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COMMUNICATION STRATEGY OF THE MINISTRY OF DEFENCE OF THE SLOVAK REPUBLIC

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Abstract: *The article deals with marketing communication issues of the Ministry of Defence of the Slovak Republic. The main author's attention is focused on the analysis of current approaches of MoD to the implementation of marketing communication. Marketing Communication of the Ministry based on carefully thought out and sophisticated communication strategy could be the means that can effectively assist to the achievement of its objectives. The communication strategy of the Ministry should first of all contribute to maximize its communication efforts exerted to achieve the support of key subjects and a better understanding between the department and its target audience at home and also abroad. The primary long-term goal of the communication strategy can be considered a systematic effort to improve the reputation or image of the armed forces, respectively to strengthen their goodwill in the public eye. In this context, the author set attention to the clarification of the place and role of public opinion in developing a communication strategy of the Ministry.*

Keywords: *Marketing communication. Communication Strategy. Ministry of Defence. Image*

1. COMMUNICATION AS A SIGNIFICANT TOOL OF MARKETING MANAGEMENT OF THE PUBLIC SECTOR SUBJECTS

Marketing concept of management and a set of activities known as marketing are the basic attribute and means of existence of enterprise subjects in market-oriented economic conditions, typical for democratic society. Although such situation definitely is not common for public sector subjects, conversely it is very often rejected by the managers, practical experience indicates, that applying marketing management in this sector seems inevitable in the increasingly competitive environment.

The fact that marketing helps create, maintain and develop ties between the goals of the

given subject based on its mission and the strategies chosen to achieve these goals following assigned sources in the framework of constantly changing conditions, is an important argument in favour of incorporation and utilization of strategic marketing management.

An important and inseparable part of marketing management of every modern organization or institution is marketing instrumentarium forming the so-called marketing mix. The composition of the marketing mix in case of public sector subjects has to respect not just the particularities of this sector, but also the mission and tasks these subjects are performing. That indicates, that traditional marketing tools require a certain modification or adjustment to fulfilling new tasks.



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The most dominant tool of marketing mix of public sector subjects can be considered communication, which performs several tasks. It provides information, building communication ties with target audiences (citizens, partners, providers etc.), it affects the behaviour and public opinion (external as well as internal), it helps create a positive image etc. It indicates that also in public sector we can notice informing communication, communication acquiring support and that might be the reason for its attribute „marketing“ communication.

Empirical knowledge suggests that using new approaches, methods, tools, means and forms of marketing communication especially in the business practice is a natural and sufficiently qualified basis also for the public sector subjects, when respecting the particularities of the given subject as well as its sphere of action, of course.

Practice findings confirm that commercially-oriented subjects as well as public sector subjects increasingly deal with the issue of marketing communication. The Ministry of Defence of Slovak Republic (MoD of SR) is not an exception. It aims to perform its communication activities systematically and purposefully following their own communication strategy primarily focused on the public and media.

In the next chapter of the article we are trying to define the current methods of MoD of SR of solving the issue.

2. CURRENT METHODS OF MINISTRY OF DEFENCE OF PERFORMING MARKETING COMMUNICATION

Activities of the ministry in the scope of marketing communication are supervised by

the Communication department of the Office of the Minister of Defence of the Slovak Republic. The main task of the department is to deliver current information from various areas of the ministry. „The reorganized communication department is based on professional staff, effective structure and manager rules of administration.“ [3]. It consists of two sections – Press section and Marketing and public affairs section. This structuring indicates that the department acts as a contact organ of the ministry not only for the press, but also for the public (expert as well as laical). The Communication department has the biggest contribution to preparing and performing activities presenting the army to the public. In addition, it is the contact place for all natural persons and legal persons that ask for information about the department available for the public according to the Act No. 211/2000 Coll. on free access to information.

This task is performed in line with the valid Directive No.5 from the year 2000 of the Ministry of Defence of the Slovak Republic on free access to information.

The Ministry of Defence of the Slovak Republic in its efforts to secure a unified method of communication with the public follows the Directives of the Ministry of Defence of the Slovak Republic No. 60/2008 on communication with the public. The directives are designed for the ministry, offices and facilities under the ministry, for the General Staff of the Armed Forces of the Slovak Republic (AF of SR), Military Police, contributory organizations, budget organizations, state companies as well as stock companies. The purpose of the directives is to [7]:



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- define tasks, methods and activities of performing communication with the public,
- define the system of coordination of providing information,
- provide a more detailed and more effective informing about the activities of the ministry and about the Armed Forces of the Slovak Republic (AF of SR),
- provide a positive influence on the public opinion.

Communication with the public is provided in line with the mentioned directives by several subjects. The subjects are [7]:

- Minister's Advisor – spokesman of the ministry,
- General Staff Officer for the public affairs,
- public affairs officer,
- Head of the organization branch of the ministry,
- Head of the Office,
- Chief of Military Police,
- Chief of organization branch of the general staff,
- Commanders of ground forces, air force, training and support force, Medical Corps Commander, unit commander, head (Officer Commanding) of the office and facilities of the Armed Forces of SR,
- statutory assistant of legal person,
- professional soldier assigned to perform given activities in line with the mentioned directives.

The tasks of these subjects related to communication with the public are defined in the directives.

From the typology perspective presented in homeland and foreign literature we can say that marketing communication of the ministry takes different shapes and forms. The point of view is the determining factor. From the

pyramid perspective it is the group or interpersonal level of communication. According to the time and content context it is the primary or secondary communication. According to the environment the communication is performed in, it is either the internal communication, let us say communication with the internal environment that can further be divided into formal, informal, vertical, horizontal, personally oriented (subject), non-personally oriented (object), goal or process oriented [4], or it is the external communication, let us say the communication of the subject with the outer environment (public).

According to the tasks the marketing communication is supposed to perform we can differentiate between informing communication, acquiring communication, persuading communication, supporting communication etc.

The ministry is striving to enforce the goal method which is typical for the communication focused on the complexity of goals. From the theoretical point of view the marketing communication goals of the ministry can be generally defined as „specific communication task, which the communication has to perform in relation to the defined target market or audience¹ during a certain period of time“[5]. It is necessary to emphasize that the marketing communication tasks of the MoD of SR are significantly determined by their specific mission and tasks, which are performed by the ministry in favour of our country and citizens. In comparison

¹ Note: According to Štefka, R. and collective, the audience becomes market just in case a specific subject (organization, institution) decides they want to acquire some sources from this audience (not just financial sources), while they offer some advantages in exchange.



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with enterprise-oriented or commercially-oriented subjects, which strive to achieve especially economic goals such as increasing the profit, sales or the market share, the goals of the ministry are different. They have the features of non-economic or communication goals, such as providing current information about the activities of the ministry, specifying negative or incomplete news, as well as reacting to negative news related to the ministry – satisfying the information needs of the public. Other goals are: earning the public's trust, creating good relations with the public through favourable publicity and building „corporate image“, creating or improving the image of the armed forces, improving their credit etc. that means influencing the public opinion with the desired direction.

Since the condition of implementation of successful marketing communication in the ministry is systematic and long-term building and maintaining the effective communication of the ministry with its target markets, groups or audiences, it is necessary to define these subjects first and then find out about their needs, requirements and expectations and finally try to achieve the given communication goals with each of them by means of tailor-made communication strategy.

The target audiences of the MoD can be considered multicomponent. In the broadest sense they are represented by the public, expert as well as laical (citizens), eventually external and internal (professional soldiers and civil employees) public.

The goal of the communication activities of the ministry oriented on the public is the effort to achieve a real or constant change of attitudes, opinions and activities of various target groups. This requires knowledge of the

audience, circumstances of the communication, good strategy, its performing and adequate evaluation, eventually correction, i.e. performing the so-called strategic communication process.

The first-rate communication activity or the connection between the ministry and the public is the existence and effect of an adequate image. The ministry has the PR (public relations) and publicity for the communication with the public. An important part of the activities of the ministry focused on the public is primarily oriented on young people, who represent the potential for complementing human resources depending on the needs of the ministry. Especially the communication activities performed within the marketing form of recruitment and central recruitment of the ministry are purposefully oriented on young people.

In the narrower sense the audiences of the ministry can be considered the cooperating home partners (e.g. organs of civil service and regional self-government, interest unions and associations, lobbying groups, companies, organizations and institutions with any connection to the department), as well as foreign partners or allies (especially from the states of the Alliance). Enterprise subjects working in the position of suppliers and providers of various services for the ministry (performed by means of outsourcing) have a significant position among the homeland partners.

Since defence is financed from the state budget and big amounts of financial means are spent on it, the ministry of finance of the Slovak Republic is also the audience that the representatives of the ministry of defence communicate with.



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Communication activities of the ministry are focused also on building correct relations with those who inform about it. Therefore there are also media among the target audiences of the ministry (including the press organs of the Alliance). The analysis results have shown that the main attention is focused on the journalists.

Based on other findings, we can say that the marketing communication of the ministry is typical for the constant expansion of elements of traditionally presented communication mix – which is especially advertisement, public affairs and publicity², by new tools – especially event marketing and direct marketing. We can also notice the usage of new communication media, multimedia and modern technologies (CD-ROM, DVD internet, e-mail, cell phone etc.), thanks to which the ministry does not significantly lag behind the commercially-oriented subjects in the marketing communication. We can also notice a great effort to build a strong „corporate identity“ that supposes unification or integration of all tools, means and forms of communication by means of which the ministry strives to affect the target groups. „Corporate culture is shown in all communication outcomes and visual elements of the ministry and gives a certain signal of unification and order in it“ [3].

2. 1 COMMUNICATION STRATEGY FOCUSED ON THE IMAGE

The common decision about marketing communication includes deciding about what

² Note: Regarding the specific position of the ministry, its objectives and mission, we can say that other tools of the communication mix – sales support and direct sales, have just a low utilization in the marketing communication of the ministry, if ever.

to say, whom to say it and how to say it while these decisions are included in the communication strategy [4]. Communication strategy of the ministry is supposed to make sure that the information they deliver will impress, will be heard, understood and they will finally stimulate the target audiences to a desired reaction or behaviour. By means of communication strategy the ministry wants to maximize the effect of the exerted communication effort, that means to achieve the support of the key subjects and improve the sympathy between the ministry and its target audiences at home and abroad.

Adequately chosen communication strategy of the ministry should answer the following questions: Why should we communicate – what is the link between the marketing communication goals and the total goals of the ministry, its capacities and knowledge about the target groups or audiences? What should be the topic of the communication – what information do the target audiences absorb the most effectively? How to communicate – by means of what channels, when and where? What should the communication be oriented on – who can be influenced by adequately chosen information?

From the theoretical point of view processing the communication strategy must be considered an examination and consideration of market risks, systematic work, constant reevaluating of weak sides and disadvantages in comparison with the competitors and finally systematic determination of goals and direction of the future development of the company, organization or institution [5].

The ministry of defence when creating the communication strategy does not rely just on the experience and knowledge of the qualified



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employees, but it also uses the services of experts – specialists in the individual fields of marketing communication (e.g. services of advertisement or research agencies). In the field of implementation of communication strategy the Communication department cooperates with organs of Civil service, regional self-government as well as the representatives of non-governmental organizations.

One of the most important objectives of the communication strategy is to improve the credit (image) of the Armed Forces, let us say to strengthen their reputation. Positive opinion about the Armed Forces plays an important role in the increasing pressure on the efficient use of public finances in the present day. Since the public opinion about the department is significantly influenced by the quality of the available information, the primary condition of meeting the objectives of the communication strategy of the MoD is presenting true information by trustworthy and convincing means. The credit of the Armed Forces can be harmed by negative phenomena occurring in the security environment and in the society whatsoever. Therefore the ministry within its communication policy has to strive to present clear and coherent ideas of its goals and methods in the field of defence and security policy of the state.

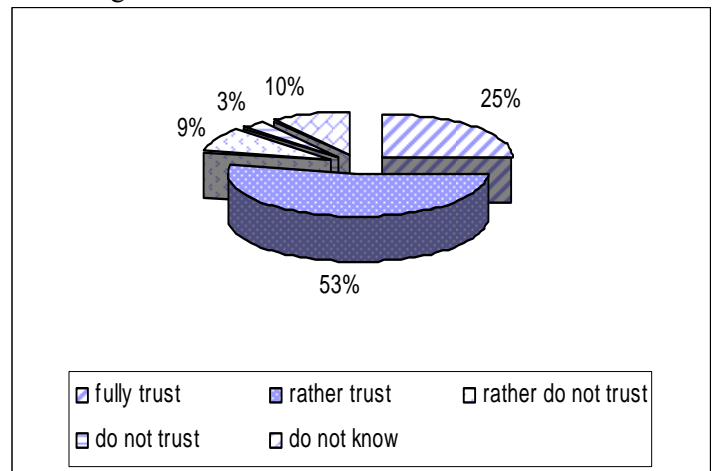
2. 2 PUBLIC OPINION RESEARCH

Researching the public opinion is an important tool of the communication strategy of the Ministry of Defence of SR. „Public opinion is not just the guarantee of conclusiveness of democracy, but also a factor that co-determinates the success of each operation we involve our forces in“ [2]. Knowledge about

the manifestations and content of the public opinion helps when choosing and applying the intentions related to recruitment of new military staff, or eventually other activities of the ministry in relation to the public.

The current opinion on the Armed Forces (AF of SR) can be presented following the public opinion research performed by the Public opinion research agency Ltd. in the year 2010. The research included 1 128 respondents older than 18 and it was representative in the features such as sex, age, education, address and nationality. The results of the research are shown in figure 1.

Fig. 1 Credit of the Armed Forces of SR



Source: ČUKAN, K. Dôveryhodnosť Ozbroyených síl SR. In Obrana. roč. 18, č. 8, 2010, p. 33.

The question: „Do you trust our army“ was positively answered by 78% of respondents, 25,4% of them answered that they fully trust the army, 52,7% answered they rather trust our army. Only 12% of the respondents answered that they do not trust our army, the rest 10,5 % could not answer. Other research results indicate that the armed forces are an institution that has the trust of all layers of citizens. Young people as well as middle-aged and old people trust our army. There were also no



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significant differences in the political nor religious perspectives. Our army is trustworthy for Slovaks as well as members of national minorities living in Slovakia. The respondents valued the skills of the Armed Forces. The agreement rate with the statement „the army is able to perform the tasks on missions abroad, help citizens in case of natural disasters, fulfil their obligations within NATO, participate in defending the public order, meet their objectives when fighting terrorism and provide defence and security of the state“ is between 74% to 96% [1].

The results of recently performed empirical researches point out the fact that in spite of the relatively stable and strong trust of the public in the AF of SR, we have lately noticed a decreasing trend of people interested in joining the professional army. Joining the army and working for them has become the last choice for even unemployed people. Defining the reasons of this situation, adequate communication strategies along with other measures can temporarily improve this situation and help increase the attractiveness of this profession in comparison to other jobs again.

One of the options of increasing the attractiveness of the Armed Forces of SR for the public is a properly chosen advertisement representing the professional armed forces as a „modern institution with a human face, offering an interesting and adventurous job“ [3]. When processing individual advertisement products, the ministry relies on the help of sociologists from the MoD of SR as well as civil media agencies [2].

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