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THE DIRECTION OF CHANGES IN MARKETING MANAGEMENT, ON THE EXAMPLE OF POLISH ENTERPRISES IN THE CREATIVE SECTOR

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ABSTRACT

Purpose: *The paper aims to clarify the direction of changes in marketing management. This analysis focused on creative sector enterprises that come from Poland. The paper is outlining COVID-19 pandemic impact on the management policy implemented in companies and what has been changed in recent years.*

Need for the study: *The study aims to expand the general information about the impact of the pandemic on creative sector companies in Poland, specifying whether and what the impact it was.*

Methodology: *The paper opted for an exploratory study using quantitative survey conducted among representatives of the creative sector in Poland. In order to maximize reaching the respondents, the CAWI technique was used. The study was enhanced with three IDI interviews with management experts cooperating with the creative sector.*

Findings: *The paper provides empirical insights about how creative sector enterprises responded to COVID-19 in the area of management and marketing. It turns out that the fact that enterprises reacted did not mean significant changes in management and marketing in recent years. Experts also confirmed that reducing operating costs was the main goal of the entities, which may be unfavourable in the longer term. Cost-cutting opportunities managers from the creative sector are also looking throughout increase the use of artificial intelligence.*

Practical Implications: *The paper includes implications for successful development of a creative sector entity. Indicates which areas were changed in entities in recent years and which could be changed to increase market competitiveness.*

Keywords: management, marketing, marketing management, creative sector, competitiveness, artificial intelligence, intelligent management

Jel codes: M10; M21; M31

1. INTRODUCTION

Contemporary discussions surrounding the current situation in business management in Poland and around the world stated that it has changed in recent years (Smith & Kowalski, 2022). It is also described that changes in management in companies are not as fast as global changes in the economic situation (McKinsey & Company, 2023). Especially in the context of the coronavirus epidemic, which appeared

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in 2019 in China but caused major economic changes in 2020, 2021 and 2022. The World Health Organization (WHO) officially called off the COVID-19 pandemic only on May 5, 2023. On that day, more than three years after the pandemic was announced in March 2020, the WHO recognized that COVID-19 no longer constitutes a global threat that would require extraordinary health measures (WHO, 2023). Therefore, enterprises have been operating in subsidized conditions without systemic restrictions for only two years so far.

During the COVID-19 pandemic, Poland experienced several lockdowns and restrictions, which were implemented in phases as the situation evolved. There were three key lockdowns:

- March 2020 - May 2020,
- October 2020 - December 2020 and
- March 2021 - May 2021.

Years 2021 and 2022 was characterised by partial lockdowns and regional restrictions (Ministry of Health of the Republic of Poland, 2022).

Thus, it is generally stated that the COVID-19 pandemic has had a significant impact on companies, their management style. Many managers set a time limit before the pandemic and after the pandemic (Smith, 2021). Despite the return to a normal lifestyle, people have changed their approach to many aspects, including what decisions they make, what kind of consumers they are. Similarly, managers are changing their approach to consumers and their needs (Johnson, 2022). This situation was define as a "new normal" to describe the changes in society, work, and daily life following the crisis (Gates, 2020).

It is commonly stated that COVID-19 has affected the creative sector. On the one hand, the creative sector tried to be very active, some entities belonging to this sector tried to be responsible for good social morale (Deloitte, 2023). A significant part of the entities benefited from state aid programs, but some had to cease their activities due to the specifics of integration with recipients. Therefore, the creative sector would have to be even more creative and evolve in its management. Thus, it is commonly said that the pandemic had a significant impact on the creative sector and its mode of operation. The pandemic also brought some good changes, accelerating the process of its digitization and improving the quality of online activities (OECD, 2020).

These necessary actions, which were very quickly forced by economic reality, had to be followed by organizational changes in entities. In this paper, the author focus more closely on:

- determining whether the COVID-19 pandemic has had an impact on the management policy implemented in companies,
- determining how the management policy has mainly changed,
- determining whether the COVID-19 pandemic has had an impact on the marketing implemented in the company,
- determining how the marketing has mostly changed,
- determining what marketing-related activities managers plan to implement in 2025.

Based on interviews with mangers as well as interviews with creative sector experts, the author contemplated potential solutions to bridge the gaps created by marketing incompatibility to market requirements.

Reducing costs can be an intense incentive to seek creative, innovative marketing solutions. Marketing activities do not always have to be expensive, what's more, campaigns that have achieved viral status were often not characterized by high expenditures but by a unique idea and exceptional authenticity that appealed to recipients. Intelligent management could be very useful in this regard. Intelligent management approach, which uses advanced technologies, including artificial intelligence, to make decisions, optimize processes and improve the efficiency of the organization can significantly support marketing management (Smith & Johnson, 2022).

Intelligent management being integration of information technologies, analytical technologies and automation in order to more effectively manage resources and processes in the organization it also has a lot in common with intelligence marketing, which will be described in the following parts of this paper.

The remainder of this paper is organized as follows. In the literature review, author identified the roles of economic, political and social changes also connected with the COVID pandemic on management in enterprises. On this basis, author formulated hypotheses that: managers are changing marketing management, not resigning from marketing expenditures but looking for different forms of

activities. Finally, author elaborate on the results, implications, limitations, and suggestions for future research.

This paper fulfils an identified need to study how entities in the creative sector should make changes in management and marketing to be competitive. Because of the chosen research approach the strong point of the article is that it focuses on the opinions of representatives of the creative sector, showing their problems. At the same time, it is a sectoral limitation, so it is worth analysing this issue in other sectors as well.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

Economic, political and social changes also connected with the COVID-19 pandemic play a significant role in policy management in enterprises. Research indicates that COVID-19 pandemic has prompted organizations to rethink their strategies, emphasizing the need for resilience in policy management to adapt to economic, political, and social changes (Schwab & Malleret, 2020). European Union adapted its economic governance framework in response to the pandemic, highlighting the integration of the Recovery and Resilience Facility into the European Semester and its implications for enterprise policy management (European Commission, 2021).

The economic impact of COVID-19 has forced many enterprises to adjust their policy management strategies in several ways to cope with the on going challenges. The table below (Table 1.) presents how companies have had to adapt.

Table 1. Areas of policy adaptation in companies during COVID-19

Area of adaptation	Actions
Flexibility in operational strategies	Remote work and hybrid models: with the shift to remote work, many companies have adapted by implementing flexible working arrangements, adjusting HR policies, and investing in remote collaboration tools. Supply chain adjustments: the pandemic disrupted global supply chains, forcing businesses to rethink their sourcing and inventory management strategies. Many companies have become more agile and diversified their suppliers to reduce risks.
Financial risk management	Cost-cutting measures: due to economic uncertainty, many enterprises had to reassess their financial positions and implement cost-cutting measures, such as freezing hiring, reducing non-essential expenditures, or even laying off staff. Financial forecasting and cash flow management: companies have adapted their financial strategies by improving cash flow management, revising forecasting models, and seeking government subsidies or relief packages where available.
Adaptation of business models	Digital transformation: many businesses have speed up their digital transformation efforts. Traditional businesses have implemented e-commerce platforms, online services, and digital marketing strategies to stay competitive in a socially-distanced world. Pivoting offerings: some companies pivoted their products and services to meet changing customer needs (e.g., food companies offering meal kits, distilleries producing hand sanitizers, or fashion brands making face masks).
Focus on health and safety	Workplace health and safety policies: enterprises had to develop and enforce health and safety policies to protect employees and customers, including sanitation protocols, health screenings, and social distancing measures in the workplace.
Government and Policy Compliance	Adjusting to government regulations: companies had to quickly adapt to changing government regulations, including lockdown measures, social distancing rules, and changing tax or labour laws. In many cases, businesses needed to adjust their policies to comply with new regulations or benefit from relief programs.
Improving Crisis Communication	Transparent and frequent communication: policy management shifted toward clear and transparent communication strategies, both internally to employees and externally to customers, stakeholders, and the general public. This helped ensure trust and stability during uncertain times.

Employee Well-being & Mental Health	Support for mental health: recognizing the toll the pandemic took on employees' mental and emotional well-being, companies adjusted policies to offer more support for mental health, including virtual counselling, flexible schedules, and better work-life balance.
Sustainability & Resilience Plans	Building future resilience: in response to the long-term impacts of the pandemic, companies have focused on creating more resilient business models. They've reviewed their risk management strategies and invested in sustainability and long-term planning to avoid future disruptions.

Source: Reuters. (2025, March 8).

In response to the on going economic challenges, enterprises have made crucial adjustments to their policy management strategies. The focus has shifted toward flexibility, digital transformation, financial stability, and employee support. By adapting to these challenges, businesses are positioning themselves for future resilience in an unpredictable global environment.

Businesses' operations changed because economic conditions changed, but society changed as well, so their shopping habits changed. The COVID-19 pandemic has acted as a catalyst for significant societal changes, compelling enterprises to reassess and adapt their policy management strategies. By acknowledging and responding to these shifts, businesses can better navigate the complexities of the post-pandemic world and contribute to societal resilience and recovery (The Guardian, 2025).

Many companies have significantly changed their marketing strategies due to the COVID-19 pandemic. The shift was driven by changes in consumer behaviour, market conditions, and technological advancements. Digital transformation is pointed as a one of the most important. Companies has to increased focus on digital channels, with physical stores closing and in-person events being cancelled, many companies shifted their marketing efforts to online platforms. This included a heavier reliance on social media marketing, email campaigns, e-commerce, and virtual events. Investing in e-commerce was related to this. Companies had to quickly adapt to a digital-first approach. Retailers, in particular, invested in building or improving their online stores, while service-based businesses explored new models like online consultations or virtual services (The Guardian, 2025).

Creation of virtual experiences and events was also connected with digital transformation. With the inability to gather physically, many brands turned to virtual conferences, workshops, and product launches to stay connected with customers and prospects. This also resulted in a transition to experiential marketing. While traditional experiential marketing was not possible, some companies created virtual experiences, such as augmented reality (AR) ads, virtual product demos, or interactive content (Smith & Lee, 2021).

The creative sector also underwent significant transformation during the COVID-19 pandemic. The shift to digital platforms, the adoption of innovative business models, and the focus on community engagement and flexible management were essential for their survival. Creative companies had to embrace technology and data more than ever to stay connected with their audiences and ensure business continuity. Moving forward, the hybrid model combining in-person and virtual experiences is likely to remain a key feature in the creative sector's business strategies. Rapid technological change could become an opening for many entities to apply intelligent marketing which refers to the use of data, AI, and analytics to optimize marketing strategies, improve customer engagement, and maximize return on investment (ROI). It combines big data, artificial intelligence (AI), machine learning (ML), and predictive analytics to make smarter marketing decisions (Liu et al., 2022). Benefits of intelligence marketing could be:

- lower costs – AI and automation reduce manual work and optimize ad spend,
- higher engagement – Personalized marketing increases customer interaction,
- better ROI – AI-driven insights help businesses invest in high-performing campaigns,
- faster decision-making – Real-time data helps marketers act quickly.

The creative sector is very diverse, so some items from this sector have fared better, some worse during the pandemic. The creative sector refers to industries that focus on the production of goods and services that rely on creativity, culture, knowledge, and intellectual property. It includes fields such as arts, design, music, film, advertising, fashion, publishing, and digital media. This sector is driven by innovation and the creation of original content, contributing to economic growth, cultural development, and employment opportunities (UNESCO, 2013). Thus, entities that were easier to digitalize operated

more smoothly. Nevertheless, for everyone it meant a change in management to make this adaptation to the new realities possible.

In 2021 Kantor and Kubiczek wrote about creative sector in Poland during COVID-19 that: “the pandemic has contributed to a significant deterioration in the financial situation of cultural institutions because of the reduced income. Long-term effects on cultural institutions may be difficult to predict and losses may be difficult to rebuild” (Kantor & Kubiczek, 2021). It is therefore important to analyse the changes over time in this industry.

According to Szostak study from 2022 forced virtualisation and digitisation significantly affect the quality of the creative process within the aesthetic situation, depending on the form of participation in art. The creator, managing the creative process within the aesthetic situation, must take into account the new optics concerning the components of the aesthetic situation because otherwise, his work will be incomprehensible or unattainable for the recipients – not due to the low quality of the work, but because the work in new virtualised circumstances may change its properties (Szostak, 2021). This is an important analysis indicating that forced changes in management, forced digitalization may have not only a positive effect, but may also negatively affect the elements of the marketing mix, e.g. the product.

Research indicates that COVID-19 pandemic has stimulated organizations to rethink their strategies, emphasizing the need for resilience in policy management to adapt to the mix of economic, political, and social changes. This may result in interest in implementing the ESG (environmental, social, and governance) concept. In contrast, ESG requires companies to align their sustainability efforts with clear, measurable performance indicators, making them more accountable to investors and regulators (Friede et al., 2015). This transformation is shifting marketing strategies from storytelling based on values to storytelling backed by quantifiable impact. Unlike CSR, which often functioned as an add-on, ESG is integrated into a company’s governance and financial decision-making processes. ESG factors influence how businesses operate at every level, from supply chain management to leadership transparency (Kotsantonis & Serafeim, 2019). For marketers, this means that ESG is not just about branding but about demonstrating real-world impact, requiring companies to communicate sustainability in a more authentic and transparent manner (Hsu et al., 2021).

There is growing evidence that investors and consumers prioritize ESG performance over traditional CSR initiatives. Research indicates that ESG-focused companies attract more investments, as sustainable business models are perceived as less risky and more resilient (Clark et al., 2015). Additionally, Millennials and Gen Z consumers increasingly base purchasing decisions on a company’s environmental and social impact, rather than just product quality or price (Nielsen, 2018). As a result, ESG is reshaping marketing by requiring brands to demonstrate concrete sustainability commitments rather than merely promoting ethical values.

In the ESG era, authenticity and transparency are crucial. Unlike CSR, which could sometimes be used for superficial branding (i.e., "green washing"), ESG requires detailed reporting, third-party verification, and compliance with global sustainability standards (Eccles & Klimenko, 2019). The digital-first approach is evident, with social media, SEO, and AI integration leading marketing priorities.

The literature review indicates that the commonly discussed changes in management in enterprises in connection with the COVID pandemic and its consequences are a fact. Similarly, research confirms changes in marketing management. However, there is no current research examining changes in the creative sector, especially in Poland. Analyses of the situation of the creative sector in Poland in the context of the pandemic were undertaken, but these analyses were undertaken during the pandemic and often contained information that it is difficult to conclude how changes in these entities will evolve over time. For this reason, the author decided to address the topic of these changes and their direction in 2025, five years after the introduction of the pandemic and two years after its end. In most business contexts, 2 years is typically not considered as a "long term." It is generally classified as a short-term or medium-term period (Kotler & Keller, 2016). Analysing the situation in the creative sector in this period is crucial for understanding long-term recovery trends, assessing the effectiveness of adaptive strategies, and identifying on going challenges and opportunities for sustainable growth.

3. METHODOLOGY

3.1. Participants

In order to analyse the situation of the creative sector in Poland, representatives of the creative sector who are responsible for management in entities of this sector were recruited for the study. The study covered entities that have registered operations in Poland. The author had a sampling frame in the form of a list of companies in the creative sector in Poland. Invitations to participate in the study were sent to randomly selected companies. A sample of 185 entities was achieved. Due to the quality control of the answers provided, the sample was narrowed down to 150, in connection with reaching 150 correctly completed questionnaires.

These entities operate in different parts of Poland and represent different areas of the creative sector (UNESCO, 2013):

- Advertising & Marketing – Branding, digital marketing, public relations, and market research.
- Architecture – Urban design, landscape architecture, and interior design.
- Crafts – Handmade products, ceramics, jewellery, and traditional crafts.
- Design – Graphic design, product design, fashion design, and UX/UI design.
- Film, TV, Video, and Photography – Movie production, animation, streaming content, and photography.
- IT, Software, and Video Games – App development, game design, and interactive media.
- Publishing – Books, magazines, newspapers, and digital publishing.
- Music, Performing, and Visual Arts – Live performances, concerts, theatre, dance, and fine arts.
- Museums, Galleries, and Libraries – Cultural heritage preservation, exhibitions, and archives.
- Heritage & Cultural Tourism – heritage management.

Creative-sector managers were chosen for studying marketing and post-COVID-19 management policies as the study group because the creative sector is particularly interesting as it was among the industries most affected by the pandemic, requiring rapid adaptation, digital transformation, and innovative marketing strategies to survive and thrive. Creative-sector required rapid digital transformation in marketing. The pandemic accelerated the shift to digital platforms, virtual experiences, and online engagement in the creative sector. Marketing strategies evolved to emphasize social media, influencer collaborations, virtual events, and e-commerce.

3.2. Research Protocol and Stimuli

Creative sector also needed resilience and adaptive management strategies. Creative industries had to implement crisis management strategies, including hybrid business models, remote work adaptation, and new revenue streams. Understanding these strategies provides insights into agile marketing practices and business sustainability in times of crisis.

The pandemic changed consumer expectations, with increased demand for authenticity, digital content, and ethical branding. Studying creative businesses helps analyse how brands redefined their value propositions in response to shifting audience needs.

Many creative businesses pivoted to subscription-based services, crowdfunding, NFTs, and immersive marketing (AR/VR) to engage audiences that is why it is valuable to analyse in this sector role of innovation in post-COVID-19 business models. Creative sector provides also case studies on how companies use innovation to maintain relevance in changing markets.

The creative industries play a key role in economic and cultural recovery, influencing global marketing trends and government support policies. Examining marketing strategies in this sector helps understand how brands rebuild consumer trust and engagement post-pandemic. The pandemic introduced long-term changes in work environments, team management, and cross-border collaboration, which continue to impact marketing teams and content production.

Studying the creative sector's response to COVID-19 offers valuable insights into marketing resilience, innovation, consumer engagement strategies, and adaptive management practices, making it a relevant case study for post-pandemic business strategies.

3.3. Research Apparatus

The study was conducted using the quantitative research method. The selected technique for collecting questionnaires was the Computer –Assisted Web Interviewing (CAWI) technique, considering the fact of wide access to respondents and maximization of the response rate.

The CAWI technique proved effective in collecting data from a specific group of respondents at a specific time and place, and at the same time giving them the opportunity to think about their answers. The CAWI technique is particularly appropriate for surveys targeting managers in the creative sector for several compelling reasons. CAWI's digital nature aligns with the tech-savvy habits of young people and creative people. The combination of technology-driven efficiency, flexibility, and engaging design makes CAWI an appropriate choice for conducting surveys among creative entities managers. By aligning with their preferences and expectations, this method can give authentic responses, leading to insightful results.

In order to enhance the results obtained from the quantitative study, triangulation of methods was used and qualitative research was conducted in the form of individual in-depth interviews (IDI). In-depth interviews were conducted with three experts from the creative industry. Adding IDI to a CAWI approach significantly enhanced the depth of the data collected, providing valuable insights that might not be captured through surveys alone. Combining IDI with CAWI offered the benefits of both quantitative and qualitative research, allowing to gain broader, statistically significant insights from the CAWI survey while also exploring deeper, more personal insights through IDI. This integrated approach led to a richer, more nuanced understanding of the research topic.

4. RESULTS

This study aims to reduce the gaps between research and practice that arise as a result of the lack of analyses of changes in entities' management or the incompatibility of their marketing activities to market requirements. Drawing insights from interviews with both managers and experts in the creative sector, the author explored potential solutions to address the gaps arising from the misalignment between marketing strategies and market demands.

According to respondents from the creative sector, the COVID-19 pandemic has had an impact on their management (Figure 1). More than half of the respondents (58,7%) stated this. The group that stated that COVID-19 has not changed the management of companies is about one third of the respondents (34%). 7,3% of the respondents find it difficult to assess whether a change in management related to COVID-19 has taken place.

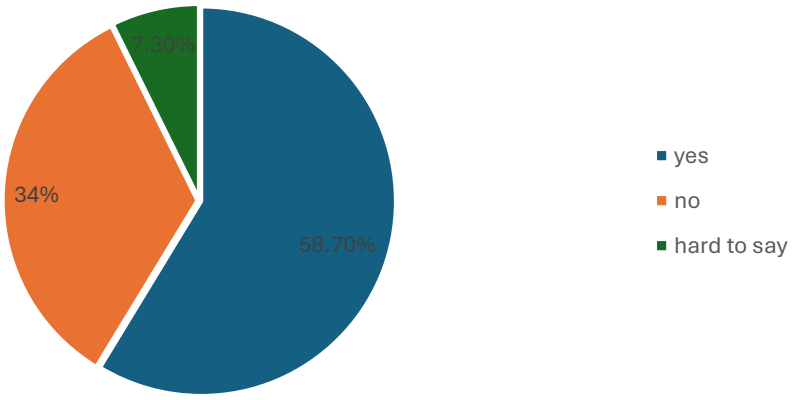


Figure 1. Please specify whether the COVID-19 pandemic has had an impact on the management policy implemented in your company?

Source: own elaboration.

The results suggest that COVID-19 had a significant impact on management practices in the creative sector, with a majority (58,7%) recognizing changes, while a substantial minority (34%) saw no impact and 7,3% were uncertain align with broader trends observed in various industries, where the pandemic forced businesses to adapt their management approaches, accelerate digital transformation, and rethink operational strategies.

This majority response is consistent with research showing that the pandemic led to shifts in remote work policies, digitalization, crisis management strategies, and organizational flexibility (OECD, 2021, Kniffin et al., 2021). In the creative sector specifically, restrictions on physical interactions likely pushed businesses to adopt digital tools, virtual collaboration, and new business models.

The fact that one-third of respondents saw no impact suggests that some companies were either already operating in flexible, digital environments before COVID-19 or that their business models were not significantly disrupted. This is comparable to findings from sectors that already had remote work infrastructure or minimal reliance on in-person operations (Eurofound, 2021).

According to creative sector experts: the respondents who were unsure about changes in management could indicate that:

- the shifts were subtle and gradual, making them harder to perceive,
- sometimes employees might not have been directly involved in managerial decision-making, affecting their ability to assess the impact,
- some companies may have returned to pre-pandemic management styles, making the changes seem temporary.

When describing how the management policy has changed the most, among the companies that declared changes in management, the respondents could indicate only one leading option (Figure 2). As many as 70,9% of respondents stated that this change concerned reducing production costs. 15,30% declared changes towards pro-ecological activities, sustainable production. Slightly fewer entities declared that they focused on social issues (12,80%). One percent of respondents are mainly focused on finding new ways of managing their business that will be appropriate for them in such uncertain times.

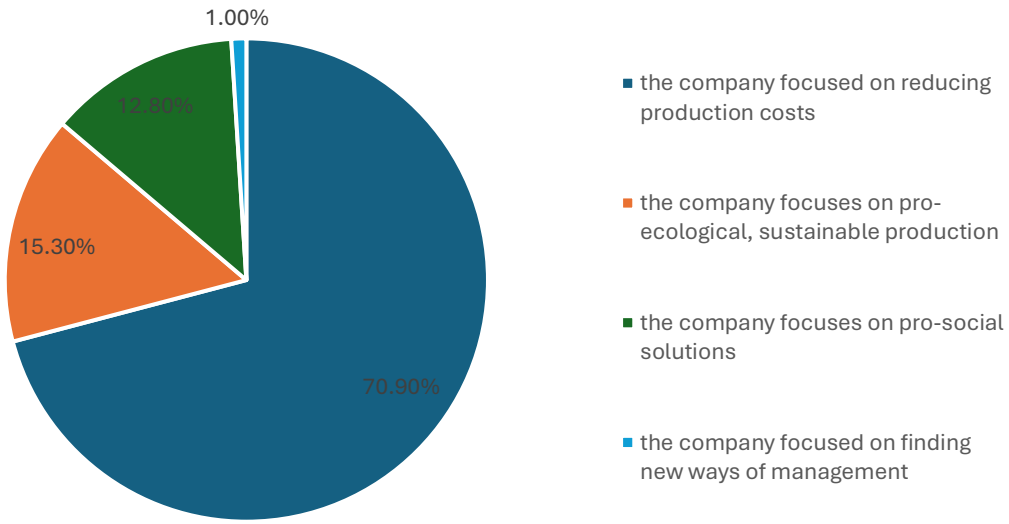


Figure 2. Please indicate how the management policy has changed the most
Source: own elaboration.

A significant majority of respondents (70,9%) indicated that their main focus was on reducing production costs. This suggests that many businesses are still prioritizing efficiency and profitability in uncertain times, likely as a response to economic pressures and market unpredictability. Nevertheless according to experts downsizing measures could include streamlining operations, optimizing supply chains and as well investing in automation.

A smaller group of respondents (15,3%) have focused on pro-ecological activities and sustainable production. Although this is a smaller percentage, it still points to a growing awareness of environmental issues and aspects connected with circular economy. Those operating in this area can also generate savings. Companies are increasingly seeing sustainability not only as a social responsibility but also as a way to appeal to conscious consumers and meet regulatory demands. The fact that 12,8% of respondents are focused on social issues is interesting as it highlights a shift in priorities towards for example corporate social responsibility (CSR). While this is a smaller group, it reflects growing attention to employee well-being, diversity, and community engagement, which are becoming more important for long-term business success.

Analysing changes connected with marketing more than half (60%) of the creative sector respondents declared that the COVID-19 pandemic had an impact on marketing in their company (Figure 3). The result is slightly greater than in the case of declarations that COVID-19 would affect management policy in general (58,7%). Only 13,3% of the respondents stated that there was no impact. On the other hand, 26,7% stated that it is difficult for them to determine whether COVID-19 had affected marketing in their company or not. In the case of influence on management, only 7,3% of respondents had such doubts.

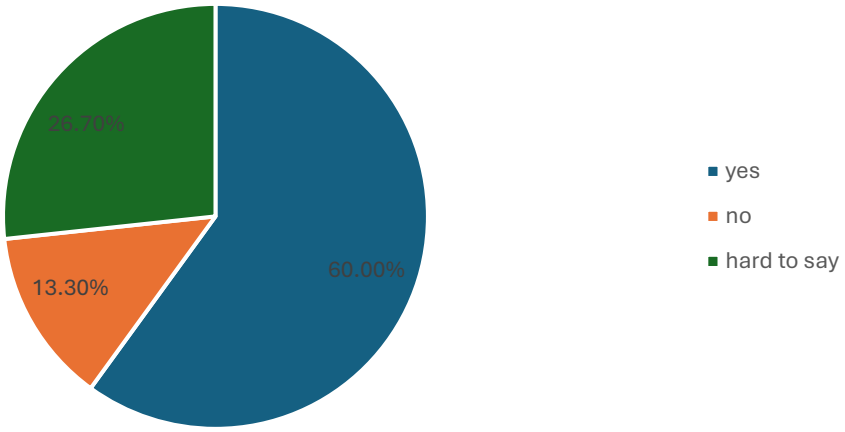


Figure 3. Please specify whether the COVID-19 pandemic has had an impact on the marketing activities carried out in your company?
Source: own elaboration.

More than half of the respondents indicated changes in marketing could reflect several factors, such as the shift to digital channels as in-person events, traditional advertising, and physical experiences were disrupted. The creative sector, which often relies on live events, performances, exhibitions, and physical interactions, likely had to pivot to virtual events, online content, and social media campaigns. This shift required quick adaptation and rethinking of how to connect with audiences.

The pandemic accelerated the digital transformation in many industries, including the creative sector. With physical venues closed or limited, companies may have turned to online platforms, social media, digital content creation, and streaming services to stay connected with customers. Creative firms may have adopted innovative marketing methods, such as virtual exhibitions, digital performances, or influencer partnerships, to replace traditional marketing approaches.

The pandemic likely led to shifts in consumer behaviour, including changes in spending habits and preferences. This could have forced creative sector companies to re-evaluate their target audience, redefine brand messaging, or adapt their marketing channels to align with a more digitally focused audience. The need to maintain engagement with consumers during lockdowns and restrictions would have further driven this shift toward digital-first strategies.

Marketing teams in the creative sector would have had to be more flexible and innovative, possibly focusing on creating digital content, enhancing e-commerce platforms, or shifting advertising efforts toward platforms that saw increased activity during the pandemic (e.g., social media, streaming

services). Creative companies that were able to innovate with their marketing strategies during this time may have gained an advantage by adapting quickly to the new normal and capitalizing on the increased demand for digital content. Thus, the sources of change had many different bases. Sometimes these changes could be wanted by managers and sometimes they had to implement projects and activities that they did not intend at all.

The managers from the creative sector in Poland who took part in interviews when they were asked how they would describe the marketing changes they were introducing three main areas (Figure 4). When describing how the marketing has changed the most, among the companies that declared changes in marketing actions, the respondents could indicate only one leading option. Most entities focused on reducing costs related to marketing activities (71%). This result is similar to the one in the case of changes in management policy (70,90%).

Further entities pointed to the circularity aspect of implementing issues related to sustainable marketing (17%). Sustainability issues also appeared in the next response, as 12% of respondents indicated that they implement ESG policy issues. ESG (Environmental, Social, and Governance) is often viewed as an evolution of CSR (Corporate Social Responsibility). Both ESG and CSR share a focus on social good, ESG brings a more structured, measurable, and investor-focused approach. ESG can be considered a new iteration of CSR for marketing. For marketers, this shift means being prepared to communicate not just corporate values but real, actionable outcomes tied to environmental, social, and governance criteria. ESG is rapidly becoming a cornerstone of brand identity and marketing, especially as consumers and investors increasingly demand responsible business practices (Eccles, Ioannou, & Serafeim, 2020).

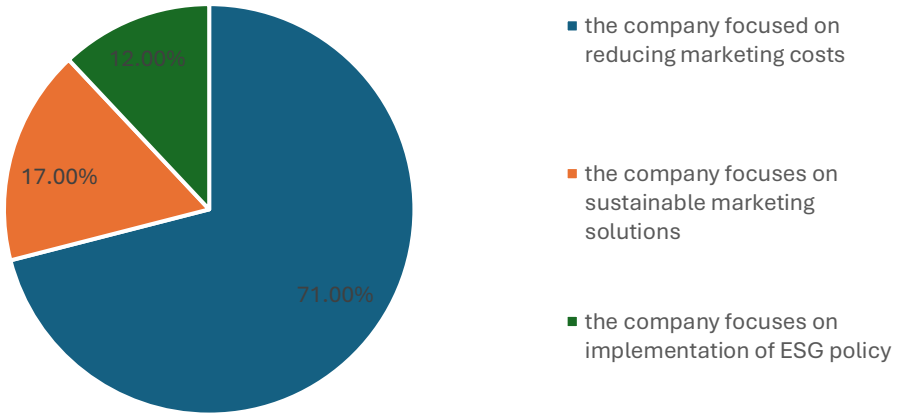


Figure 4. Please indicate how marketing has changed the most
Source: own elaboration.

In response to the question: What marketing-related activities do you plan to implement in 2025? The studies indicated many different answers, but it can be noticed that actions related to cost reduction are indicated more often (Figure 5).

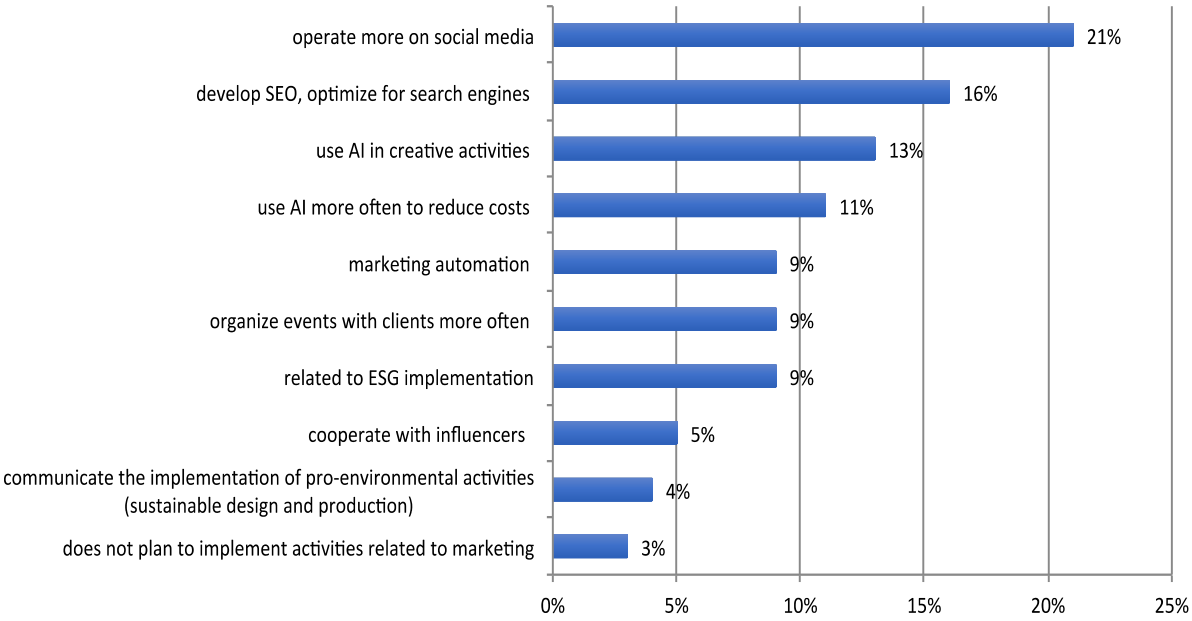


Figure 5. What marketing-related activities do you plan to implement in 2025?
Source: own elaboration.

The respondents mainly plan to operate more often in social media (21%), which in itself is not a high-cost activity. SEO optimization (16%) came next, so it is really an expansion of actions already taken. Optimization usually aims to reduce costs.

Using AI in creative activities (13%) can also reduce costs. The respondents also stated that they intend to use AI more often to reduce costs (11%).

Marketing automation activities (9%) can be an investment in the initial phase, but in the long term they are also aimed at reducing costs. The respondents less often indicated organizing events with clients more often (9%), actions related to ESG implementation (9%).

As a separate category of activities, apart from activities in social media, the issue of cooperation with influencers (5%) appeared.

4% of respondents plan to communicate the implementation of pro-environmental activities (sustainable design and production). However, 3% declared that they do not plan to implement activities related to marketing.

Key observations apart of the will decrease costs can be social media dominance (21% and 5%). This suggests that companies recognize the growing importance of digital presence, audience engagement, and social media-driven marketing strategies. Only 5% of respondents plan to collaborate with influencers, despite the rise of influencer marketing. This might indicate a shift toward more owned and organic digital marketing efforts rather than relying on third-party endorsements.

The second-highest priority is SEO development (16%). This indicates that businesses are focusing on organic visibility, recognizing the need to optimize websites and content for search engines to improve reach and customer acquisition.

Responses indicate the growing role of AI in marketing (13% and 11%). 13% of respondents plan to use AI in creative activities, which reflects the increasing role of AI in content creation, design, and personalized marketing campaigns. 11% aim to use AI to reduce costs, highlighting an interest in automation, efficiency, and data-driven decision-making to optimize marketing expenditures.

9% plan to implement marketing automation, which suggests a focus on streamlining campaigns, email marketing, and customer segmentation. Another 9% plan to organize events more often, possibly indicating a shift back to in-person marketing efforts or hybrid models post-pandemic.

ESG and Sustainability Considerations (9% & 4%) is important trend which is constantly shifting. Especially since Poland's 2025 introduces mandatory ESG reporting. 9% of companies are aligning marketing strategies with ESG initiatives, which may be in response to increasing consumer and

regulatory pressure. A smaller 4% plan to specifically communicate their pro-environmental activities, such as sustainable design and production. This suggests that while sustainability is gaining attention, it is not yet a primary marketing focus.

Only small group (3%) does not plan to implement any marketing-related activities. According to experts this could include businesses that either do not rely heavily on marketing or have already established sufficient brand recognition.

5. DISCUSSION

This study indicates the changes that have taken place in creative sector companies in Poland in recent years in terms of management and marketing. After analysing the respondents' answers and the experts' interpretations, it can be stated that the hypothesis was correct verified positively. Managers are changing marketing management, not moving away from marketing expenditures but looking for different forms of activities. The common opinion that entrepreneurs change management policy to reduce costs and thus give up marketing activities is not true. Marketing activities are strongly present in creative entities and are not eliminated. Managers change marketing management to reduce costs by looking for other forms of activities.

Research conducted in 20216 indicated a slow pace of change in the creative sector entities. In study by Joanna Kubicka (2016) investigated the implementation of management changes in cultural and creative organizations in response to environmental shifts. The findings indicated that only a portion of respondents fully recognized the scope and impact of management changes on their organizations, and the overall state of implementing these changes was still low. While Kubicka's research highlights a low implementation rate of management changes, it does not specifically address the relationship between cost reduction and marketing activities. Therefore, the assertion that managers in Poland's creative sector are maintaining or adapting marketing efforts despite cost-reduction pressures appears to be a relatively unexplored area, suggesting a potential gap in existing literature.

However, there is little data on the creative sector in Poland that would provide a picture of the changes taking place in this sector in recent years. The size of the sector and the fact that the entities in it are very often very different are not without significance here.

Results obtain during this study align with global trends, highlighting how COVID-19 influenced management adaptation in varying degrees. The majority of creative sector companies recognized a shift, but a significant minority either maintained previous management approaches or were uncertain about changes. Further research could explore specific areas of management transformation, such as leadership styles, work arrangements, and innovation strategies.

The COVID-19 pandemic has significantly influenced management practices across various sectors, including the creative industries. While many companies have adapted to new challenges and new reality, others have maintained traditional approaches or remain uncertain about necessary changes. This aligns with global trends observed during the pandemic. For instance, the UK's TV production sector faced substantial financial challenges due to decreased spending on program commissions by British broadcasters. Despite a record income of nearly £4 billion in 2022, the abrupt downturn left many small independent producers at risk of closure, with over 70% facing possible shutdowns by May 2025 if conditions did not improve (The Guardian, 2024). Similar, the 2015-founded events company Creation showed resiliency throughout the pandemic by reorienting services and continuing to run without laying off employees. The business, which prioritizes tenacity, prompt decision-making, and team values, has extended its operations internationally and intends to join the US market (The Times, 2024). These illustrations show how different levels of managerial adjustment occurred in the creative industry throughout the pandemic. While some businesses acknowledged the necessity of major changes, others held to their previous management styles or were hesitant to make the necessary adjustments. Further research could explore specific areas of management transformation, such as leadership styles, work arrangements, and innovation strategies, to understand better how organizations can navigate such unprecedented challenges.

An important direction of changes are activities within the ESG framework. ESG which stand for Environmental, Social, and Governance *(*MSCI, 2023) and is often viewed as an evolution of CSR (Corporate Social Responsibility), but it’s not exactly the same thing. While both ESG and CSR share

a focus on social good, ESG brings a more structured, measurable, and investor-focused approach. The compatibility of certain areas may indicate the fact that ESG can be considered a new iteration of CSR for marketing. CSR has traditionally been seen as a company's voluntary commitment to social good, often focusing on philanthropy, community engagement, and sustainability projects. ESG, on the other hand, is more data-driven and involves clear metrics that can be evaluated, reported, and assessed by investors, stakeholders, and consumers. ESG focuses on:

- Environmental (e.g., carbon emissions, waste reduction).
- Social (e.g., employee diversity, human rights).
- Governance (e.g., board diversity, ethical business practices).

For marketing, this means that brands must not only perform with good approach but also prove their efforts through measurable results and transparency (CFA Institute, 2022).

CSR initiatives, while impactful, were often treated as separate from the core business model, mostly driven by marketing and PR teams. ESG, however, is becoming deeply integrated into a company's core strategy, influencing decisions at every level—from operations to supply chains to executive leadership. This integration makes ESG a more strategic focus for marketing, as it's now part of the company's overall value proposition and reputation management (Carroll & Shabana, 2010).

The literature on the subject indicates that ESG goes beyond CSR by answering the growing demand from investors and consumers for more accountability. While CSR was about enhancing a company's image, ESG adds a layer of credibility and risk management, which appeals to both ethical consumers and investors looking for sustainable, long-term business models. Companies that effectively market their ESG efforts attract consumers who care about sustainability and social responsibility, as well as investors who want transparency and ethical practices (Eccles & Klimenko, 2019).

With ESG, marketing plays a crucial role in storytelling - but it's storytelling based on hard data. Rather than just positioning CSR initiatives as optimistic marketing, ESG pushes companies to share quantifiable impact (Hsu, Ko, & Chung, 2021). Authenticity and transparency are key to marketing ESG effectively - if the claims don't align with the company's actions, consumers and investors are quick to call it out as "green washing".

CSR typically focused on social causes such as charitable donations or employee volunteer programs. ESG is more comprehensive, considering environmental, social, and governance factors across the entire business model. This holistic focus means that companies need to engage with all stakeholders, including employees, suppliers, investors, and consumers, in a more cohesive way.

ESG could be seen as the "new CSR" in the sense that it's a broader, more measurable, and more integrated approach to corporate responsibility. While CSR emphasized good intentions and community involvement, ESG places a stronger emphasis on impact, data transparency, and long-term sustainability - all of which are key elements in modern marketing strategies.

For marketers, this shift means being prepared to communicate not just corporate values, but real, actionable outcomes tied to environmental, social, and governance criteria. ESG is rapidly becoming a cornerstone of brand identity and marketing, especially as consumers and investors increasingly demand responsible business practices.

Mention very often by mangers during the study social media is a powerful tool for promoting a company's also ESG efforts. To engage consumers, investors, and stakeholders, companies must authentically communicate their ESG initiatives in a way that builds trust and transparency. While ESG builds upon CSR principles, it represents a more rigorous, accountable, and strategic approach to corporate sustainability. For marketing, this means shifting from value-based branding to data-driven transparency, ensuring that corporate sustainability efforts are credible, measurable, and aligned with stakeholder expectations. In this sense, ESG is not just the "new CSR" - it is a more evolved, integrated, and market-driven approach to responsible business practices. Companies should leverage storytelling to showcase ESG Impact. For creative sector entities creative approach can be very useful and should allow you to reduce your marketing costs.

Respondents pointed out that reducing costs is important to them but still they want to act according to market needs and trends. Experts pointed out, however, that various elements related to marketing activities do not have to mean high costs, but can, in the long term, translate into savings. Such issues may be, for example, the increasing use of artificial intelligence in creative work indicated by the respondents, as well as focusing on achieving a sustainable business.

Implication for further research and practice is combining activities around intelligent management with marketing and ESG in one business model and testing this model. Merging intelligent management with marketing and ESG in companies involves integrating data-driven decision-making, sustainability initiatives, and ethical business practices into a cohesive strategy. Creative sector companies can effectively merge these three elements in areas describe in the Table 2.

Table 2. Merging areas between Intelligent management, ESG and marketing

Merging areas	Actions
1. Intelligent Management: leveraging data & technology	Intelligent management refers to using AI, big data, and analytics to enhance decision-making. Furthermore using AI for creative purposes is also respondents goal. Companies can use: - AI and machine learning: analyse consumer behaviour and predict ESG trends. - Automation: streamline sustainable supply chains and reduce environmental impact. - Real-time monitoring: track ESG performance metrics (carbon footprint, diversity, ethical sourcing).
2. ESG Integration: aligning with business strategy and finance	- Sustainable supply chains: use intelligent management to optimize logistics, reduce waste, and ensure ethical sourcing. - Governance & compliance: AI can assist in monitoring regulatory requirements and avoiding ESG-related risks. - Corporate social responsibility: develop meaningful community engagement programs based on consumer insights.
3. Marketing: communicating ESG Value to Consumers	- Data-Driven Personalization: Use intelligent management tools to tailor ESG messaging for different customer segments. - Transparency & Trust: Showcase ESG efforts through real-time dashboards, interactive reports, and blockchain-backed verification. - Brand Storytelling: Use ESG initiatives to differentiate the brand and appeal to conscious consumers.

Source: own elaboration.

Combining those elements can mean building the synergy of intelligent, ethical, and market-driven growth. By integrating intelligent management with marketing and ESG companies make smarter, more ethical decisions based on real-time insights. Marketing can become more authentic by leveraging ESG initiatives and then ESG becomes a competitive advantage rather than just compliance. Those merged areas will apply intelligent marketing that refers to the use of data, AI, and analytics to optimize marketing strategies, improve customer engagement, and maximize ROI.

6. CONCLUSION

The study examines recent changes in management and marketing within Poland's creative sector, concluding that while managers are adapting their marketing strategies, they are not completely reducing marketing expenditures but rather exploring different forms of activities. This challenges the common belief that cost-reduction efforts lead to diminished marketing efforts; instead, marketing remains integral to creative entities.

The creative sector experienced both extreme disruptions e.g., live event cancellations and rapid innovations e.g., digital content expansion, virtual exhibitions (UNESCO, 2021). Therefore, the search for new management policies is strongly justified.

In conclusion author would like to indicate two key directions of changes in marketing management that companies have adjusted their marketing in response to COVID-19:

- Strategic planning: understanding the broader societal shifts resulting from the pandemic is crucial for enterprises to align their strategies with changing societal expectations and contribute positively to societal well-being.

- Policy adaptation: enterprises have had to adapt policies to address the evolving needs of their workforce, including implementing remote work arrangements and supporting mental health initiatives.

The research results show not only the desire to reduce costs but also openness to new technologies and solutions. Implementation of AI and intelligent management in companies can significantly lower marketing costs while improving efficiency and effectiveness. AI-driven tools like chatbots, email automation, and AI-generated content reduce the need for large marketing teams, lowering labour costs. AI-driven analytics tools can improve customer segmentation and targeting, ensuring marketing budgets are spent effectively. AI tools can also create social media posts, ad copy, and even videos, reducing creative costs. AI-powered dashboards and decision-making tools can help businesses analyse performance and adjust marketing strategies in real time. By automating processes, optimizing spendings and improving personalization, AI and intelligent management can significantly reduce marketing costs while improving effectiveness. Due to its specific nature and adaptation experiences from recent years, the creative sector may be particularly prepared for these innovative changes.

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