

Article

Brand Management of Catholic Church in Poland

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Abstract: Building the brand of the Catholic Church is an area that is little explored in the literature on the subject. This issue turns out to be a very controversial area due to the nature of the activities and the sphere in which these activities are to be performed (marketing, ethics, religion, and faith). The article presents the results of qualitative research conducted among clergymen in Poland and is additionally based on the analysis of the literature on the subject. The theoretical considerations and research results presented in the article help to develop an understanding of the activities of the Catholic Church in Poland, aimed at strengthening the value of its brand. It should be noted that the generational change taking place in Poland forces the clergy to change their narrative and way of conducting dialogue. The previous generations, based on the faith and ethos of John Paul II, also expect modern forms of communication more and more often, which leads to building the brand value of the Catholic Church in Poland. The article discusses the specificity of the interdependence of the Church and marketing, identifies the issues of building the brand of the Catholic Church and the use of modern marketing tools in this process, and presents the results of its own research, which leads to the drawing of final conclusions verifying the research questions posed in the research methodology. This article may initiate an extended discussion on the controversial topic of the implementation of commercial marketing tools into management processes in the Catholic Church.

Keywords: Church; marketing; brand

1. Introduction

Research shows that in European countries we encounter less and less participation of the faithful in the religious life of the church. The number of consecrated persons is also decreasing from year to year (Esteves 2020). These processes also apply to Poland, which is considered a country with a high commitment to religious life. According to studies conducted in 2019 by the Centre for East European and International Studies, the Catholic Church in Poland enjoys low trust among young people who consider themselves less and less religious (Krawatzek 2019).

The Churches themselves and the church institutions of different denominations face a serious dilemma, namely, how to effectively reach not only non-believers, but also people who declare themselves as believers, so that they become active members of the Churches. This situation becomes important, because people who struggle with everyday problems have to choose between many organizations that encourage active participation in their lives. The diminishing trust of young people in the Church is important not only for its future, but also for its present. Like the elderly, young people also have an impact and significance for the current existence of the Church, because “young people are not only the future of the Church and of the world. They are the present of the Church and of the world, insofar as the future starts with the present” (Tagheu 2019, p. 138).

Therefore, the question arises whether in order to return people to religious practice and to regain social trust, church leaders and their pastors should use the activities and tools used by marketers,

especially when it comes to building a good brand. In the literature on the subject, a certain type of dependency is emphasized, which indicates that people identifying themselves with a brand recognizable in society participate more actively in the life of that community (Bergami and Richard 2000; Bhattacharya and Sankar 2003). The issue of the use of marketing practices by church institutions is a relatively new one, gaining more and more recognition today (Alin et al. 2009). Its roots can be found in the analyses and practices undertaken by American Protestant religious communities, who have adopted the market strategies successfully used in business. They did so without major detriment to their doctrine and theology, while making changes to the lifestyle of their members. American studies showed that churches in urbanized environments were much more open to such practices than churches operating in rural areas (Newman and Benchener 2008).

This text is a contribution to discussions about the brand of various local Christian churches (Dover 2006; Mulyanegara 2012; Woelke 2014; Valaskivi 2019; Coman 2019; Wijaya et al. 2019). At the same time, it pays particular attention to the possibility of brand construction in the Catholic Church, which allows it to be distinguished from other organizations (Baster et al. 2018).

2. Church and Marketing

Today, recognition of marketing principles is not only associated with Protestant communities. As early as 2001, the New York rabbi of the Makor Jewish Religious Center used marketing research to determine the spiritual needs of his faithful. The purpose of the marketing research was to help him take appropriate actions to convince the faithful to participate in the services. On the basis of the obtained answers, the rabbi thoroughly rebuilt the religious activities carried out so far in his community (Wellner 2001; McGrath 2009).

For a long time, the heads of the Catholic Church were skeptical of the marketing approach to religious activities. Some experts believe that such a cold attitude may stem from a highly hierarchical structure of the Church, where many decisions are made at the diocesan bishopric level, independent of lay counselors. Meanwhile, as early as 1983, Dunlap, Gaynor, and Roundtree (Dunlap et al. 1983) were researching Protestant and Catholic clergy in North Carolina on how to approach issues such as sales, public relations, and advertising. The analyzed issues gained positive approval among the clergy of the studied denominations. Namely, 80% of the respondents stated that they used advertising tools in their activities, and 70% that they used entire advertisements (Webb et al. 1998). A certain positive approach to the issue was much more noticeable from the beginning of the 20th century. This was confirmed by a 2009 study in one of the Catholic parishes in Pennsylvania (McGrath 2009).

It is worth remembering that in the activities of churches, we have always encountered elements of public relations, advertising campaigns, or creating plans for the future with the use of available propaganda tools. The churches used the media willingly in their activities. However, deliberate, decisive, and real advertising campaigns or the use of methods used by specialized marketing companies is an issue that is not easy to deal with in modern times (Conrad 2010). Activities aimed at using methods used in business marketing have often been criticized by religious leaders. In 1994, Wells (1994) cited the opinions of critics who argued that the use of marketing tools in churches would mean that churches would “be marketed as an organization rather than an organism, as a place to meet people rather than as a place where one meets God, on terms that He establishes, as a commodity for consumption rather than an authority calling for pertinence and surrender”. Even more figuratively, “the idea of promoting the word of God in the same way that sneakers and soda pop are sold has offended some” (Miller 1994, p. 1).

At the beginning of the discussion on the possibility of using marketing activities in churches, it was believed that the cautious position could result from identifying marketing with sales or advertising. Namely, “the field of marketing is believed by many to be synonymous with selling or advertising. While this definition is somewhat myopic in scope, it does tend to cause the term marketing to leave a bad taste in one’s mouth as one contemplates the typical complaints made against these activities” (Shawchuck et al. 1993, p. 41).

At that time, the most important reservations were put forward, which are also quoted in contemporary publications and can be reduced to a few of the most important ones. It is about the belief that marketing wastes money donated by parishioners, acts as an intruder that enters the lives of individuals, is based on manipulation, fights spirituality built on the idea of leadership, and desecrates religion. Where it is believed that all marketing activities can be reduced to a calculation of material gains and losses, they cannot be used in the Churches. This is not the principle the Churches follow (Shawchuck et al. 1993; Rodrigue 2008; Odlá 2014; Gavra 2016).

It should be noted, however, that a restrained or even critical approach to marketing techniques may result from a misunderstanding of marketing itself. It cannot be equated with manipulation, perceiving it as a set of advertisements, or promoting sales in an unfair way. Some marketing tools could be approved if the focus was on the marketing analysis of social needs and the standard of living of the society, and thus by adapting the organization of services to them, using effective communication to ensure the spiritual needs of man. Well-conducted marketing activity assumes the formulation of strategic plans and activities, as well as the need to define one's own mission, competition analysis, organization of major strategic decisions, and the use of modern communication tools (Abreu 2006). Marketing activities aimed at assessing individual customer needs can then be used in the Churches. Their objective would be to identify and understand the values that are shared by individual members and to design and disseminate programs that meet them. Bearing in mind the need to achieve success, the research and preparation of programs should take into account the age of people who believe in the values and how to reach them are approved (Coleman 2002).

The gradual friendly look at the possibility of using marketing activities in Churches finds its explanation in their positive assessment of the activities of non-profit organizations, which were already carried out in the seventies of the last century. The analysis of their operations shows that non-profit organizations adopt more and more marketing strategies and tools that allow them to effectively acquire and manage the gifts received. The difference lies in putting less emphasis on profit optimization and the nature of the relationship with numerous stakeholders such as donors, communities, and target audiences (McGrath 2009; Iyer et al. 2010). As early as 1969, Kotler and Levy (1969, p. 15) wrote that "the choice (. . .) is not whether to market (. . .), for no organization can avoid marketing. The choice is whether to do it well or poorly (. . .)". A positive approach to marketing in Churches also supports the social activities of church volunteers who promote church initiatives of a social nature (Wymer 1998; DiGuiseppi et al. 2014). Of course, church charities are not the same as secular non-profit organizations (Kotler and Levy 1969; Sargeant et al. 2002). This does not change the fact that the social marketing activities carried out by the Churches are well received among the faithful (Lumpkins et al. 2015). Marketing by social institutions provides the basis for religious marketing. On the one hand, the main religious activity concerns building social attitudes, and on the other hand, religious organizations are involved in satisfying human needs and ensuring the well-being of people in not only a spiritual, but also physical, sense (Abreu 2006).

By some analogy, we can say that the actions taken by the Churches fit in some way with the marketing of services, and not of specific physical products. They are closer to promoting intangible offers such as healthcare or travel than to promoting products such as motor vehicles or clothing. They are closer to charities (non-profit organizations) that do not work only to earn tangible profits. The nature of the ministry carried out by the Church is intangible, somewhat elusive, heterogeneous, and impermanent (Van der Merwe et al. 2013).

In conclusion, we can say that there will always be some tension between marketing and religions. Marketing is based on and supports the development of consumerism. Religions, on the other hand, criticize consumerism. It is also undeniable that marketing and its concepts are associated with business, buying, and selling by the general public, and therefore it is not easy to accept that marketing can be used to support social activities, not to mention religion, which focuses on spiritual values. Nevertheless, practice has proved that the connections between marketing and religion can be many and profound, and scientists have begun to deepen their research into these relationships. An analysis

of the activities carried out by Catholic Churches in some countries shows that more and more people use marketing tools. For example, the Catholic Church in Ghana has strategic plans based on marketing, consciously or not, using marketing tools to promote its results (Appah and George 2017). Research in Indonesia shows that believers appreciate marketing tools. Research has shown that, in their opinion, clergymen should strengthen the communication process and a sense of sensitivity to the current needs of the faithful regarding the celebration of the Eucharist (Junianto 2018). Communication with the outside world and public relations are becoming increasingly important in church activities (Sturgill 2004; Conrad 2008; Nwanganga 2017). It should not be forgotten that as early as 1997, the Catholic Bishop's Institute for Social Communication (BISCOM I), after the Singapore meeting, admitted that Christian Public Relations should not only be considered from a business perspective, but also understood as a task for Christians to live in love with people of other religions (Bishop's Institute for Social Communication (BISCOM I)). Another expression of a positive attitude towards marketing is the discussion of brand building. Building a brand image is one of the essential elements of megachurch marketing. In order to build brand loyalty and convey content, available media, including music, are used (Yip and Susan 2016). Megachurches became very visible at the beginning of the 20th century in Latin America and the USA; they mainly responded to the needs of religious expression of societies and the search for spiritual leaders, using innovative communication techniques (Eagle 2015). In the literature on the subject, one can find research on the factors determining the marketing success of megachurches (Martin et al. 2011; Kim 2007; Sturgill 2004). Social media play an important role in the marketing communication of megachurches; the four basic functions of strategy, opportunities, management, and influence on the environment (Nah and Saxton 2013) were used by the leaders of these religious communities.

3. Church and Brand Building

A positive view of marketing activities and the growing distrust of the Catholic Church allow us to ask if the possibility of using the tools necessary to build a good brand would not be a good attempt to change the attitude of believers. Religious organizations also function in a competitive environment, similar to companies that try to stop their competitors. In the discussion of the possibility of using the brand in church activities, it was pointed out that in order to attract the attention of people interested in religion, the latter use various tools (Shawchuck et al. 1993; Iyer et al. 2010). Thus, the possibility of building an image and brand was not excluded. It was also pointed out that church marketing is a complicated issue when it comes to brand identity, products offered, and audience diversity. The commercialization of religion and theology itself is not without significance (Horne and McAuley 1999). In 2010 Mulyanegara, Tsarenko, and Mavondo (Mulyanegara et al. 2010) noted that marketing includes communication, service quality, strategy, market orientation, and branding. The principles of building a good brand come into play where there is a visible need to build lasting relationships and where long-term commitment is concerned.

We even hear the opinion that "people become attached to a religion in the same way they become attached to a brand" (Adebayo 2015, p. 6). The importance of communication in the Church in creating its brand was also pointed out (Abreu 2006; Iyer et al. 2010). Research was conducted that analyzed the branding strategies of a specific religious organization from the perspective of market position and brand identity (Abreu 2006). Religious organizations undertake marketing activities by deciding to position the brand, i.e., they create an unquestionable brand identity in the consumer's mentality in relation to other religious organizations. As a consequence, they develop and implement a communication strategy that allows them to consolidate their brand identity (Iyer et al. 2010). A well-built brand can be a helpful tool in the missionary activity of the church (White 2019).

One of the important tasks of marketing activities is building a durable and trustworthy brand image (Gargiulo et al. 2011). Each religious organization can be perceived by its essential constitutive elements, which undoubtedly include the brand (Abreu 2006; Einstein 2011). A church that enjoys a good name in the local community, meaning that its brand is positively perceived, has more attached

members (Stevens et al. 1997). Based on research in Australia, Mulyanegara (2011) shows that the perception by the respondents of the extent to which the Church engages in activities aimed at maintaining brand building consequently leads to increased participation in the life of the Church. Mulyanegara (2013) also shows a positive orientation of the Church towards building its own brand. The more people have a positive image of their own Church, the more they show that participation in the life of the Church is essential for its spiritual and social life.

Currently, it can be noticed that institutions or social organizations more and more often recognize the importance of building their own brand—brand equity strategy (Aaker 2009; Silva et al. 2020; Rybaczewska et al. 2020). It seems, however, that in some social environments, marketing is perceived as a profit-making activity, and therefore has a negative nature (Čačija 2016). However, one of the basic directional premises of marketing is to influence the behavior of recipients (Andreasen 2012); therefore, various marketing concepts can be successfully used, for example, in church institutions. When reviewing the literature on the subject, it can be concluded that there is little focus among researchers on the marketing of church institutions. It is pointed out that marketing can be used in any religious organization, not only to spread content, but also to build a brand or raise funds for activities.

The basis for effective marketing is activities aimed at building the brand of a given organization or company. It should be noted, however, that the very concept of the brand will be consistent for most entities; it will be distinguished by its features that will be characteristic of individual entities. Kotler indicates that a brand is a name, term, or symbol that was created to identify a given organization, company, or institution (Kotler and Sarkar 2017). The American Marketing Association (Bennett 1995) presents a similar position. It seems that an important element of the brand building process is, above all, awareness of the brand's purpose, i.e., what it gives to its client. There is an opinion among researchers that a positive brand image has a large impact on its good reception and high value and shapes consumer behavior (Aaker and Keller 1990; Keller 1993). A very great similarity in the characteristics of the concept of a brand occurs between companies focused on profit and non-profit organizations. Non-profit organizations can create brand features that will identify them, distinguish them, and differentiate them in a given environment (Huang and Ku 2016). In the case of non-profit organizations, such activities may be characterized by various goals, e.g., convincing the recipient of the ideas announced, donations made by recipients for statutory purposes of the organization, or making the society aware of the issues important for their functioning. It should be emphasized that brands of non-profit organizations should stand at the opposite extreme to profit-oriented brands and should emphasize their main values, such as credibility, honesty, humanity, and idealism (Voeth and Herbst 2008). In this idea, it can be indicated that the brand image is created by three basic types of associations: empirical, functional, and symbolic (Michel and Rieunier 2012). Empirical association is the power of the desire for services or products of a given brand, functional desire is related to satisfying the needs of recipients, and symbolic association is identified with the desire for products and services, and this desire results from human needs, e.g., position or role in a group, membership in a given group, or identification with a given group. Looking at the above approach, it can be stated that the brand of the Catholic Church should be based mainly on types of symbolic associations.

When attempting to implement activities aimed at building a brand image, one should, however, consider what the desired features of the Catholic Church brand are. In the literature on the subject, there are many publications on brand characteristics (Andreini et al. 2017); however, there is no comprehensive analysis of the brand characteristics of the Catholic Church. According to the authors of this publication, such features may be as follows: honesty, authenticity, presence and involvement in the life of the society, consistency of the content of the message, and spirituality. However, the authors realize that the above-mentioned features are not the only ones, and they are constantly evolving along with changing social behavior.

Looking at the directions of brand development presented above, it can be stated that the brands that have been created by the Catholic Church for years can be distinguished among other brands. It is obvious that this brand is built in the spirit of the idea of non-profit organizations.

In building the brand of the Catholic Church, activities aimed at building and strengthening its image seem to be important. In the area of commercial marketing, public relations tools are used for this type of activities (Doorley and Garcia 2020). Public relations is also used in the image-building activities of organizations or non-profit institutions (Johnston and Sheehan 2014; Reddi 2019; Netzer 2020). Therefore, public relations tools are used more and more often in image-building activities of churches of various religions. The implementation of commercial public relations tools in the marketing activities of the Catholic Church requires in-depth reflection and adaptation to the specificity and assumptions of the church. These activities require a certain kind of relationship (Baster et al. 2018), which should combine the church strategy, image-building activities and the spiritual needs of the recipients.

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4. Research Methodology

The issue of building the brand of the Catholic Church in Poland is poorly recognized in the literature on the subject. The research conducted so far focuses on the use of individual marketing concepts in the marketing activities of the Church. The research results presented in the article are based on qualitative research. It should be noted that the controversial subject of the research significantly hampered the research process. Therefore, the article sets three main objectives:

- O1: Identification of brand awareness among the clergy of the Catholic Church in Poland.
- O2: Getting to know the opinions of clergy about the purposefulness of marketing activities in order to build the brand of the Catholic Church in Poland.
- O3: Indicating the place of marketing in creating the brand of the Catholic Church in Poland.

The article also raises research questions aimed at providing answers to the objectives set in the article.

- Q1: What are the opinions of Catholic clergy about building the image of the Catholic Church in Poland?
- Q2: How does the Catholic Church in Poland build its image?

In order to achieve the above research goals and answer the research questions, qualitative methods were adopted in the research. As part of the qualitative method, an individual in-depth interview was used. Its main purpose was to examine how the Catholic Church understands the issue of building its own image and brand and what importance it attaches to this process. The research method used in the article was also intended to indicate the answers to the research questions posed in the article. In addition, in-depth interviews also tried to explain to what extent the issue of building the brand of the Church is taken up in the formation process of clergy and to identify the possibility of its promotion in the church environment.

The interviews were conducted from 15 June to 19 July, 2020, with 10 clergy belonging to the Catholic Church. The selection of qualitative research at this stage made it possible to reach specific cases (Fendt and Sachs 2007; Sułkowski 2009; Toften and Hammervoll 2010). The specificity of the local Church was taken into account in this respect. Individual in-depth interviews were based on a repeatable research scenario, which gave the opportunity to ask the respondents additional questions, thanks to which it was possible to highlight and detail the research issues. Before the research, the interview scenario was consulted with four external experts dealing with the image of the Catholic Church in the media, ecclesiology and marketing specialists. Two experts came from academia. The third one came from a church organization dealing with charity and pastoral activities, and one worked in a Catholic news agency.

The interviews were conducted both in the form of direct and telephone conversation, as well as by means of electronic correspondence. The selection of the form of the interviews took into account the fact of the still-prevailing coronavirus pandemic and certain restrictions resulting from it in the church environment (Sułkowski and Ignatowski 2020). Both oral forms were recorded. Then, together with the material provided by e-mail, they were transcribed and subjected to qualitative analysis.

The selection of respondents was deliberate. Clergymen with various functions in the Catholic Church participated in the study. Four of them are lecturers of Catholic theology at universities in Poland, two of them have no direct contact with pastoral activity (apart from occasional cases), and the other two teach Catholic theology and at the same time conduct pastoral activity. One is resident in a parish in a city of over 750,000 inhabitants, and the other is active in a parish in an urbanized city of over 56,000. The fifth respondent is a Doctor of Philosophy and looks after a small religious community in the outskirts of a city of over 750,000 inhabitants. Another participant of the research was a clergyman working in diocesan institutions, delegated to contact the media, and he also maintains constant pastoral contact with a parish located in a city with over 56,000 inhabitants. The remaining four graduated theology, conduct only pastoral activities, and thus know the issues related to the image of the Church and how it is created by secular environments from a practical perspective. The first is the parish priest in the parish with over 46,000 inhabitants, and the second is the vicar and catechist of the town parish. The last two clergymen come from religious communities. The first of them is a Master of Theology and a catechist at school. He conducts pastoral activities in a village of over 650 inhabitants. The last of them graduated from the seminary and is the superior of the religious order, and the monastery buildings are located in a town with over 18,000 inhabitants.

The table below (Table 1) presents the list of clergy participating in in-depth individual interviews.

Table 1. Respondents participating in the research.

Respondent Code	Church Function	Location	Contact with the Believers
D1	Lecturer in Catholic theology at a university	City over 750,000 inhabitants	data
D2	Lecturer in Catholic theology at a university	City over 750,000 inhabitants	data
D3	Lecturer in Catholic theology at a university	City over 750,000 inhabitants	Constant contact with the believers
D4	Lecturer in Catholic theology at a university	City over 650,000 inhabitants	Constant contact with the believers
D5	Employee of the diocesan institution for contacts with the media	City over 56,000 inhabitants	Constant contact with the believers
D6	Head parish priest	Suburbs of the city over 750,000 inhabitants	Constant contact with the believers
D7	Head parish priest	City over 46,000 inhabitants	Constant contact with the believers
D8	Vicar and catechist	City over 650,000 inhabitants	Constant contact with the believers
D9	Monk and catechist	City over 650,000 inhabitants	Constant contact with the believers
D10	Superior of the religious order	Town over 18,000 inhabitants	Limited contact with the believers

Source: authors' own elaboration.

5. Research Results and Discussion

Qualitative research has shown that the concept of a brand used in creating the image of a company or service is not strange to the clergy participating in the interviews. Moreover, they are ready to use it to build the image of the Church. As the first of them noted, a brand that is “always built on solid

foundations will allow the Church to stand out from other organizations, and thus operate effectively in those areas where other institutions do not have the appropriate competences" (D1). The second one added concisely that "the Church is a specific institution that has existed for two thousand years and has extensive experience in this regard, that is in building a brand. He does not name his activities in a marketing way, but uses his own language" (D2). Building a brand allows the Church not only to distinguish itself from other institutions, but also "to define the intentions and goals of its activities" (D3). It also allows you to give up "tempting and immediate goals" (D4). Unfortunately, as the seventh added, "it does not always want to use it" (D7). Brand building "must take into account the fact that the Church has been in existence for over two thousand years and has always had various forms of activity". Thus, brand building must take into account the wisdom of the spiritual life, which makes it not easy to succumb to "the influences of the changing world and its temporariness" (D9). Spiritual life "is so rich that it is possible to find the right patterns in each epoch and adapt them to specific needs" (D10). It does not change the fact that this "experience should constantly take into account the changing circumstances and challenges when building a brand" (D8). This does not mean that "one should adapt to these circumstances and give in to them thoughtlessly" (D3). All these reasons mean that the "need to build a good brand" should not disregard the available tools and modern technologies, thanks to which such media as television and social media can function. It is important to get used to the fact that "radio and television is not enough anymore". The same clergyman responsible for contacts with the media noted that "the brand cannot be easily changed or lost". A good brand "is therefore necessary for the Church" (D5). The parish priest from the parish located on the outskirts of a large city noted that in this context, it should not be forgotten that "a synonym for the word brand is good, unblemished opinion. It is related to the Church's credibility in the institutional dimension, and it is necessary to undertake the tasks facing the Church" (D6). Forgetting the need to build a good brand leads to "losing a good brand and, consequently, losing it and gaining bad reputation" (D7).

The research has shown that the surveyed clergymen realize that a brand can be good or bad. They indicated the general possibilities of building a good brand. The first of the clergy, a university professor who had occasional contact with the faithful, did not, however, provide any specific examples that would indicate what constitutes a good or bad brand. From the theoretical point of view, he emphasized that "the Church is a divine-human community and its brand can be considered on three levels". On the first level, "from a purely religious perspective, the Church will enjoy a good reputation when it distances itself from activities that go beyond its mandate. In its activities, it will implement the goals that were set with its establishment" (D1). The second dimension in which we can consider building the brand of the Church "determines the Church's commitment to work for the common good of the society in which it functions". The more so that "because it does not have to engage in political life and strive to gain power, it can pursue goals that are not popular from a political perspective". The common good does not have to coincide with charity. For the third level at which we can talk about building the brand of the Church "is precisely the charitable activity". However, in order to speak of brand building in this context, the activity of the Church must go beyond "purely humanitarian inspirations". If it were so, "it would not be different from other institutions and he would not be able to build a brand that is characteristic of the Church" (D1).

The same categories include the statement of the second clergyman who said that "the brand of the Church is determined by the manner of administering the sacraments" (D2). Only "in carrying out its basic function," added the seventh, "the Church can build her brand". However, he explained that it is not limited to the celebration of the sacraments, but is also built up in the process of proclaiming the Gospel (D7). The eighth noted that the celebration of the sacraments always takes place in the context of the proclamation of the Gospel. The preached Word is "an integral part of the sacraments celebrated in the Church" (D8). Two clergymen from religious orders pointed out that the brand of the Church "is also determined by an in-depth religious life" (D9). As the tenth respondent stated, "humble religious life, detached from everyday affairs, both social and political, is one of the essential elements that constitute" an integral part of building a good brand. Where "there is no deep religious

life, the Church will always have a bad brand". However, "it may temporarily gain a brand that can quickly deteriorate" (D10). This reflection is presented in the statements of the third clergyman, who noted that "the brand of the Church is presented daily in the media", various types of publications, and circulating opinions repeated in social media (D3). You have to take into account the fact that more and more people are willing to participate in discussions on social media. When "building a good brand, it is necessary to use this potential and the involvement of people whose task is to point to the disseminated erroneous information, as well as highlight the elements of positive commitment of the Church" (D5). Especially since "many good things" are happening, even at the local level. However, they are overshadowed by "negative examples dominating in the media that hinder the creation of a good brand" (D8).

The research has shown that the surveyed clergymen see the need to learn about building a good brand already at the level of seminary education. The second of them stated that "promotion is a requirement of modern times, and therefore seminary participants should be prepared for modern conditions" (D2). The first one noticed that it should be done regardless of the fact that the concept of "brand" may be associated with the propaganda aspect (D1). Building a brand by clergymen who carry out pastoral activities is also associated with contemporary propaganda activities, namely, "talking about a brand becomes meaningful when we understand the creation of the base and the essence of an action" (D7). Then the brand concept is close to the term "authenticity". Speaking of "the brand of the Church" can influence the message to the faithful. Moreover, if, in common use, the term brand was established in the Church, then such a term would contribute to the renewal of authority, not in the sense of knowledge, but in terms of authenticity (D8). For the clergyman in charge of communication with the media, the need to learn about brand building "can contribute to communication with the next generations of people who admit to the Church" (D6). For the first clergyman from the religious order, there is no need to learn about building the brand of the Church. Modern candidates for the priesthood should "possess the necessary knowledge in this regard" (D9). The other, however, was convinced that such a need existed; "we will not learn about it by reading the masters of spirituality or asceticism" (D10). The need to learn about building a good brand also results from the fact that, thanks to such a brand concept, it is possible to "emphasize those elements in its learning and operation which are its strongest point at a given stage of history. In the process of evangelization, which is the most important for the Church, a brand (i.e., good opinion) is an asset and a help in the difficult process of transmitting the truths of faith and moral principles" (D4).

The research has shown that clergymen realize that the science of brand building should be included in the program of seminary studies. It should be discussed not as a separate subject, but within the framework of already existing theological and philosophical subjects. For understandable reasons for the parish priest and Doctor of Philosophy, "it should be mentioned in the preaching, where the issue of the art of persuasion and the use of eristic tricks should be discussed" (D6). The others pointed to other lectures. Theologians who did not have constant contact with pastoral life mentioned "pastoral theology and moral theology" (D2). The first one, however, noted that "he has no contact with today's seminary curriculum". He based his statement on "what he has learned himself and on the observation of current needs" (D1). The clergyman who lectures on theology and has constant contact with the faithful, pointed to two subjects. He spoke of "pastoral theology, which should be based" on the healthy principles of the functioning of the Church in the modern world, and therefore take into account the need to build a good brand of it. The other subject is catechetics, because "it is to take into account the standard of living of contemporary youth who are sensitive to all manifestations of hypocrisy. Caring for the good brand of the Church allows you to discover the authenticity of the Church" (D3). It is interesting that the clergy living in religious orders pointed to other subjects. They talked about pedagogy, psychology, and contemporary philosophy, specifically "during classes in psychology and pedagogy, which are obliged to take into account the sublime spiritual needs of modern man" (D9). Additionally, philosophy classes, in their lectures on contemporary issues, "must take into account issues related to the understanding of marketing principles" (D10). The clergyman

dealing with media relations, however, found that he did not see “the need to talk about the brand of the Church in some separate way” for “this issue should be discussed at all stages of seminary education” (D5). The theology lecturer who had contact with the faithful had a similar opinion. Namely, “brand learning does not have to be a topic undertaken in separate classes. It should be presented at every possible opportunity” (D4). For head priests, seminary studies “should educate clergy from the very beginning to work in the religious community as well as in social and public life” (D8). Activity in public life is related to the need to constantly care for the good brand of the Church” (D7).

The research has shown that clergy are well aware of the fact that they will not build a good brand on their own. The first respondent stated that he did not see the need to create special offices that would create a positive image. He also does not see the specific role of clergy. However, he considered that “management specialists would be helpful in this regard” (D1). This was confirmed by the second of them, who stated unequivocally that the matter concerns “management specialists” (D2). Other clergymen, those who are associated with pastoral life, decided that the issue concerns the people who make up the Church. Responsibility rests “on all members of the Church, clergy, and laity” (D4). However, more emphasis was put on the need for lay involvement. The media contact specialist pointed out that he could not imagine that “in building the brand of the Church, first of all secular specialists with extensive experience in brand creation would not be involved” (D5). The head parish priest and Doctor of Philosophy indicated a wide range of specialists. It is about “lay deacons and catechists, lawyers and psychologists” (D6). The clergy who held the office of the parish priest spoke of the need to create special councils similar to parish councils. Namely, “a good and effective form may be organized councils centered around those in charge of management” (D7). The other head parish priest pointed out that “shaping a good brand can build strong ties with the local community” (D8). The clergy living in the religious order wanted them to be “people connected with the Church and showing concern for its image in their personal lives” (D9). Moreover, they themselves, “with their lives and care for the family, are to confirm that the good of the Church is their top priority” (D10).

The research has shown that clergymen believed, however, that building the brand of the Church must not only be effective, but also take into account religious beliefs. They constitute “the norm in the search for effective methods of building the brand of the Church” (D1). The norm should also be “the voice of those who make up the Church, who will determine which means can be considered ethical and which are not” (D2). Indeed, when choosing people who work to build a good brand, and therefore “have competences, are able to consult, dialogue and use modern technologies, there must be people who have limitations in the Gospel message” (D3). Thus, it is not only about the possessed competences, but also “strong faith and a strong moral backbone” (D4). What matters is not only the effectiveness, but also the authenticity and credibility of activities aimed at building the brand of the Church (D5). Respondents involved in pastoral work indicated specific activities. When building a brand, you should use every opportunity. However, if the Church is to be “the Church, and secondary products are only instruments, then the most important tools will always be the integrity and personal commitment of all members of the Church to the content announced” (D6). Therefore, “personal example, credibility, and honesty, combined with respect for others” are necessary (D8). Another tool in this regard will be “preaching, personal cooperation between clergy and the faithful and among themselves” (D7). An effective tool in building a good brand is “quick reaction to evil that appears, also in the structures of the Church” (D9). Honesty in actions “should be combined with empathy for another human being who cannot feel like an ordinary customer showing up in a supermarket” (D10).

Summing up, it should be stated that the surveyed clergy know the concept of a brand and are aware of the need to build a positive image of the Church, even though they do not use strictly marketing terminology in this regard. It is fully understandable, as there are no lectures on marketing within the seminary teaching. The latest document of the Vatican Congregation for the Clergy entitled “The Gift of the Priestly Vocation”, which contains the fundamental principles by which the education of future clergymen is to be conducted ([Congregation for the Clergy 2016](#)), does not mention it either.

The analysis of the research shows that the established good image and brand will allow the Church to stand out from attractive secular institutions, including the charities. Therefore, when building the image, it should not be forgotten that the services performed by the Church, such as baptisms, masses, weddings, or funeral ceremonies, should by their nature be permeated with some kind of invisible, mystical character. This mysticality is a characteristic element that clearly distinguishes the initiatives of the Church from the activities of non-profit organizations (Odlá 2014). In this context, it is worth noting that the clergy surveyed did not associate good brand reception with financial income. However, it is worth noting that a well-built brand has a positive impact on the attitudes of church donors (Hou et al. 2009).

The research results also show that striving to consolidate a good image will allow the Church to develop a strategy for the future, taking into account the existing problems. Moreover, the clergy realize that good reputation is achieved by resolutely carrying out their mission, honestly administering the sacraments, and a deepened spiritual life. It is these elements that should be exposed in the process of building a good brand of the Church, because every religious marketing process should take into account the spiritual needs of the faithful. Clerics should strengthen communication with the faithful and show sensitivity to the needs of people present at Eucharistic gatherings (Junianto 2018). They must not lack a well-structured definition of pastoral missions, plans, and programs (Abreu 2006). It should not be forgotten that a well-built brand has a positive impact on the participation of the faithful in church life (Mulyanegara 2011). Religious topics in Poland are frequently interpreted as fragile by respondents, especially those representing groups of believers. From the point of view of religion, Poland is quite a homogenous country, where ca. 75% of the population declare themselves as part of the Catholic Church. Therefore, the perception of questions about marketing, promotion, and branding of the Catholic Church in Poland could be interpreted as fragile and offensive by some of the respondents. To counterbalance this effect, the researcher was a trustful person, not perceived as an opponent of the Catholic Church.

When building a positive image and brand, reliable knowledge is necessary, which, even if it is incomplete, should be passed on in theological studies. It is not about a single selected subject, but about taking up branding issues both in theological and social sciences. At the same time, when building the image, one should use the help of professionals, especially, but not only, in management. They should have well-formed religious beliefs and be guided by reliability and honesty. After all, moral norms, not short-term goals, determine the choice of tools. The need to pay attention to the ethical side of marketing, especially in church marketing, has been emphasized since the 1960s. Already in those years, when the concept of this marketing was formed, it was pointed out that ethical considerations would ensure a balance between marketing and religious requirements. Moreover, marketing applied in the activities of the Church can make marketing itself morally, socially, and ethically responsible (Appah and George 2017).

6. Conclusions

The conducted research, limited to Polish clergy, which does not allow us to draw general conclusions, shows the respondents' awareness of the need to use modern marketing tools to build the brand image of the Catholic Church. It seems important, however, that this awareness is inextricably linked with other areas of life, such as faith or ethics. It is important that the above awareness creates a certain consensus in the process of building the image of the Church between the assumptions of faith, the commercialization of marketing activities, and the expectations of the society. An action that is essential in this process will constantly change and adapt the forms of communication to the contemporary language, taking into account the target groups of the faithful identified in the marketing process of the Church. In building the brand of the Catholic Church, it is not always necessary to use commercial marketing tools; very often they can be replaced by, e.g., dialogue or actions that will lead to building a positive relationship between the Church and its stakeholders. In the United States, religious visits to the faithful or having telephone conversations with them bring

positive results (Vokurka et al. 2002). The conducted research shows that the Catholic Church in Poland should establish a wider cooperation and dialogue with institutions whose nature of operation fits in with the basic assumptions of the faith it proclaims. Some kind of partial separation of the Catholic Church from politics is suggested. In the literature on the subject and the research conducted, there is a specific view on the significant role of marketing in the secularization of societies, which may directly translate into a decrease in the number of believers or vocations (Cummings 2006). The passive attitude of the Church and the lack of reaction to the changes taking place in the communication process of the society may deepen this opinion. It seems, however, that the conscious use of marketing by the Catholic Church can bring it and the faithful many benefits. Better communication of the Church with the environment may lead to an increase in the value of its brand, which may result in a reversal of the secularization trend of societies. It is important that the Catholic Church conducts some kind of imitation (commercially called benchmarking). This activity consists of observing the activities of other entities and implementing their best solutions in their structures and activities. In this way, the Catholic Church implements in its processes activities that benefit the Protestant Churches. It is worth noting that research conducted in the USA shows that the greatest achievements are due to such marketing activities as home visits and telephone calls (Vokurka and McDaniel 2004). Referring to the research conducted by the authors of the article, relating to the preparation of future clergymen for certain types of marketing activities aimed at building the brand of the Catholic Church, it can be stated that the seminary system of educating clergy lacks theoretical and practical classes in the area of marketing. University faculties of theology do not conduct specialized classes that would prepare future clergy for this type of activity.

At the end of the discussion, therefore, a question can be asked: should the role of the Catholic Church be based solely on the proclamation of the truths of faith and ethical principles, or should the Church be more involved in the daily life of society, transmitting at the same time the basic values that guide it? The answer to this question seems to be affirmative. The Catholic Church in Poland should move from a passive attitude to an active one, activate its operations for the benefit of society, and inform about them. For this type of activities, it can use, like other churches in the world, commercial marketing tools and support these activities with market specialists. One should make a reservation, however, that conducting activities in the area of building the brand of the Catholic Church requires prudence and paying special attention to the ethical aspects of the activities carried out. When selecting specialists who are to help in building a brand, one must be guided by competences, ethical standards, and not favoring other people (Sułkowski et al. 2020).

In conclusion, it can be stated that activities of a marketing nature will always arouse some kind of tension and reservations (marketing is based on and supports the development of consumerism, while religions criticize consumerism; marketing and its concepts are associated with business, buying, and selling by the general public), but the proper introduction of some tools of marketing by the Catholic Church to the process of building a brand image can change the prevailing view and create a specific new trend in broadly understood marketing.

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