
Developing the Driver-Employer Relationship in Terms of Internal Public Relations Activities

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Abstract:

Purpose: The article aims to present the principles of internal public relations in relation to the electronic communication tools used by road transport companies from the perspective of their managers and employees - the drivers.

Design/Methodology/Approach: The research, conducted by the University of Łódź with Emaus-International's support, employed an online survey via the Webankieta program. Targeting drivers and managers using the Trans.eu transport exchange, the study explored logistics processes in transport companies. A pilot study in March 2022 on Emaus-International employees ensured questionnaire functionality. The main survey, conducted in September 2022, garnered 410 driver and 63 manager responses.

Findings: The website is the most prevalent communication tool, extensively used by 80.95% of surveyed companies. However, a noteworthy 16% of smaller companies do not possess or plan to create their websites. Social Media Usage: Facebook is the primary social media platform for transport companies, with 44.44% having profiles. Other platforms like YouTube, Instagram, Twitter, and LinkedIn have lower adoption rates, ranging from 6% to 14%. The majority of companies do not plan to establish profiles on these platforms.

Practical Implications: Basic communication tools are widely adopted, there's room for diversification and improvement, especially in the realm of advanced tools and social media. Understanding the varying impacts of these tools on different aspects of the business is crucial for tailoring communication strategies effectively. Regular evaluation and adaptation to industry changes will ensure the continued effectiveness of communication efforts.

Originality/value: The article presents the results of the authors' own research, which relates to the extent to the use of internal public relations tools in the assessment of managers and employees (professional drivers) of road transport companies in Poland.

Keywords: Road transport, internal public relations, internal marketing.

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1. Introduction

The establishment of relational capital is currently seen as an indicator of a company's effectiveness, its capacity to adjust to the fluctuations in the dynamic business environment, and its success in the market (Drewniak, Słupska, and Posadzińska, 2020). Relational capital is not only considered a crucial asset for a company, determining its potential for growth and the construction of a competitive advantage.

The effective utilization and endurance of relationships play a pivotal role in the formation of a competitive advantage in the market (Słupska, Drewniak and Karaszewski, 2020). Companies establish diverse relationships, both internally with their employees and externally with various stakeholders, within a complex and dynamic environment (Drewniak, Słupska and Posadzińska, 2020).

The diversity of these relationships contributes to the distinctiveness of a company's relational capital and its potential (Halawi, Aronson, and McCarthy, 2005). Consequently, businesses should consistently enhance their relational competencies by cultivating positive relationships among employees (Drewniak, Drewniak, and Posadzińska, 2020) and by shaping relationships with the external environment (customers, suppliers, business partners, and competitors).

Developing a strategy for the creation and improvement of relational competencies and relational capital, both internally within the company and in relation to its interactions with the external environment, represents a fundamental trend in modern business philosophy (Hormiga *et al.*, 2011; Słupska 2019).

Referring to the above, nowadays, it is increasingly recognised that achieving optimal levels of job satisfaction brings tangible benefits to both the employee and the employer (Kunecka, 2018). However, the introduction of new solutions in human resource management is still not widespread, even though the role of the human factor as a key company resource is recognised (Kadlubek *et al.*, 2022).

Often, it is only reduced to administrative activities related to attracting, motivating and controlling employees, which does not foster their creativity. In such a situation, it becomes necessary to reach for new ideas for influencing people in the organisation.

It is for this purpose that the concept of internal marketing combined with public relations tools can lead to effective and efficient two-way communication and thus foster the building of internal relationships (Biesaga-Słomczewska, Iwińska-Knop, 2017a).

Internal marketing refers to the entirety of company management's actions towards employees (Levering and Lijjander, 2006), and its essence is to treat employees as

internal customers (Grönroos, 1990) to whom actions are taken to build loyalty and identification with the company and to motivate them to provide ever better customer service (Perenc, 2005).

Particularly in companies facing labour shortages, such as the road transport industry, the implementation of activities along the lines of internal marketing takes on particular importance. According to the report "Transport Market in Poland and Europe", prepared, by Trans.eu and the Polish Automotive Industry Association, there is a shortage of around 150,000 professional drivers in Poland.

The average age of professional drivers in Poland is over 50 years. In Europe, one in three is five years older. By 2026, the driver shortage in Europe could exceed 2 million people, as 30% of the workforce will retire (Losik, 2023). Therefore, the aim of this article is to present the principles of internal marketing in relation to the electronic communication tools used by transport companies from the perspective of their managers and employees - the drivers.

2. Internal Marketing vs. Internal Public Relations

Internal marketing operates on the premise of interactions resembling those between a supplier and a recipient among all staff members (Reardon and Enis, 1990). This extends beyond frontline employees to include those in the back-office, providing support for their endeavors (Varey, 2001). At each phase of this process, value is appended, emanating from the collective experience and knowledge of the workforce.

The efficacy of this particular chain relies on the establishment of mutual relations among employees and their inclination to share knowledge and skills (Boguszewicz-Kraft, 2007). This approach plays a crucial role in garnering employees' support in comprehending the company's mission, strategy, and objectives, facilitating their implementation (Olsztyńska, 2005).

However, obtaining this endorsement necessitates reciprocating with employees, as each organizational entity calculates its interests and inherently seeks to maximize benefits. Despite differing expectations among participants, there is an awareness that, to achieve individual goals, one must consider the objectives of the other party (Biesaga-Słomczewska, 2009; Woźniakowski, 2022).

Internal marketing comprises four fundamental systems: communication, motivation, training, and integration of the company's staff (Fonfara, 1999). The focus of this article is on the communication aspect, given the specific research area analyzed in the subsequent section.

The marketing communication system encompasses a variety of instruments and activities that facilitate the transmission of crucial information related to the ongoing

internal matters of the company, as well as those concerning external stakeholders (Wiktor, 2001). Smalec (2012) emphasizes that internal communication should particularly focus on initiatives related to enhancing the knowledge and skills of employees, elevating their awareness regarding the achievements of the companies they are associated with.

Additionally, Olsztyńska (2002) posits that the goal of internal communication in companies extends beyond furnishing up-to-date information essential for employees' task performance; it also involves cultivating loyalty and fostering a sense of identification with the company.

Consequently, the effectiveness of internal communication systems has far-reaching implications for various aspects of enterprise operations, notably enhancing work efficiency and potentially contributing to employee motivation and appreciation (Fonfara, 1999). As asserted by Malinowska (2001), internal communication readies employees to serve as ambassadors for enterprises within their immediate and extended environments.

The enumerated advantages of internal communication underscore its status as a key factor for enterprises seeking a competitive advantage in the modern, competitive market (Woźniakowski, 2022).

The elevation of employee satisfaction (Dyczkowska and Poznański, 2021) has the potential to strengthen internal partnerships and foster loyalty towards the employer, significantly influencing the construction of the company's reputation and image (Biesaga-Słomczewska and Iwińska-Knop, 2017a).

Consequently, fostering a positive company image in the eyes of its employees will manifest in an enthusiastic approach towards customers and a commitment to securing their satisfaction. This, in turn, creates a favorable image of the company in the minds of contented customers, establishing a basis for forming relationships that mark the commencement of the company's market success (Woźniakowski, 2022).

As indicated by Biesaga-Słomczewska and Iwińska-Knop (2017b), one might venture to assert that internal public relations initiatives closely resemble tools employed in internal marketing. It is widely accepted that PR serves as a component of the marketing communication system designed to promote and safeguard a company's or product's image (Kotler 2003).

In a broader context, PR is regarded as a managerial function tasked with establishing and sustaining mutually beneficial relations between the organization and its audience (Cutlip, Center, and Broom, 2000). Consequently, PR should be viewed as an internal, interdisciplinary system of endeavors associated with relationship marketing, human resource management, sociology, and psychology.

It encompasses a broad spectrum of behaviors exhibited within an organization, encompassing attitudes towards influential instruments and the experiences employed (Woźniakowski, 2022).

In foreign literature, the term internal public relations is commonly utilized (interchangeable with internal public relations, internal relations, employee public relations, employee communications, relationship management, or employee relations). This concept is equated with the cultivation of internal relationships by organizations through a meticulously executed communication policy (Cutlip *et al.*, 2000). The construction of internal relations is regarded as the capacity to communicate effectively within a specific company.

Authors frequently link activities within internal public relations with those in the realm of internal communication within the company. Professionals overseeing internal communication in companies outline the primary goals and objectives set for internal public relations as follows (Wojcik, 1997):

- Enhancing the company's efficiency through unimpeded message flow,
- Disseminating information about the company's strategy and planned initiatives,
- Fostering employees' identification with the company and instilling pride in belonging to its workforce,
- Motivating employees to undertake specific tasks, thereby increasing efficiency and effectiveness of work time,
- Cultivating a positive attitude among employees towards tasks, the profession, the company, or the industry,
- Addressing negative sentiments towards the organization's management,
- Nurturing the self-fulfillment of employees,
- Preventing disinformation and misunderstandings,
- Garnering support for newly introduced changes,
- Making employees cognizant of their impact on the company's successes and failures,
- Stimulating innovation within the company,
- Cultivating a positive internal and external image of a company that prioritizes its employees,
- Mitigating internal conflicts in times of crisis.

In light of the aforementioned, internal public relations can be likened to communication policy to a considerable extent, although the range of activities within internal PR is more extensive and encompasses the company's cultural events, social and sports activities, training programs, health and social services, company materials, gadgets, and various others.

In practical terms, these are frequently employed methods due to their versatile, adaptable nature, and relatively straightforward implementation.

However, their drawback lies in their transient nature. Constructing internal relations supported by a communication policy geared towards constructive dialogue, as outlined by Wojcik (2009), proves to be notably more challenging. This is a process that demands time, determination from managerial staff, and an understanding among employees of the advantages resulting from the initiatives undertaken.

As a result, internal communication, deemed the most pivotal component of PR, is often considered the behind-the-scenes force in managing contemporary enterprises. It plays a pivotal role in shaping how employees carry out their tasks, how they perceive the organizational milieu, and their perspectives on the company's financial standing, incentive systems, and the execution of the adopted strategy (Biesaga-Słomczewska and Iwińska-Knop, 2017b).

Consequently, one might assert that efficient management is unattainable without effective communication (Rostek, Wiśniewski, and Zajac, 2018; Woźniakowski, 2022).

3. Research Methodology

The research project "Logistics processes in the marketing activity of transport companies" was carried out by the University of Łódź (UŁ) with the support of the transport company Emaus-International. The research was carried out in the form of an online survey using a questionnaire generated in the Webankieta programme, among two groups of employees of transport companies: drivers and managers, who are also users of an instant messaging service operating as part of Poland's most popular electronic transport exchange (EGT) Trans.eu. The exchange brings together around 25,000 hauliers and the professional drivers working for them.

The pilot study was carried out in March 2022 on employees of the transport company Emaus-International. Its purpose was to check the correct functioning of the electronic survey questionnaire and to verify the assumed time needed to complete the questionnaire correctly. The aforementioned entity was chosen due to the availability and possibility of participation of all employees identified as survey addressees.

The survey proper was carried out in September 2022. Information about the survey being carried out, together with a link to the questionnaire, was sent to the co-operators of Emmaus-International. 410 correctly completed questionnaires were received from drivers and 63 from transport company executives.

In view of the volumes obtained, it must be considered that the survey is not representative, but an illustration of the phenomenon under study among the respondents. Nevertheless, based on the information obtained, some generalisations can be made in the final conclusions.

The results of the study provided information from 3 areas, making up the study as a whole:

1. factors conditioning the work of professional drivers in Poland;
2. shaping driver-employee relations in logistics centres and warehouses as an element of distribution channel development;
3. the formation of driver-employer relations in the dimension of internal public relations activities with the use of electronic tools;
4. the formation of driver-employee relations in the dimension of internal public relations activities with the use of electronic tools.

Due to the limited volume of the publication, it focuses on presenting selected results of the study in the third area.

4. Research Results and Discussion

The website is the most frequently used communication tool (Table 1) on the Internet among the surveyed companies (80.95%). Interestingly, almost 16% of companies (primarily small) do not have their own website, nor do they plan to create one. The other online communication tools included in this part of the study, i.e., the pressroom, newsletter, company blog or interactive forms, are used by less than 10% of the companies, while the others generally do not plan to implement them.

Table 1. Internet communication tools used by car transport companies - indications of managers

No.	Communication tool	In use
1	Website	80,95%
2	Virtual pressroom	3,17%
3	Company newsletter	9,52%
4	Company blog	11,11%
5	Interactive forms (games, screensavers, wallpapers, applications, etc.)	9,52%
6	Other	9,52%

Source: Own elaboration based on the authors' research.

In terms of transport companies having their own profiles on social networking sites (Table 2), Facebook is the most commonly used site (44.44% of indications). Interestingly, a small percentage of companies plan to set up a Facebook profile (4.76%), while the majority of companies (50.79%) have no such plans.

In the case of YouTube, 14% of companies have a profile on this site and 3% plan to set one up. The majority of companies (82%) do not plan to create a profile on this

platform. For the other sites, Instagram, Twitter, LinkedIn, the share of companies with profiles on these social networks is relatively low (between 6% and 11%). Almost all companies (between 84% and 92%) do not plan to set up profiles on these platforms.

Table 2. *Social networks used by car transport companies - indications of managers*

No.	Communication tool (social network)	In use
1	Facebook	44,44%
2	YouTube	14,29%
3	Instagram	6,35%
4	Twitter	6,35%
5	LinkedIn	11,11%
6	GoldenLine	9,52%

Source: *Own elaboration based on the authors' research.*

The analysis of data on the assessment of the impact of the communication tools used on various issues in transport companies, as perceived by their managers, reveals some interesting trends:

- *Building competitive advantage:* The majority of respondents believe that communication tools have a medium impact (33%) or no impact (17%) on building competitive advantage. Also 24% of respondents consider them to have a high impact. This suggests that using the right communication tools can influence a company's competitiveness, but it is not the only factor.
- *The company's marketing communication (promotion) strategy:* A large proportion of respondents (45%) consider that communication tools have a medium impact, while 22% consider the impact to be high. This shows that communication tools play an important role in the promotion of companies, but there are also other factors influencing marketing strategy.
- *New customer acquisition:* A large proportion of respondents (35%) recognise that communication tools have a high impact on new customer acquisition. A medium impact is noted by 32% of managers. This confirms that the right communication tools can help to acquire new customers and attract the attention of potential customers.
- *Forming relationships with existing customers:* 37% of respondents recognise that communication tools have a medium impact on forming relationships with existing customers. A high impact is noted by 32% of respondents. This demonstrates that using the right communication tools can increase customer engagement and maintain loyalty to the company.
- *Revenue growth:* 30% of respondents consider communication tools to have a high impact on revenue growth, while 29.03% consider the impact to be

medium. This suggests that communication tools can help generate more revenue for a company, but their effectiveness can vary depending on the industry and company strategy.

- *Creating a positive corporate image among the public:* Communication tools play a key role. The majority of respondents consider that they have a high (40%) or medium (42%) impact.
- *Acquiring drivers from the market:* 47.54% of respondents recognise that communication tools have a high impact on the acquisition of drivers from the market. This is important given the current driver shortage in the transport industry.
- *Driver retention:* The results show that the majority of respondents believe that communication tools have a medium impact (29%) or no impact (27%) on driver retention. This may indicate the need to consider other strategies and actions to increase driver retention.
- *Identification of drivers with the company:* 35% of respondents believe that communication tools have a medium impact on drivers' identification with the company, while 27% consider the impact to be high. Identifying drivers with the company is important to increase employee engagement and loyalty.

In summary, most companies use basic communication tools such as websites and Facebook profiles. However, more advanced tools such as company blogs, interactive forms and profiles on other social networks are less popular. The use of communication tools shows a positive impact on image creation, customer acquisition and revenue growth.

However, for driver retention and acquisition, the impact is considered low to medium. Companies should closely analyse the effectiveness of the communication tools used in the context of specific marketing and HR objectives.

In research on the use of communication tools by transport companies, the perspective of employees, especially drivers, is somewhat different. In general, there is a significant lack of knowledge regarding the communication activities undertaken by companies. For example, 36% of respondents are not sure whether the company they work for has its own website (Table 3).

Similarly, the answer "don't know if it uses one" is common for other forms of communication. Given the widespread lack of information about the basic online communication tools used by companies, it is not surprising that the percentage of negative opinions towards social networks is even higher (Table 5), even with regard to such a popular platform as Facebook.

Even those respondents who are aware of their companies' use of online communication tools do not necessarily use them. In each case, the percentage of positive responses ('I use') is several percentage points lower than the percentage of

statements regarding the use of communication tools by the company they work for (Tables 4 and 6).

Table 3. *Internet communication tools used by car transport companies - drivers' indications*

No.	Communication tool	In use	Not in use	I am not aware
1	Company website	37,37%	26,88%	35,75%
2	Company newsletter	7,01%	53,64%	39,35%
3	Company blog	7,24%	56,84%	35,92%
4	Interactive forms (games, screensavers, wallpapers, applications, etc.)	7,03%	56,76%	36,22%
5	Other	9,33%	34,67%	56,00%

Source: Own elaboration based on the authors' research.

Table 4. *Internet communication tools used by car transport companies that drivers use regularly*

No.	Communication tool	I use	I don't use
1	Company website	24,06%	75,94%
2	Company newsletter	9,50%	90,50%
3	Company blog	9,01%	90,99%
4	Interactive forms (games, screensavers, wallpapers, applications, etc.)	8,36%	91,64%
5	Other	12,00%	88,00%

Source: Own elaboration based on the authors' research.

Table 5. *Social networks used by car transport companies - drivers' indications*

No.	Platform name	In use	Not in use	I am not aware
1	Facebook	29,11%	28,30%	42,59%
2	YouTube	12,81%	39,55%	47,63%
3	Instagram	6,42%	41,06%	52,51%
4	Twitter	3,09%	42,13%	54,78%
5	LinkedIn	3,37%	40,73%	55,90%
6	GoldenLine	1,99%	40,63%	57,39%

Source: Own elaboration based on the authors' research.

Table 6. Social networks used by car transport companies that drivers use regularly

No.	Platform name	Used regularly	Not used / Not aware of its existence
1	Facebook	21,63%	78,37%
2	YouTube	9,28%	90,72%
3	Instagram	5,00%	95,00%
4	Twitter	2,07%	97,93%
5	LinkedIn	1,19%	98,81%
6	GoldenLine	0,00%	100,00%

Source: Own elaboration based on the authors' research.

In conclusion, the data shows limited use of social media sites by the company, which should definitely consider increasing its social media presence. Many respondents are still not using these platforms, which may mean that the company is not realising the full potential of communicating with customers on social media.

Switching to popular platforms such as Facebook, Instagram or YouTube can help you reach a wider audience and increase engagement with your brand. Furthermore, the choice of platform should be tailored to the target audience of customers in order to communicate effectively with their preferences and expectations.

Respondents have limited engagement in following a company's profile on various social networks. A company can gain benefits from a more proactive approach to social media, especially those that are more popular with its target audience. Regular and engaging content on these platforms can help build relationships with customers, attract new audiences and promote a positive brand image

5. Conclusions, Proposals, Recommendations

The considerations in this article may lead one to think about the possibility of introducing practical aspects of internal public relations. The tools used as part of this concept are definitely taking on an evolutionary character, as a result of both the conditions of change in the labour market (for example, the shortage of drivers) and technological advances (new forms of electronic communication).

As part of internal public relations activities, it is important to raise employees' awareness that they are an integral part of a community involved in a meaningful and rewarding endeavour. Internal marketing initiatives should be seen as a long-term investment, aiming to contribute, through the formation of ambassadors (i.e. employees), to the competitiveness of the company in the marketplace (Woźniakowski, 2022).

The results of a survey of road transport companies presented in this article show

that these companies make fairly extensive use of basic online communication tools, and the motivation for their use on the part of management is often related to internal marketing. On the other hand, employees expect communication activities directed at them.

However, the biggest challenge among the surveyed companies proved to be the dissemination of information about the Internet communication tools used for internal activities. Therefore, the following recommendations can be made:

- *Diversify Communication Tools:* Beyond basic tools like websites and Facebook, consider adopting more advanced tools such as blogs and interactive forms to enhance communication strategies.
- *Tailor Tools to Objectives:* Analyze the effectiveness of communication tools based on specific marketing and HR objectives. Customize the approach for driver retention and acquisition.
- *Employee Perspective Consideration:* Acknowledge the lack of awareness among employees, especially drivers, about company communication activities. Bridge the knowledge gap through targeted communication and training.
- *Enhance Social Media Presence:* Recognize the potential of social media, particularly Facebook, for customer acquisition and image building. Develop strategies to improve awareness and usage among employees.
- *Address Driver Engagement:* Given the perceived low to medium impact on driver retention, explore additional strategies and actions to enhance driver engagement and loyalty.
- *Regular Evaluation:* Regularly assess the effectiveness of communication tools, considering industry trends, technological advancements, and changing market dynamics.
- *Employee Training:* Provide training and resources to employees, ensuring they are not only aware of communication tools but also proficient in using them. This can bridge the gap between awareness and utilization.

In summary, while basic communication tools are widely adopted, there's room for diversification and improvement, especially in the realm of advanced tools and social media. Understanding the varying impacts of these tools on different aspects of the business is crucial for tailoring communication strategies effectively. Regular evaluation and adaptation to industry changes will ensure the continued effectiveness of communication efforts.

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