Changes in the demand for CSR activities and stakeholder engagement based on research conducted among public relations specialists in Poland, with consideration of the SARS-COV-2 pandemic

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Abstract
Care for the external and internal environment of the company, ethics and human resources, as well as the organizational culture, is a crucial element for the importance and competitive advantage of the company. It was especially noticeable during the SARS-COV-2 pandemic. Companies began to grapple with difficulties, which contributed to an increased interest in crisis management competencies. The pandemic has permanently changed the functioning of society and the image of many industries, including public relations. The analysis of changes in the demand of companies for CSR-related activities after the pandemic becomes a valuable element of the direction of innovative research. Recognizing the interest, these aspects of the company were verified. The article uses data obtained in the course of the implementation of three independent research projects realized in Poland. The first study concerned crisis management from the perspective of a public relations agencies. The structures of the offer of public relations services (including CSR strategies) were examined. The responses of some public relations specialists regarding CSR and activities in this area after the COVID-19 pandemic were extracted from the second research project. The last, third project involved specialists employed in PR agencies. The research area covered changes in the demand of companies for CSR-related activities after the pandemic and the desired areas of training and personal development, with particular emphasis on CSR. The common denominator of all three projects is CSR campaigns and the way they are implemented by PR specialists.

KEYWORDS
COVID-19, CSR, mass media, media relations, public relations, social communication, stakeholder engagement

1 | THE AREA OF CORPORATE SOCIAL RESPONSIBILITY ACTIVITIES

The year 2020 was difficult for the functioning and operation of companies of almost every industry. The changes that had to be made within the organizations meant entities’ to be or not to be. The focus of companies on the external and internal environment has proved that not only the material aspect is important in the development of enterprises, but also care for the environment, culture, ethics, and people within the organization. This resulted in an increased emphasis
implementing innovative solutions, taking into account the conduct of business in a more humane, ethical, and transparent manner (Garry & Harwood, 2017). These factors, embedded in the CSR strategy, proved that such a policy is extremely important in the company's development. It represents the responsibility that companies commit to practice for the welfare of the society they affect and depend on (Rangan et al., 2015). The motivation for actions in this area is the responsibility of companies, their owners, and investors (Brotons & Sansalvador, 2020), towards society and the environment (Tibell et al., 2021). However, the economic aspect cannot be excluded from companies' incentives. It is an integral part of the company's existence and market attractiveness. Such understanding of responsible business means that CSR is noticed by stakeholders and influences the perception of the company. Companies strive to implement their strategic plans and maximize profits, taking into account the economic, social, and environmental issues that arise in their operations (Streimikienė et al., 2020). Based on the opinion of the European Commission, Stoian and Gilman (2017) define CSR as the responsibility of enterprises for their impact on society. They indicate that social, environmental, ethical human rights and consumer concerns can be incorporated into the company and its core strategy in close cooperation with stakeholders. Wang et al. (2013) and Mitrev (2019) distinguish the following CSR activities: economic, legal, ethical, and philanthropic. These areas were previously presented in the work of Carroll (1991). They illustrated CSR activities in terms of a pyramid that could include economic issues – at the bottom as the basis, and legal, ethical, and philanthropic – at the top, as responsibilities shifted towards sustainable corporate development. The practice of corporate responsibility is a search for optimal ways to create a dynamic balance in the aforementioned areas in relations with stakeholders, bearing in mind the protection and development of resources necessary for the future (Rok, 2013). The holistic approach to CSR applies to both relations with the environment (external dimension) and processes taking place inside the organization (internal dimension) (Bartkowiak, 2011). CSR activity has a part in shaping social capital, improving the management system, building organizational capital, implementing innovative solutions – all to create the common good, as well as development opportunities. It is treated as a process of cognition and implementation of changing social and environmental expectations into a business management strategy (Opolska-Bielarska, 2018). When defining CSR, it is difficult to use unambiguous terminology. This concept, as can be seen, is interdisciplinary and complex (Dahlsrud, 2008; Duca & Gherghina, 2018; Looser, 2020). Therefore, one can see the coherence of the CSR concept with several theoretical foundations, the use of the achievements of numerous research approaches, as well as the deep embedding of this theory in the humanities and social sciences and business practice.

2 THE NEED TO IMPLEMENT CSR IN THE AGE OF A PANDEMIC

The last months have been a period that went down in the history of the world as a time of global change. The coronavirus pandemic was an event that affected our lives and the way we think. Organizations and companies have put in their efforts and resources to deal with the consequences of the pandemic, guided by the concept of their social responsibility. The range of CSR practices in the face of a serious global crisis allowed for deepening the understanding and insight into the best ways in which companies should plan and practice their social responsibility (Marom & Lussier, 2020). In this case, the verification of crisis management strategies seems important, important for the public relations industry and the structure of the offer of qualified services in this area. The SARS-COV-2 pandemic has modernized the activities implemented so far that are part of CSR. Many companies and institutions have been forced to introduce unexpected changes to their existing CSR activities (Hassan et al., 2021; Sorribes et al., 2021). Analyzing changes in companies' demand for CSR activities and CSR strategies adopted by companies after the COVID-19 pandemic is now becoming a valuable element in the direction of innovative research.

In many ways SARS-COV-2 can be seen as an analogy to what Taleb (2008) calls the “Black Swan Event” - a shocking event that changes the world (Greh, 2020; Mazzoleni et al., 2020). The adaption to the new conditions made it possible to re-analyze the essence and need to practice activities in the area of socially responsible business. This necessity was noticed in the study carried out for this article. Project 3 analyzes the changes in companies’ demand for CSR-related activities after the COVID-19 pandemic and attempts to indicate the desired areas of training and personal development in the field of public relations activities, taking into account social responsibility.

The time before the pandemic was a period dominated by activities dedicated to sustainability, in which environmental and ethical issues were the most important. The beginning of 2020 was a moment of sudden response to emerging crises related to the modernization of the work style, safety, and the provision of health protection measures. When analyzing the immediate surroundings, enterprises focused on the fight against the pandemic in local communities and medical facilities. Currently, organizations reflecting on the post-pandemic world will have to reassess their visions, missions, and goals to take into account, among other things, changes that have occurred in relation to their customers or competitors. It may seem that public relations agencies will more often undertake activities related to CSR than other practices. For this purpose, a study was conducted, the results of which were published in the empirical section. Goals and targets that include long-term survival, strategic agility, significant social responsibility, focus on social marketing orientation seem likely. It is noticeable that post-pandemic theorists and practitioners are likely to face a radically different marketing landscape and significantly changed customers (Hongwei & Lloyd, 2020).

The period of the pandemic and the resulting socio-economic crisis accelerated the reorientation of the business mission in line with the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) set by the United Nations (UN, General Assembly, 2015). In the workplace, SDGs guide the organization's mission to provide a safe working environment for employees; fostering awareness and skills required to create productive workers as well as proactive citizens who contribute to society
management practices that increase the value of the company. This indicates that environmentally and socially responsible companies can adopt attitudes, and concepts, where organizations balance short-term consumer needs with society's long-term well-being (Kotler et al., 2019).

Recent events related to the coronavirus crisis suggest that new employment measures could replicate many of the activities associated with the 2008 economic crisis (Aryatama, 2020; Koirala & Acharya, 2020). However, the need for change at present may constitute a great opportunity to implement sustainable and responsible HRM, which, in line with the sustainable development promoted by the UN, increases the welfare of one of the most important stakeholders of companies - employees (Sorribes et al., 2021). The COVID-19 pandemic has once again made people realize how important it is to be responsible for the environment and society. During this pandemic, we began to understand the importance of the company's environmental impact, taking care of employee safety, taking quick action against an unexpected crisis (not necessarily financial and economic), while maintaining core business activities (Vural-Yavaş, 2020).

It can be expected that enterprises will conduct CSR-related activities mainly on their own. Socially responsible activities in recent months aimed to ensure the safety of employees and to maintain continuity in the company's business area. The implementation of remote work forced both employees and employers to innovatively look at the future. The means of communication between buyers and suppliers immediately changed. Skype, WhatsApp, and Zoom (and dozens of others) have exploded in use, and the digital age of online, mobile, and social media marketing moved from adolescence through turbulent teenage to adulthood in a matter of weeks. Advertising and media companies had to develop campaigns and responses in days when previous activities lasted months and years. Therefore, it can be expected that the demand of companies for CSR activities after the COVID-19 pandemic will increase. This may be influenced by the growing role of media in communities through which companies contact their environment. Mutual respect, forbearance, optimism, solving problems, fighting stress and uncertainty - have become the foundation for the future of 21st-century business. Trust and belief in the activities undertaken by the companies have strengthened the human element in each enterprise. People's attitudes and professional preferences have changed, and the need to build a culture of understanding and trust at every level of a company has strengthened. After the pandemic, CSR will have a different dimension than the one we have been used to so far.

While many of these changes are unpredictable, it seems likely that they will have a profound impact on marketing philosophy, attitudes, and concepts, where organizations balance short-term consumer needs with society's long-term well-being (Kotler et al., 2019). Views on the issues related to practicing responsible business indicate that environmentally and socially responsible companies can adopt management practices that increase the value of the company. This supports the view related to human resources that environmentally or socially responsible practices attract more qualified employees (John et al., 2019). The changing environment of the company is related to the increasing expectations of employees. Observations of the generation of young employees show that these people have more interest in CSR-related projects than older employees. This may result from the socially responsible approach to work of employees with less seniority than employees with greater seniority. It is related to the changing environment of the company and the expectations of employees. It seems interesting to apply CSR activities in relation to needs in this area. This trend should be reflected in the relationship between the assessment of the increase in demand for CSR activities and the need for improvement in the area of CSR and job seniority. These aspects have been studied and the obtained results are described in the empirical part of the article.

The current generation pays attention not only to the economic motivators of employment. Self-esteem, self-development, sharing, and acquiring knowledge become essential. Observing employees, their needs and style of work, as well as changes taking place in the structure of enterprises, one can notice the emerging symbiosis. Mutual respect and consideration for the needs of the employer-employee and realistic requirements placed on employees contribute to the creation of a strong brand and competitive advantage. The CSR strategy includes in its assumptions factors highly sought after by young employees - a code of ethics, socially responsible practices, socially engaged marketing, caring for the environment, attractiveness for stakeholders. A socially responsible company creates working conditions that take into account and comprehend the needs of employees (Opolska-Bielańska, 2016). It is also important to analyze the environment - the company's environment in which people are technologically and emotionally involved (Kowalik, 2019). However, most companies focus on practice, at the same time not always educating and informing about their socially responsible activities. This often causes difficulties for employees to identify the theory of CSR strategies with the activities in which the company is involved. It also contributes to the argumentation of the reasons for the company's high rating in the market and its strong brand.

There is a growing need to educate within companies about proper information regarding CSR activities. The essence of socially responsible business conduct is precisely the skilful communication on implemented activities in this area. It is therefore worth taking a global and profound look at CSR as an important element of the development of 21st-century business in the field of public relations. They must not be perceived as marketing activity. CSR is closely related to the activity undertaken by PR specialists. Relatively recently there has been an increase in interest in CSR in business and bolder attempts have been made to include it in the corporate strategy of companies in Poland. This particularly applies to the PR sector, whose clients direct their strategies towards pro-environmental and socially beneficial activities. This allows to gain a market advantage and increase the chance of being perceived as a socially responsible brand. Besides, analyzes have shown that along with the growing awareness of crisis risks, CSR raises customers' awareness that external image
can be effectively built through CSR, which affects the perception of their brand during the crisis (Tworzydło et al., 2021). The company’s CSR activities increase the value of the brand and improve its image, stimulates the consumer purchasing behavior, including its commitment to the brand, and improves its performance and reputation by meeting customer expectations (Abid et al., 2019; Kowalczyk & Kucharska, 2019; Rothenhoefer, 2019). For this purpose, three independent research projects were carried out that addressed crisis management from the perspective of the PR agency, changes in companies' demand for CSR activities after the COVID-19 pandemic, and CSR-related action strategies adopted by companies after the pandemic. The research also discussed the subject of changes in demand of companies for socially responsible activities after the coronavirus pandemic and the area of training and personal development activities related to public relations, including CSR.

Directive 2014/95/EU of the European Parliament and of the Council (https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/PL/TXT/?uri=CELEX%3A32014L0095) on disclosure of non-financial and diversity information by certain large entities and groups, introduced the obligation for large entities or public interest groups to prepare and publish reports on the non-financial information in which the firm engages. Declarations can be an integral part of the report or a separate document. This measurement is expected to increase the relevance, consistency, and comparability of non-financial information disclosed by certain large entities and groups across the European Union. As shown by the analysis of non-financial reports carried out in the last 3 years on 147 companies in Poland (Aluchan & Mrówka, 2020), the best results are obtained in employee, environmental and social issues. These areas of CSR activities are reported by all companies. There is also a tendency to record indicators in which companies perform best.

To sum up, socially, SARS-COV-2 has changed the attitudes and philosophies of individuals, groups, leadership, and governments. Culturally, people’s views of themselves, others, organizations, nature, and the universe have transformed. While few predicted the timing of such events, futurists and long-term scenario planners have long worked to highlight the potential of such dramatic and tragic events to affect the world (Malaska, 2000). It is unclear what the exact nature of such changes will be in our society and culture. Opinions, beliefs, values, habits, and behaviors that have been developed in society and business will evolve as a result of both good and bad experiences. Unfortunately, the Covid-19 outbreak will have a profound impact on all of them, so marketers should be at the forefront of researching, explaining, and responding to such changes. Recent months have shown that during the pandemic, consumers, society, and governments have demanded, and in some cases forced, cooperation across all sectors for the benefit of the public.

3 | RESEARCH PROJECT METHODOLOGY

The article uses data obtained in the course of the implementation of three independent research projects, which in part of their questions referred to CSR:

1. Project 1: a nationwide survey on crisis management from the perspective of a public relations agency. It was carried out in 2018 using computer-assisted telephone interviews (CATI). The research sample consisted of 204 PR agencies with a sampling frame of 736 identified companies operating on the Polish PR services market (Aluchan & Mrówka, 2020). The research area related to the subject of the article is an analysis of the structure of services classified as public relations (including CSR strategies). The main research objective was to determine whether activities related to CSR are an important task area of public relations agencies. The hypothesis assumes that PR agencies often undertake tasks related to CSR, but it does not constitute the dominant activity of the surveyed companies.

2. Project 2: a nationwide survey among public relations specialists. Implemented at the turn of April/May 2020, using the CAWI technique (Computer-Assisted Web Interview, which consists of completing an electronic questionnaire). 104 PR agency employees and freelancers with their own businesses were included in the research sample to develop this document. The research area related to the subject of the article is the analysis of changes in the companies' demand for CSR activities after the coronavirus pandemic and strategies of CSR-related activities adopted by companies after the COVID-19 pandemic. The main research objective was to examine how the demand of companies for CSR activities will evolve, and what strategies companies will adopt for CSR activities after the COVID-19 pandemic. The hypothesis assumes that the demand of companies for CSR activities will increase over time, while companies will carry out CSR-related activities mainly on their own after the COVID-19 pandemic.

3. Project 3: a nationwide survey among public relations specialists employed in PR agencies. Implemented at the turn of November and December 2020 using the CAWI technique. The research sample consisted of 216 public relations specialists. The research area related to the subject of the article is the analysis of changes in the demand of companies for CSR-related activities after the COVID-19 pandemic and the desired areas of training and personal development in the field of public relations activities, with particular emphasis on CSR. The main research objective was to find out whether CSR-related activities are a desired area of training and personal development among PR agencies' employees. The hypothesis posed is that PR professionals often declare a desire for training in the area of CSR, but it is not the dominant public relations task area in which respondents express a desire for personal development after the COVID-19 pandemic.

The use of the results of three independent research projects allows for a deep and multifaceted look at CSR as one of the areas of public relations. The statistical inference presented in the chapter on research results was based on the frequency analysis and correlation analysis, based on demonstrating statistically significant relationships using the Spearman's rho correlation. Popular statistics for nonparametric tests were also used, for example, chi-square, V Kramer and U Mann–Whitney.
Activities related to CSR are an important part of activities undertaken by public relations agencies. Based on the results of research conducted as part of a project concerning crisis management in PR agencies, it was found that CSR activities are systematically carried out by over 15% of the surveyed entities. Media relations projects are in the lead, with more than four out of five surveyed public relations agencies implementing them daily. More than half of the surveyed enterprises (52%) specialize in tasks related to building and maintaining relationships on the Internet (e-PR) as well. PR agencies carry out also activities related to crisis management and organization of events and meetings - 34.3% of responses each.

Analyzing the data presented in Chart 1, we observe that the surveyed public relations agencies relatively more often undertake activities related to CSR than research and evaluation, sponsorship, investor relations, and relations with the government. This confirms perhaps not the most important but still significant role of CSR-related tasks in all activities undertaken by public relations agencies. With this in mind, it is advisable to carry out a closer CSR analysis by examining the companies’ needs for these activities, defining the strategies of CSR-related activities adopted by companies after the COVID-19 pandemic, as well as the characteristics of the desired areas of training and personal development in the field of public relations, with particular emphasis on CSR. For this purpose, at the turn of April/May and November/December 2020, two independent studies were conducted among PR agency employees and people running a business, one of the elements of which was to check how companies’ demand for CSR projects changes during the pandemic.

When analyzing the responses from the first project, which took place at the turn of April and May 2020, that is, at the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic, the different moods among the respondents are noticeable (Table 1). More than two out of five respondents believed that companies’ demand for CSR activities after the coronavirus pandemic would rather or definitely increase - 43.3%. A slightly smaller group is constituted by PR people who said that the demand would be lower, compared to the period before the pandemic - 37.5%. The remaining group of respondents - 17.3% believed that the demand for CSR activities would remain at the same level, while 1.9% of the respondents could not answer this question.

The same topic was also raised during the survey conducted 6 months later, that is, in November–December 2020 (Table 2). The obtained results indicate much greater optimism among the respondents about the changes in companies’ demand for activities related to CSR. It turns out that the increase in demand for this type of activity was indicated by 52.3% of respondents. On the other hand, 14.4% of the surveyed public relations specialists expressed opposite opinions. 28.2% of respondents stated that companies’ demand for CSR activities after the COVID-19 pandemic will remain unchanged. The
remaining group - 5.1% of the respondents did not indicate any of the answers included in the question.

A comparative analysis of answers given by the surveyed PR specialists revealed statistically significant correlations (Table 3). Presenting the results on a scale of 1–5, where 1 means a significant decrease, and 5 - a significant increase in the demand for CSR-related activities, it was shown that the average result for the participants of the April/May study was 3.16 points, while in the November/December it increased up to 3.62 points. The Mann–Whitney U test showed significant differences between the variables \( p = 0.001 \). Respondents from the survey held during the pandemic more often said that the demand for CSR activities would increase than it was in the case of the survey at the beginning of the pandemic.

Figure 1 summarizes the considerations so far. The data presented therein confirm the positive trends in the demand for CSR activities. Over the analyzed months, we observe an increase in the percentage of respondents indicating an increase or stabilization of the demand for activities related to CSR. The percentage of responses indicating a decline in demand for CSR projects decreased significantly - from 37.5% in April/May to just 14.4% in November/December 2020. This means that the pandemic has caused shifts in the areas of activities undertaken by public relations practitioners. The research results reveal a growing demand for activities related to CSR in the opinion of the surveyed PR specialists. This may be due to a greater awareness of the situation and changes taking place in connection with the pandemic. Increased demand for services related to CSR should also be seen in the increasing role of social media, through which companies communicate about their activities and, using the imitation strategy, enter areas that have so far been ignored, and in which their competitors operate.

Further interesting results are provided by the comparison of the assessment of the need for CSR-related activities after the COVID-19 pandemic with the seniority of the surveyed public relations specialists (Table 4).

When analyzing the results of the survey conducted at the turn of April/May, it can be observed that the longer the seniority of the respondents, the assessment of the declared demand of companies for activities related to CSR decreases significantly. Among public relations practitioners with work experience of up to 5 years, 55.9% of them believed that the demand for CSR projects would increase after the COVID-19 pandemic, while 29.4% indicated that there would be a decrease. On the other hand, among public relations specialists with over 10 years of experience, 32% of respondents indicated a possible increase in demand for CSR services, while 42% of respondents believed that the demand for such activities would decrease. The analysis of Spearman's correlation showed the

| TABLE 2 | Companies’ demand for CSR activities after the pandemic COVID-19, November/December 2020 |
|---------|-------------------------------------------------|
|          | N   | %    |
| I do not know/hard to say | 11  | 5.1  |
| It will definitely decrease | 1   | 0.5  |
| It will rather decrease    | 30  | 13.9 |
| It will remain unchanged   | 61  | 28.2 |
| It will rather increase    | 67  | 31.0 |
| It will definitely increase| 46  | 21.3 |
| Total                     | 216 | 100.0|

Source: Own elaboration based on scientific research.

| TABLE 3 | Average companies’ demand for CSR activities after the COVID-19 pandemic – Comparative analysis (scale 1–5) |
|---------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
|          | Average | N   | Standard deviation | Mann–Whitney U | p    |
| April/May| 3.16    | 102 | 1.208              | 8189.5         | 0.001|
| November/December | 3.62 | 205 | 1.006              |

Note: Excluding answer “I don’t know/hard to say.”

Source: Own elaboration based on scientific research.

| FIGURE 1 | Trends in companies’ demand for CSR activities after the COVID-19 pandemic. Source: Own elaboration based on scientific research [Colour figure can be viewed at wileyonlinelibrary.com] |
existence of statistically significant relationships between the variables \( (\rho = -0.216, p = 0.029) \).

When making analogous calculations for the survey conducted in November/December, one can see a definite convergence of respondents’ answers concerning their seniority in the PR industry (Table 5).

The group of respondents that indicated the greatest possible increase in companies' demand for CSR-related activities after the coronavirus pandemic were PR specialists with work experience in the industry from 6 to 10 years - 55.3%. On the other hand, public relations specialists with experience in the profession of over 10 years most often indicated that the demand for CSR projects will decrease, compared to the pre-pandemic period - 17.3%. As shown by the analysis of the Spearman correlation, the differences in responses were not statistically significant \( (\rho = -0.026, p = 0.709) \).

Demand for CSR services is directly related to the action strategies that companies will undertake in this regard after the COVID-19 pandemic. The participants of the study conducted at the turn of April/May 2020 were asked to assess this issue. Detailed results are presented in Chart 2.

When assessing the strategies related to CSR activities, adopted by companies after the coronavirus pandemic, almost half of the respondents believed that enterprises would conduct these activities mainly on their own - 45.2% of responses. 12.5% of respondents indicated that they would mainly use external support. Moreover, one-third of the respondents (32.7%) stated that companies would implement CSR projects through both their own activities and external support (outsourcing), while every tenth respondent (9.6%) was inclined to the lack of activities undertaken in this area.

Interesting conclusions are provided by the summary of the discussed strategies of activities related to CSR with the declared demand (Table 6). It turns out that the respondents indicating a decrease in demand for CSR projects after the pandemic were much more in favor of the lack of measures undertaken in this regard - 20.5%. Among people inclined towards the growing demand for this type of service, the percentage of indications regarding the lack of any activities related to CSR oscillated at the level of only 2.2%. A detailed analysis of the research results allows us to observe that the actions undertaken mainly on the company’s own were most often indicated by the respondents pointing to a decrease in demand for CSR - 51.3%. The use of mainly external support was most often declared by people indicating a stabilization of demand for CSR services - 20%, while PR specialists who forecasted an increase in demand for CSR projects were most often in favor of combining both own activities and using external support - 37.8%. The Chi-square test showed statistically significant relationships between variables \( (\chi^2 = 14.310, p = 0.026) \).

When conducting intergroup comparisons due to the seniority of the respondents (Table 7), no statistically significant relationships were observed in the responses concerning the strategies of CSR activities planned for adoption after the COVID-19 pandemic \( (\chi^2 = 7.908, p = 0.245) \). It is worth noting that the longer the professional experience of PR specialists, the more often they advocated that companies would not undertake CSR activities - from 5.9% of indications among people with work experience up to 5 years, by 10% among specialists PR with 6 to 10 years of experience, up to 12% among PR specialists with over 10 years of experience in the public relations industry.

### Table 4

| Seniority          | Demand for CSR activities | N | It will decrease | It will stay the same | It will increase | Total |
|--------------------|----------------------------|----|------------------|-----------------------|-----------------|-------|
| Up to 5 years      |                            | 34 | 29.4             | 14.7                  | 55.9            | 100.0 |
| 6–10 years         |                            | 20 | 40.0             | 10.0                  | 50.0            | 100.0 |
| More than 10 years |                            | 50 | 42.0             | 26.0                  | 32.0            | 100.0 |
| Total              |                            | 104| 37.5             | 19.2                  | 43.3            | 100.0 |

Note: chi-square = 6.263, Cramer's V = 0.174.
Source: Own elaboration based on scientific research.

### Table 5

| Seniority          | Demand for CSR activities | N | It will decrease | It will stay the same | It will increase | Total |
|--------------------|----------------------------|----|------------------|-----------------------|-----------------|-------|
| Up to 5 years      |                            | 117| 12.8             | 35.9                  | 51.3            | 100.0 |
| 6–10 years         |                            | 47 | 14.9             | 29.8                  | 55.3            | 100.0 |
| More than 10 years |                            | 52 | 17.3             | 30.8                  | 51.9            | 100.0 |
| Overall            |                            | 216| 14.4             | 33.3                  | 52.3            | 100.0 |

Note: Chi-square = 1.134, Cramer's V = 0.051.
Source: Own elaboration based on scientific research.
The last point of this research analysis constitutes the definition of the most desirable areas of training and personal development in the field of public relations activities. Comparing this issue with the assessment of the demand for CSR projects is an interesting point of analysis, as it shows whether the declared assessment of the increase in demand for CSR activities is related to a greater willingness to improve in the area of CSR. First, however, it is worth taking a closer look at the detailed reports on various task spheres of PR and the declared willingness to undergo training or personal development in these spheres. This question was answered by the participants of the study carried out at the turn of November/December 2020, while the exact results are presented in Chart 3.

The area in which the surveyed practitioners employed in public relations agencies most often expressed the desire for improvement turned out to be communication management in crises - 38.9%. Almost a quarter of the respondents supported the need to develop public affairs skills - 22.7%. The third most desirable areas for improvement were issues related to finances and campaign accounting (cost estimation). The fourth place was taken by improvement in

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**TABLE 6** CSR activities strategies adopted by companies after the COVID-19 pandemic in terms of declared demand for CSR activities (in %)

| CSR activities strategies | Demand for CSR activities - trend | N | No activities | Mainly internal activities | Mainly external support | Both internal activities and external support | Total |
|--------------------------|----------------------------------|---|--------------|---------------------------|------------------------|--------------------------------------------|-------|
| Decrease                 | 39                               |   | 20.5         | 51.3                      | 2.6                    | 25.6                                      | 100.0 |
| Stable                   | 20                               |   | 5.0          | 40.0                      | 20.0                   | 35.0                                      | 100.0 |
| Increase                 | 45                               |   | 2.2          | 42.2                      | 17.8                   | 37.8                                      | 100.0 |
| Total                    | 104                              |   | 9.6          | 45.2                      | 12.5                   | 32.7                                      | 100.0 |

Note: Chi-square = 14.310, Cramer’s V = 0.262, p = 0.026. Source: Own elaboration based on scientific research.

**TABLE 7** CSR activities strategies adopted by companies after the COVID-19 pandemic in terms of seniority (in %)

| CSR activities strategies | Seniority | N | No activities | Mainly internal activities | Mainly external support | Both internal activities and external support | Total |
|--------------------------|-----------|---|--------------|---------------------------|------------------------|--------------------------------------------|-------|
|                         | Up to 5 years | 34 | 5.9          | 44.1                      | 23.5                   | 26.5                                      | 100.0 |
|                         | 6–10 years   | 20 | 10.0         | 40.0                      | 15.0                   | 35.0                                      | 100.0 |
|                         | More than 10 years | 50 | 12.0         | 48.0                      | 4.0                    | 36.0                                      | 100.0 |
| Total                   | 104        |   | 9.6          | 45.2                      | 12.5                   | 32.7                                      | 100.0 |

Note: Chi-square = 7.908, Cramer’s V = 0.195, p = 0.245. Source: Own elaboration based on scientific research.

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Chart 2: Strategies for CSR-related activities adopted by companies after the COVID-19 pandemic, N = 104 (in %). Source: Own development based on research [Colour figure can be viewed at wileyonlinelibrary.com]
The field of CSR and media relations - 17.1% of responses. The surveyed PR agency employees express a desire to undergo training in CSR more often than in areas such as brand PR, event marketing and sponsorship, corporate PR, and media training. This confirms the important role that CSR plays in the task sphere and the offer of public relations agencies.

As was the case with the question regarding the strategies of actions taken by companies in the field of CSR, the willingness to undergo training on CSR was compared with the declared changes in the demand for CSR projects (Table 8).

The need for development in the field of CSR was most often declared by the respondents forecasting an increase in demand for this type of services after the pandemic - 20.4%. Among people pointing to the stabilization of demand for CSR projects after the pandemic, the percentage of people willing to train in the field of CSR was equally high and oscillated at 18.1%. In the group of people leaning towards a decline in demand for CSR-related activities after the pandemic, only one PR specialist declared willingness to train. Despite significant differences in the respondents’ answers, the Chi-square test did not show statistically significant relationships between the

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**Table 8**

| Demand for CSR | Trend | N   | Willingness to improve in CSR | Yes | No  | Total |
|---------------|-------|-----|-------------------------------|-----|-----|-------|
| Decrease      |       | 31  |                               | 3.2 | 96.8| 100.0 |
| Stable        |       | 72  |                               | 18.1| 81.9| 100.0 |
| Increase      |       | 113 |                               | 20.4| 79.6| 100.0 |
| **Total**     |       | 216 |                               | 17.1| 82.9| 100.0 |

Note: Chi-square = 5.093, Cramer’s V = 0.154, p = 0.078.
Source: Own elaboration based on scientific research.

**Table 9**

| Seniority       | N   | Willingness to improve in CSR | Yes | No  | Total |
|-----------------|-----|-------------------------------|-----|-----|-------|
| Up to 5 years   | 117 |                               | 16.2| 83.8| 100.0 |
| 6–10 years      | 47  |                               | 17.0| 83.0| 100.0 |
| More than 10 years | 52  |                               | 19.2| 80.8| 100.0 |
| **Total**       | 216 |                               | 17.1| 82.9| 100.0 |

Note: Chi-square = 0.227, Cramer’s V = 0.032, p = 0.893.
Source: Own elaboration based on scientific research.
variables ($\chi^2 = 5.093, p = 0.078$). However, the obtained results confirm the relationship between the assessment of changes in companies' demand for CSR services and the willingness to undergo training in this task sphere of PR.

When comparing the respondents' seniority in the public relations industry and the desire to improve in the field of CSR (Table 9), no statistically significant differences were observed between the individual groups of respondents ($\chi^2 = 0.227, p = 0.893$). It is worth noting, however, that the desire to improve in the area of CSR slightly increases with the professional experience of the respondents - from 16.2% among people with work experience in the PR up to 5 years, by 17% among respondents with 6 to 10 years of work experience, up to 19.2% among PR specialists with over 10 years of experience.

5 SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION

The SARS-COV-2 pandemic has permanently changed the functioning of society, and thus the image of many industries, including public relations. Projects related to CSR started to gain importance. This is indicated, among others, by the forecasts of the PR specialists themselves. According to the conducted research, at the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic, at the turn of April and May 2020, an increase in demand for CSR-related activities was declared by 43.3% of respondents, while 37.5% of respondents forecasted their decrease. Another study also confirms the indicated changes. The obtained results reveal positive trends (increased need) in terms of demand for projects related to CSR. The percentage of respondents indicating the growing demand for CSR services increased to 52.3% and, importantly, the percentage of respondents who forecast a declining interest of companies in CSR tasks after the coronavirus pandemic decreased significantly to just 14.4%. These results indicate an optimistic view of the PR industry on CSR projects. According to the surveyed PR specialists, the situation we are currently facing will contribute to the growing interest of companies in this type of service, which should have a positive impact on, among others, the economy, natural environment, and local communities.

Additional elements of the research analysis carried out were to determine the relationship between the demand for CSR projects discussed above and the action strategies adopted by companies in the field of CSR, as well as the desire to improve in areas related to CSR. As shown by the results of the survey conducted among PR agency employees in April/May 2020, almost half of the respondents stated that enterprises will conduct activities related to CSR mainly on their own - 45.2% of responses. The use of mainly external support was indicated by 12.5% of the respondents, while almost one-third of the respondents (32.7%) stated that companies will implement CSR projects through both their own activities and with external support. Also, one in ten respondents (9.6%) indicated that companies do not take any action in this regard. The correlation analysis carried out showed a statistically significant relationship between the strategies discussed above and the declared changes in companies' demand for CSR projects. It turns out that the respondents indicating a decrease in demand for CSR projects - 20.5% - were most often in favor of the lack of undertaken activities in this area. Among people leaning towards the growing demand for this type of service, the percentage of indications regarding the lack of any activities related to CSR oscillated at the level of only 2.2%.

The last point of the analysis was to characterize the most desirable areas of professional development. The respondents participating in the survey conducted in November/December 2020 were asked about this. 17.1% of them declared the need to develop in the area of CSR. It was one of the most frequently chosen PR task areas, giving way only to crisis communication management, Public Affairs, and campaigns cost estimation. It is worth emphasizing here that the willingness to undergo training in the area of CSR was most often declared by PR specialists forecasting an increase in companies' demand for activities related to CSR - 20.4%. For comparison, among public relations specialists leaning towards a decline in demand for this type of service, only one person declared willingness to train in the area of CSR.

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ENDNOTE
1 Tworzydło et al. (2019, p. 38).

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