from the repercussions of development was the publication of a report in 1989, "Blueprint for a Green Economy", where the term "green economy" was first introduced [16]. Twenty years later, in March 2009, a report entitled "Global Green New Deal" was published. It pointed out the need to overcome the triple crisis: financial, related to climate change, and resulting from high oil prices [17]. The green economy can create new opportunities, particularly in terms of new jobs in many sectors of the economy. It can also lead to a shift in jobs from activities based on non-renewable resources to those using renewable resources. The transition to a green economy depends to a large extent on investment (in green technologies, among other things), the use of innovation (especially green innovation), and citizen involvement. It can be suggested here that the "green economy" sets the stage for an economic transformation that aims to ensure an increase in prosperity and quality of life, as well as social equality, while halting the depletion of natural resources and reducing environmental risks.

An important developmental event was the adoption of the 2030 Agenda, comprising 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) following the United Nations (UN) conference in New York in September 2015. The goals contained therein apply to the entire world (developed and developing countries) and are based on three consistent elements: economic growth, social inclusion, and environmental protection. They are intended to stimulate action in areas of paramount importance: people, our planet, prosperity, world peace, and partnership. They are an expression of common global tasks tailored to a country's capabilities. They thus make it possible to address a wide range of major challenges in education, health, prosperity, social cohesion, governance, and the environment. This requires the firm commitment of private corporations working with governments at various levels, international institutions, academia, and societies in general [18]. Integrating sustainability principles into core business activities and corporate plans is essential to contributing to global sustainability [19].

However, actions in the area of SDGs can also be utilized by companies in an unethical manner [20]. The Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) of the United Nations are increasingly being leveraged by corporations to benchmark and communicate their sustainability performance. Corporations typically disclose their engagement strategies and outcomes voluntarily, without the assistance of standardized and externally verified reports. This poses a risk that corporations misuse the SDGs for "greenwashing" and "impact washing" in their activities, for example, by selectively reporting favorable information. Inaccurate and opaque disclosure of information can also lead to information asymmetry, which distorts the decision-making process for investors and other stakeholders. However, in the worst cases, SDG assessments contribute to yet another level of greenwashing [21].

There are signs, for example, indicating that companies may be tempted to focus their reports on Sustainable Development Goals in areas where they already achieve good results or know they can easily improve, a practice sometimes referred to as "cherry picking" (see, for example, [22]). This can be likened to "greenwashing" or "ecological money laundering". Growing institutional changes towards new measurement frameworks (such as GRI and SASB standards) and regulatory oversight regarding the monitoring of information disclosure (e.g., the EU Directive on non-financial reporting) are likely to improve the transparency and credibility of sustainable development reporting [23].

As interest in the issue grows, internal and external stakeholders are increasing the pressure on companies to make business decisions. Developed countries and international

organizations are vigorously promoting a set of mechanisms to help companies effectively integrate activities around environmental and social concerns into their operational strategies and management systems. As a result, companies now tend to disclose their activities by publishing reports related to their sustainability promotions and performance [24]. Organizations are required to present sustainability reports demonstrating their commitment to protecting the economy, environment, and society.

The growing trend clearly demonstrates that acting around sustainability strategy is an unavoidable responsibility and an important issue for organizations to ensure future competitive advantage [25]. The multidimensional orientation of corporate reports can improve the dialogue between companies and stakeholders [26]. It helps improve the degree of accountability of companies [27] to stakeholders and provides legitimacy for certain sectors (e.g., extractive industries).

An important area that has a unique role to play in the pursuit of the Sustainable Development Goals is the private sector [28]. The specific capabilities it can bring to their achievement are: financing, sector-specific expertise, governance and enforcement capabilities, and a higher willingness to take risks. The contribution of business to achieving the Sustainable Development Goals is unquestionable [29], but research is still needed to understand the role of organizations in addressing issues based on the SDG framework [30]. The SDG framework enables companies to adhere to a global system of goals, which requires new knowledge indicating which business practices are consistent with an SDG-based approach to sustainability [31].

The implementation of SDGs can be selective, depending on the type of company, its business strategy, and the area in which it seeks to make changes and has an influence. Not all goals need to be pursued simultaneously, and their implementation can be gradual. The issues addressed in this article are dependent on the aim of the research project, which was conducted among public relations specialists and touched upon the topic of sustainable development in the PR profession.

The topic of sustainable development is currently widely analyzed and described in various scholarly publications. The theoretical considerations presented constitute a particularly significant portion of what is already known about sustainable development. However, juxtaposing it with actions in the field of PR is a novel approach worthy of consideration. To this end, an original Polish study was conducted, focusing on the issues of sustainable development in the PR profession.

The authors' study, which addressed the issue of sustainability in the work of a PR professional, was conducted to serve this purpose.

3. Survey Methodology

This article is based on the presentation of results from a quantitative research project that was conducted among public relations professionals and touched, among other things, on the issue of sustainability in the work of a PR professional. The project "Trends and changes in the public relations industry in the context of sustainable development" was coordinated by the Department of Social Communication and Public Relations at the University of Warsaw. For the purposes of the research, it was assumed that the authors understood sustainable development as the socio-economic development of modern societies, consisting of meeting their needs in such a way as not to reduce the ability of future generations to meet their needs (Brundtland Commission, 1987). This definition was also communicated to the survey respondents. The survey was conducted from September–October 2022 among people representing the broad public relations community in Poland. Using a computer-assisted web interview (CAWI) format, 315 questionnaires were collected and statistically analyzed. The selection of the sample was purposeful, yet it allowed us to gather information from both practitioners and researchers in the field of public relations in Poland, as well as from people providing services qualified under PR (of which 37% are PR specialists employed by private companies, 23% from the public sector, 18% from PR agencies, 10% are freelancers, and researchers and PR professionals from the

non-governmental sector are 6% each). There is no universal research frame for Polish PR specialists, although we tried to take into account the opinions of the entire professional community, which is confirmed by the distributions in Table 1. The main research was preceded by an introduction for the study, where respondents were to indicate what they do in their professional work. The survey was only available to those who marked the following answer as one of their two leading specializations: "I am a PR specialist (public relations/marketing communication specialist/spokesperson/freelancer/PR agency employee/scientific researcher in social communication)".

Table 1. Profile of respondents (frequency of given characteristics in the research sample, where n = 315).

Respondents' Characteristics		**n**	**%**
Gender	Female	210	67.1
	Male	103	32.9
Main workplace	PR agency	54	17.6
	Private organization	113	36.9
	Public organization	70	22.9
	Non-governmental organization	19	6.2
	University/research center	20	6.5
	Freelancer	30	9.8
The size of the company	Micro (1–9 employees)	60	19.2
	Small (10–49 employees)	77	24.6
	Medium (50–249 employees)	67	21.4
	Big (250 employees and more)	109	34.8
Role in the PR team	Executive	107	34.4
	Executive and management	143	46.0
	Managerial	61	19.6
Seniority in PR	Less than 3 years	55	17.7
	3–10 years	145	46.6
	More than 10 years	111	35.7
Work experience gained in a PR agency	No	142	45.2
	Yes	172	54.8
PR education	Lack of this type of study/course	121	40.6
	Completed PR studies/courses	177	59.4
Education	Secondary or lower	50	15.9
	Higher	265	84.1

Source: authors' own research entitled "Trends and changes in the public relations industry in the context of sustainable development".

The main hypothesis of the article is that the professional experience of Polish PR professionals (including education, seniority, main workplace, and role in the PR team) determines the frequency of using sustainability elements in PR campaigns and professional work. It was important to learn about the sustainability factors that are used in the work of Polish PR professionals. In addition, the researchers were interested in whether the size of the organization influences the types of activities related to caring for future generations.

The profile of the respondents is illustrated in the following tables (Table 1). For the purposes of the article, eight variables were used to support the analysis of sustainability issues. Their frequency distributions indicate the diversity of respondents in terms of both demographic and professional characteristics, which positively influences the way the results are inferred and interpreted. In the case of seniority in the PR industry and level of experience, the variables were recoded to obtain larger numbers within each category. In the research sample, it was noticeable that there was a preponderance of women, those with agency experience, those with graduate degrees and/or courses in public relations, and those with a higher education (all the aforementioned received more than 50% of

indications). On the other hand, the extensive professional experience of the respondents is evidenced by the fact that, on average, one in three respondents has been professionally involved in PR for more than 10 years (average 9.26; median 7), while one in five holds a management position in their organization.

The article includes classical elements of statistical description, as well as more in-depth methods of data analysis. These were based on measures of dependence to determine the strength and direction of the relationship between variables, i.e., Spearman's rank correlation coefficient (with two ordinal variables), chi-square, and V-Kramer tests (in cross tabulations). In the situation of comparing the results of averages in at least three groups, the non-parametric equivalent of one-way analysis of variance was used—i.e., the Kruskal–Wallis test (e.g., for the main workplace variable). And the Mann–Whitney U test was used to compare two groups (e.g., the PR education variable). In the course of the analyses, an aggregate index entitled the index of the importance of sustainable development in PR activities was also designed, consisting of five statements presented in Table 2. In the construction of the index, the procedures for calculating the values of the variables and recoding for internal consistency of the scale were applied, which were preceded by reliability analysis and verification of the values of Cronbach's alpha (α) coefficients (Cronbach's alpha is a reliability statistic based on the internal consistency of responses. It is calculated from the average correlation between items. Data can be measured on a dichotomous, ordinal, or quantitative scale. The results oscillate between 0 and 1). The graphic presentation of the results is made up of graphs and tabular summaries. The percentages presented in the article have been rounded and may not add up to 100%.

Table 2. PR professionals' views on sustainable development.

Tested Claims	Answers in % (Likert's Scale)					Average
	I Absolutely Disagree	I Rather Disagree	Hard to Say	I Rather Agree	I Absolutely Agree	
I am seeing an increase in interest in implementing sustainability measures at my company	1.3	10.9	24.0	42.6	21.2	3.71
Sustainability activities contribute to the image benefits of those who apply them	0.6	3.5	17.3	44.6	34.0	4.08
Sustainability activities reinforce the effectiveness of other communication activities carried out by companies	0.6	4.8	28.2	43.6	22.8	3.83
Stakeholder engagement in sustainability activities is steadily increasing	1.0	5.5	26.9	43.4	23.3	3.83
Sustainability issues are marginalized in the PR industry (not a big deal)	10.6	27.0	35.4	21.2	5.8	2.85

Source: authors' own research entitled "Trends and changes in the public relations industry in the context of sustainable development".

4. Sustainability in the Professional Work of a PR Specialist

The presence of sustainability in the work of a PR specialist can provide a starting point for a better understanding of the role organizations play today in the context of local communities, global trends, or consumer demands. Modern society is increasingly paying attention to the actions of companies, not only in an economic context, but also in a social and environmental context. The very analysis of sustainability aspects in the work of a PR specialist is becoming essential due to the growing importance of corporate social responsibility, the changing expectations of stakeholders, and the impact of an organization's activities on the environment. In light of the research conducted, it is apparent that there is no single dominant factor in this regard, and a scattered approach is more apparent (Figure 1).

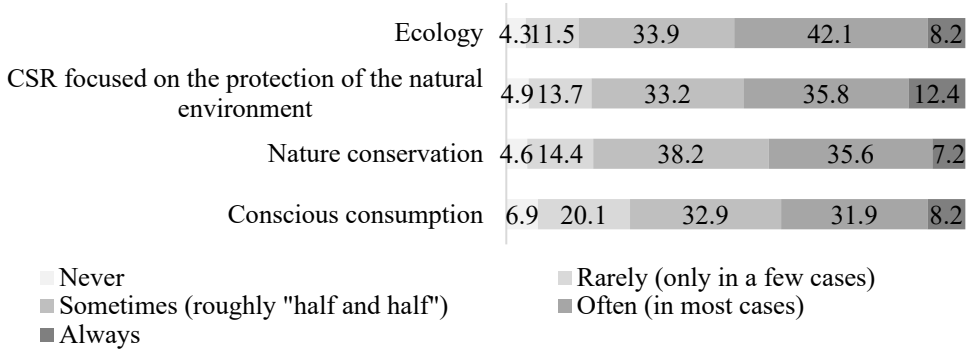


Figure 1. How often do the following sustainability-related aspects appear in assignments/campaigns carried out by PR professionals? (%). Statistics for conscious consumption (n = 304, median = 3, average = 3.14); nature conservation (n = 306, median = 3, average = 3.26); CSR (n = 307, median = 3, average = 3.37), ecology (n = 304, median = 4, average = 3.38). Source: authors' own research entitled "Trends and changes in the public relations industry in the context of sustainable development".

At least two-fifths of those surveyed note that ecology, CSR, nature conservation, and conscious consumption are themes present in most PR service implementations. That is, for an average of 45% of respondents, topics that consider various elements of sustainable development are present in realized assignments and/or public relations campaigns. In the case of ecology, we can speak of the relatively most frequent category (the sum of "often" and "always" responses at 50%). It is interesting to note that one in eight respondents includes the topic of corporate social responsibility focused on environmental protection in their projects every time. On the other hand, issues of conscious consumption can be considered the relatively most often marginalized in PR campaigns (sum of answers "never" and "rarely" at 27%). At the stage of conceptualization of the research process, the authors developed a research tool whose aim was to analyze trends and conditions related to professional work in the public relations industry. The topic of sustainable development was one of the areas of a broader survey, and its level of detail was adjusted to the unit of analysis (i.e., the group of Polish PR specialists and their professional practice). Therefore, for the question "How often do the following aspects related to sustainable development appear in orders/campaigns carried out by PR specialists? Please answer based on your observations and professional experiences", the aspects included nature protection, ecology, conscious consumption, and CSR aimed at protecting the natural environment. Each of the four items was tested using an ordinal frequency scale. The authors considered only selected elements, although all of them fit into the adopted definition of sustainable development of the Ministry of Development and Technology of the Republic of Poland. The definitions were also provided to all respondents in the guidance section of the survey question. (See Table 3).

Table 3. Correlation coefficient within the analyzed aspects of sustainable development.

Spearman's Rho		Nature Conservation	Ecology	Conscious Consumption	CSR
Nature conservation	Correlation coefficient		0.688 **	0.547 **	0.557 **
	n		303	302	304
Ecology	Correlation coefficient	0.688 **		0.450 **	0.656 **
	n	303		302	303
Conscious consumption	Correlation coefficient	0.547 **	0.450 **		0.471 **
	n	302	302		304
CSR	Correlation coefficient	0.557 **	0.656 **	0.471 **	
	n	304	303	304	

** Significant correlation at the 0.01 level (two-sided). Source: authors' own research entitled "Trends and changes in the public relations industry in the context of sustainable development".

Correlation analysis showed that for two aspects, the rho coefficient is particularly high [32]. This is the case for the relationship between nature conservation and ecology and between ecology and CSR (the correlation coefficient took values of $0.6 < |r| < 0.7$).

Of the set of independent variables analyzed (gender, main place of work, company size, role in the PR team, seniority in PR, work experience gained in a PR agency, PR education, and level of education), only the number of years of work in the industry significantly differentiates respondents' opinions on the frequency of sustainability elements in PR campaigns (Table 4). This is an argument for positive verification of the hypothesis.

Table 4. Frequency of occurrence of sustainability elements in assignments/campaigns carried out by PR professionals in relation to their seniority (scale from 1 to 5).

Elements of Sustainable Development:		Less than 3 Years	3–10 Years	More than 10 Years
Nature conservation	Average	3.20	3.42	3.08
	p value		$p < 0.05$	
Ecology	Average	3.25	3.55	3.24
	p value		$p < 0.05$	
Conscious consumption	Average	3.00	3.42	2.87
	p value		$p < 0.001$	
CSR	Average	3.22	3.50	3.28
	p value		$p > 0.05$	

Source: authors' own research entitled "Trends and changes in the public relations industry in the context of sustainable development".

PR professionals assigned to the middle range in terms of seniority (3 to 10 years) significantly more often perceived the presence of issues related to nature conservation ($p = 0.017$), ecology ($p = 0.018$), and conscious consumption ($p = 0.001$). Nevertheless, the greater the seniority, the less frequently the topic of conscious consumption was indicated (Spearman's rho correlation: rho = (−0.123); $p = 0.033$; n = 302). This is also confirmed by the relatively low average in the entire set (the "over 10 years" group), as this was the only time its value fell below 3 points. In no other aspect was a linear relationship ($p > 0.05$) observed.

The following analyses show a polarized approach in terms of the importance of sustainability in the work of a public relations specialist. On the one hand, 27% of respondents point out that the issue of sustainability is marginalized in the PR industry (this is most strongly emphasized by those employed in small companies with 10 to 49 employees—38%), while on the other hand, almost 2/5 of respondents have a different opinion on the subject (the relatively highest result was recorded in the group of large companies with a minimum of 250 employees—50%) (chi-squared test: $\chi^2 = 24.397$; df = 12; $p = 0.018$; n = 310; Kramer's V = 0.162.). It is worth noting that at least one in five PR professionals surveyed strongly emphasized that:

- stakeholder involvement in sustainability-related activities is steadily increasing,
- sustainability-related activities enhance the effectiveness of other communications activities carried out by companies,
- their organizations are taking an increasingly strong interest in implementing sustainability-related activities.

On the other hand, one in three respondents believes that sustainability-related activities contribute to the image benefits of the entities that use them. It is interesting to note that the highest intergroup averages for all of the above opinions indicating the relevance of sustainability issues in the practice of the company's operations occurred in the group of PR specialists representing the largest companies (each time the average values exceeded 4 points on a scale of 1–5).

The data summarized in Table 5 show how opinions on sustainability change in relation to seniority in the PR industry. In general, the values of averages increase in successive ranges, which indicates the influence of work experience on the awareness of PR professionals. In addition, a positive correlation with seniority in terms of quotients (i.e., expressed in terms of the exact number of years worked in the PR industry) (Spearman's rho correlation: rho = 0.114; $p = 0.046$; n = 309) was observed for the statement "Sustainability activities contribute to the image benefits of those who use them".

Table 5. Opinions of PR professionals on sustainability in relation to their seniority (scale from 1 to 5).

The Meaning of Sustainability:		Less Than 3 Years	3–10 Years	More Than
I am observing an increase in interest in implementing sustainability measures at my company	Average	3.46	3.72	3.82
	p value		$p > 0.05$	
Sustainability activities contribute to the image benefits of those who apply them	Average	3.73	4.10	4.23
	p value		$p < 0.01$	
Sustainability activities reinforce the effectiveness of other communication activities carried out by companies	Average	3.56	3.86	3.93
	p value		$p < 0.05$	
Stakeholder engagement in sustainability activities is steadily increasing	Average	3.56	3.82	3.97
	p value		$p < 0.05$	

Source: authors' own research entitled "Trends and changes in the public relations industry in the context of sustainable development".

The opinions of the PR professionals surveyed about sustainability were combined into a single synthetic indicator, showing the strength of the intensity of the opinion expressed on a scale of 0–100%. The higher the value, the more important sustainability is to the respondents in their professional work. With the help of such an indicator, it is possible to draw conclusions about the role sustainability plays in the practice of public relations, which additionally allows for describing changes in the area of professionalization of the industry.

The index was calculated based on the average value of the index for respondents who answered all aspects that make up the index structure (there were five aspects: "I observe an increase in interest in the implementation of sustainability-related activities at my company", "Sustainability-related activities contribute to the image benefits of the entities that use them", "Sustainability-related activities enhance the effectiveness of other communication activities carried out by companies", "Stakeholder involvement in sustainability-related activities is steadily increasing", "Sustainability issues are marginalized in the PR industry—they are of little importance"). The result obtained in this way is converted into a percentage, according to the following proportion:

$$\frac{(\mu - 1)}{x} = \frac{4}{100\%}$$

The index of importance of sustainability in PR activities in the entire survey sample is 68%, indicating an above-average role of sustainability-related activities. In addition, reliability analysis using the Cronbach's alpha coefficient (α) confirmed that the scale is homogeneous and allows for an aggregate description of phenomena. The Cronbach's alpha coefficient can take values from 0 to 1, with a value closer to 1 indicating a better quality of the measurement scale [33]. In the case of the corporate social responsibility issues analyzed, $\alpha = 0.730$. (See Figure 2).

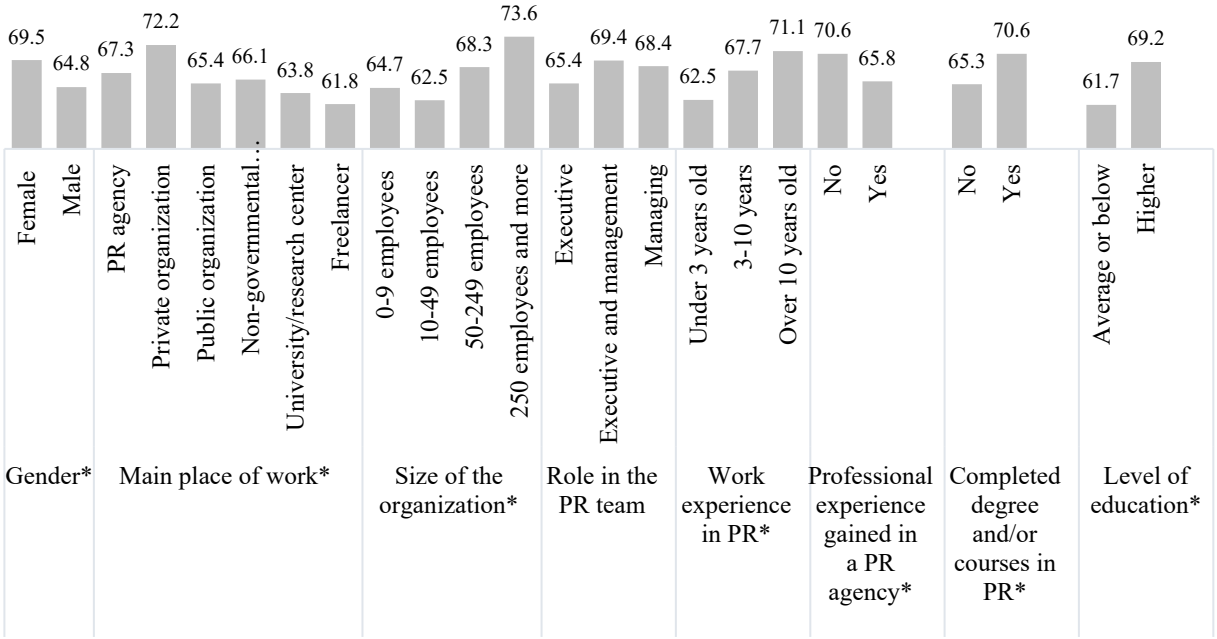


Figure 2. Index of importance of sustainability in PR activities relative to independent variables (%). * Significant relationship. Source: authors' own research entitled "Trends and changes in the public relations industry in the context of sustainable development".

It should be noted that the relatively highest value of the index (74%) was in the group of PR professionals who are employed by large companies. Clear differences in the saturation level of the index can be seen, especially in two configurations, i.e., between large and small companies (11-point difference) and between private organizations and freelancers (10-point difference). The observed differences are statistically significant for eight of the nine analyzed profiling variables of the surveyed PR professionals ($p < 0.05$). Only the type of position held proved to be a non-significant factor in the analysis comparing averages. In general, with each additional year of seniority in PR, the index of the importance of sustainability increases by 0.27% (prediction based on linear regression, where t = 2.142; $p = 0.033$; B = 0.011; constant = 3.619).

5. Summary and Discussion of Results

In this article, the authors present an analysis of the integration of sustainability principles into the activities of Polish PR professionals. It is shown that large organizations are more likely to incorporate sustainability principles into their strategies, due to perceived image benefits and growing public expectations of corporate social responsibility. In turn, seniority in PR influences awareness of and commitment to sustainable activities, with greater emphasis on ecology, nature conservation, CSR, and conscious consumption.

Research has shown that the topic of sustainability is an important element in the work of PR professionals in Poland. The topic has a direct impact on business practices and communication with stakeholders. The developing awareness and growing commitment to sustainability issues in the PR sector can contribute to building a positive image for companies and more effective communication with the public.

Seniority in the PR industry differentiates respondents' opinions on the frequency of sustainability elements in their PR campaigns. In addition, the authors tried to show that work experience influences PR professionals' awareness of sustainability, where the greater the seniority, the more often elements related to ecology, nature conservation, or conscious consumption are perceived. In the course of the analysis, it can be seen that, especially in large organizations, sustainability is an important part of a PR specialist's work.

This may be because larger companies recognize the need to implement sustainability practices due to the image benefits that are so important with constant competition. This is

justified by the obligation to report on sustainability activities, which translates into socially responsible practices undertaken by the organization. In addition, employees are aware of their rights, care for the environment is important to them, and they make decisions based on experience.

This is characteristic of the current generation of employees, factoring work–life balance into their decisions to take a job [34]. This indicates the prominence of the concept of sustainability being forced on companies not only by government laws but also by employee expectations.

The analysis indicated that an important aspect from the perspective of public relations professionals is also the role of education and continuous development in the field of sustainability among PR professionals. The study underscores the need for training courses and workshops that would increase competence in sustainability strategies and their effective implementation in campaigns. Such an initiative would not only raise industry standards but also contribute to professionals' understanding of global environmental and social challenges, which in turn can lead to more innovative and effective communication solutions.

In addition, the article highlights future directions for sustainable PR in Poland, pointing to the need for further research on the impact of sustainable activities on customer loyalty and brand perception. As sustainability issues become increasingly influential in consumer decisions, it will be crucial for companies to understand how an integrated approach to sustainability can help build long-term customer relationships and increase competitiveness in the marketplace.

Further research directions in the area under study should focus on deepening the understanding of the impact of integrated sustainability strategies on business performance and consumer perceptions of the brand. It would also be important to study how different stakeholder groups respond to sustainability-related messages and how these perceptions affect customer loyalty and engagement. In addition, it would be worth considering the development of methodologies for measuring the effectiveness of PR activities in the context of sustainability, which could contribute to a better understanding and optimization of practices in this area.

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