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# The issues of patriotism in marketing communications in the conditions of Russian aggression in Ukraine<sup>1</sup>

Zagadnienia patriotyzmu w komunikacji marketingowej  
w warunkach agresji rosyjskiej w Ukrainie

## Abstract

The purpose of the article is to identify changes in the attitudes, values and postulates of Ukrainian consumers during the Russian aggression and to assess the trends of changes in the development of marketing communications of enterprises during the war in Ukraine. Critical analysis of the literature on this topic was used as research methods in the theoretical part. In the empirical part, the descriptive-comparative method and case studies were used to analyze the content of advertisers and the reaction of consumers to them. For her research, carried out in September 2022, the Author applied a survey on the Google Forms platform, in which 198 respondents aged 18–25, from universities in different regions of Ukraine, took part on a voluntary basis. The research sample is deterministic, not representative. In addition, the article uses the results of research on this topic by the research companies Gradus Research, Deloitte Ukraine, Kantar, and the American Chamber of Commerce, all conducted between February and October 2022. The results of the research as presented in the article allow us to conclude that Russian aggression significantly influenced the behavior of consumers and their preferences regarding communication messages. Currently, processes related to the protection of national identity are taking place in the Ukrainian society. Therefore, since the first days of Russian aggression in Ukraine (dating since February 24, 2022), a great demand has been seen for the values of patriotism in advertising campaigns, and consumers prefer brands that advertise them. At the same time, the results of the study indicate that the continuation of the armed conflict may lead to a habituation effect and a certain decrease in the effectiveness of marketing communication of enterprises based on the category of patriotism in their campaigns.

## Keywords

marketing communication, Russia's aggression in Ukraine, consumer behavior, advertising values, patriotism

## Streszczenie

Celem artykułu jest identyfikacja zmian postaw, wartości i postulatów ukraińskich konsumentów podczas rosyjskiej agresji oraz ocena trendów zmian w rozwoju komunikacji marketingowej przedsiębiorstw w warunkach wojny w Ukrainie. Jako metodę badawczą w części teoretycznej wykorzystano krytyczną analizę literatury przedmiotu. W części empirycznej wykorzystano metodę opisowo-porównawczą oraz studia przypadków w zakresie analizy treści reklam i reakcji konsumentów na nie. Do przeprowadzenia własnych badań autora, które wykonano we wrześniu 2022 r., wykorzystano ankietę na platformie Google Forms. W ankiecie wzięło udział 198 respondentów w wieku 18–25 lat, studentów uczelni z różnych regionów Ukrainy. Próba badawcza miała charakter celowy, wynikający z warunków i czasu prowadzenia badań. Ponadto w artykule w aspekcie komparatywnej analizy wyników badań własnych wykorzystano wyniki badań agencji badawczych: Gradus Research, Deloitte Ukraina, Kantar oraz Amerykańskiej Izby Handlowej, zrealizowanych w okresie od marca do października 2022 r. Wyniki badań przedstawione w artykule pozwalają stwierdzić, że rosyjska agresja znacząco wpłynęła na zachowania konsumentów i ich preferencje dotyczące komunikatów komunikacyjnych. Społeczeństwo ukraińskie przechodzi obecnie procesy związane z ochroną tożsamości narodowej, dlatego od pierwszych dni rosyjskiej agresji w Ukrainie (24.02.2022 r.) pojawiło się bardzo duże zapotrzebowanie na wartości patriotyczne w kampaniach reklamowych, a konsumenci preferują marki, które je promują. Jednocześnie wyniki badań wskazują, że przedłużanie się konfliktu zbrojnego może prowadzić do efektu habituacji i pewnego spadku skuteczności komunikacji marketingowej przedsiębiorstw, opartej na kategorii patriotyzmu.

## Słowa kluczowe

komunikacja marketingowa, agresja Rosji na Ukrainę, zachowania konsumentów, wartości reklamy, patriotyzm

JEL: M39

## Introduction

Marketing communications depend on the events taking place in society and reflect the mood of consumers. The better brand owners feel the change in values in society, and the faster they react to them, the more effective communication tools, aimed at building consumer loyalty work, tend to be. This is observed, in particular, by the scientists, who studied the theoretical aspects of managing marketing communications of enterprises and promoting brands in the modern environment (Wiktor, 2013; Taranko, 2015; Sanak-Kosmowska, 2018; Romat, 2022). Russian military aggression in Ukraine became a significant test for its citizens, fundamentally disturbing the sense of security and leading to extreme stress. Under such conditions, the tools for applying marketing communications are changing, and the role of emotional marketing is increasing. Some aspects of the application of emotional marketing are revealed in the works of Boguszewicz-Kreft (2009), Staszewska & Skorus (2017), Gajewski (2016), Wolanin-Jarosz (2015), Miroński (2022), Szymoniuk (2019), however, they require further theoretical research and generalization, taking into account new circumstances and experience of application under modern conditions.

## The importance of communications during the war and their peculiarities

War is an extraordinary disaster for any country and injures people not only physically. Most people get psycho-emotional trauma. This is confirmed by

the results of the Gradus Research Company's research on the emotions of citizens during the invasion of Russian troops into the territory of Ukraine (Table 1). The research was conducted in March 2022 using the method of a self-filled questionnaire in a mobile application (1019 respondents aged 18 to 60 from various regions).

In such a crisis situation, people's emotions remain blocked, they are unable to make any rational decision, because they lack: firstly, relevant information to rely on, and secondly, internal mental forces to understand and accept what is happening. That is why, with the beginning of the war, news sites became the most sought-after sources of communication for consumers. According to the results of a joint research by Google and Kantar regarding the perception of advertising creative during the war, 76% of respondents read or watch news several times a day, while 86% of respondents use messengers, 85% use social networks (Borodii, 2022).

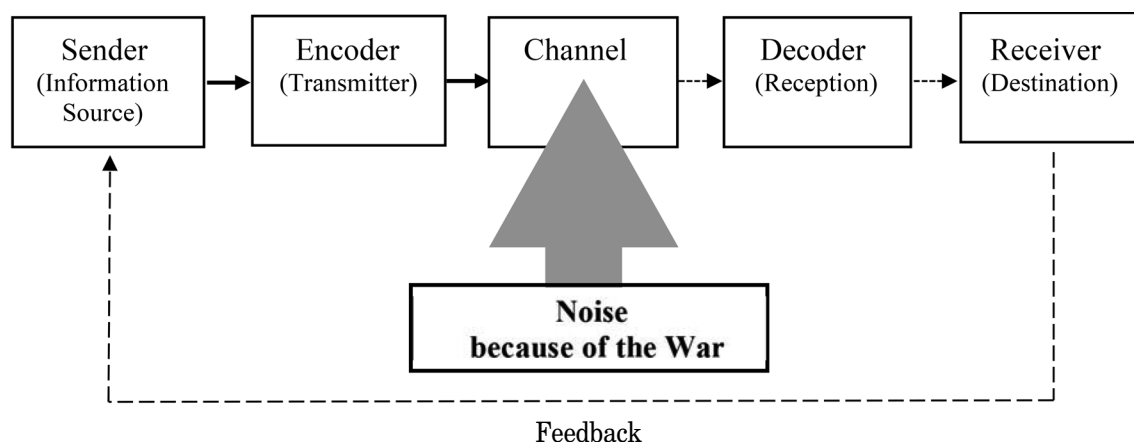
The psychological state of any person, their confusion and uncertainty, affects their ability to process information and perceive communications. The Shannon-Weaver communication model is the one most often mentioned in scientific works on marketing, in particular in works of Wiktor (2013), Taranko (2015), Romat (2022); it can be considered basic in the theory of communications. According to this model, the key stages of message transmission from the communicator to the addressee include coding, the origin of the message through communication channels, and decoding. Under conditions of deep shock and tension, as experienced by are during the war, the process of decoding a communication message is rather complex. The so-called "noise", or interference, becomes so significant that it makes communication between

**Table 1. Emotions felt by Ukrainians related with Russia's attack on Ukraine (% of responses)**

Emotions	All respondents	Men 489	Women 530	18-24 110	25-34 240	35-44 298	45-54 232	55-60 139
Anger	67	68	65	59	60	65	71	79
Tension	33	33	34	22	35	31	36	41
Irritation	31	34	29	29	31	30	30	39
Fear	28	17	39	21	25	30	30	35
Disappointment	19	20	18	32	17	20	13	19
Resentment	18	17	18	21	20	18	13	19
Powerlessness	11	8	15	8	11	13	12	10
Panic	7	4	11	10	9	8	6	4
Brokenness	6	4	8	9	8	4	3	7
Surprise	3	4	3	7	4	2	2	4
Shame	2	2	3	6	3	2	–	3
I hesitate to answer	5	5	4	5	6	5	5	1

Source: Gradus Research Company; 2plus2.ua, 2022.

**Figure 1. Violation of the functioning of the Shannon–Weaver Model of Communication in conditions of powerful interference caused by war**



Source: edited by the author, based on: Wiktor, 2013; Taranko, 2015; Romat, 2022.

the sender and the receiver impossible. Alternatively, it makes it ineffective due to erroneous decoding. If this statement is applied to marketing communications, it can be observed that the message sent by the brand fails to reach the consumer, or is perceived inadequately. This is schematically presented in Figure 1.

When consumers are confused and under stress, they are more likely to perceive any incoming information in a negative light and to view events and commercial offers as problems rather than opportunities. At the same time, when communications evoke positive emotions, consumers evaluate their environment as something favorable and it is easier to them to make positive decisions regarding purchases. Therefore, creating positive emotional associations with products and brands that are based on current events and values is crucial in stressful situations caused by war conditions. In our opinion, under such conditions, the tasks of marketing communications are mainly as follows: to calm the consumer and establish contact, unblock emotions, create a foundation (an additional "safety cushion") for the processes of "decoding" and "feedback" to take place.

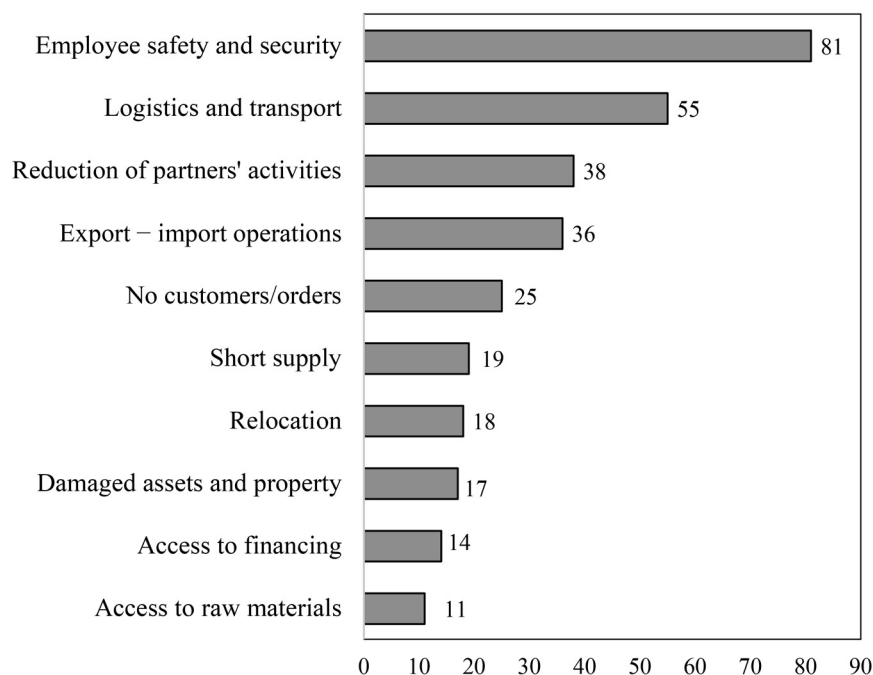
## Russian aggression in Ukraine as a determinant of consumer behavior and a challenge for business

Russian aggression in Ukraine has become a serious challenge for the world community. Even after six months, concerns about the war in Europe remain high: Poland (90%), Germany (73%), Spain (69%), France (69%) and Great Britain (55%). In

particular, half of Europeans worry that the war could involve other countries (51%) or lead to a nuclear conflict (48%). While 60% of people are concerned about rising prices due to military aggression, 53% are also concerned about the humanitarian crisis. 59% of Africans are concerned that the war is creating food shortages on the continent (Kantar.com, 2022). All the above-mentioned economic challenges are close and understandable to Ukrainian society, since Ukrainians have already felt the consequences of high inflation. According to calculations of experts from the International Monetary Fund, the inflation rate may reach 30% by the end of the year, and the gross domestic product may decrease by approximately 35% (International Monetary Fund, 2022). Then, it may take decades to overcome the environmental consequences of the invasion of Russian troops.

Due to a decrease in purchasing power as a result of inflation, financial restrictions and large-scale migration of the population abroad, private consumption and investments are reduced. At the same time, despite deterioration of the financial condition of consumers, both domestically and abroad, people have become more interested in politics, their behavior growing more conscious and socially responsible. According to the results of a study by the Kyiv International Institute of Sociology, conducted in August 2022, vast majority of Ukrainians contribute to humanitarian and military aid. 81% of respondents have donated money to the Armed Forces, although 95% say they have not enough income to live comfortably. In addition, 63% donated necessary items to internally displaced persons (IDPs), 60% donated money for humanitarian aid, and more than half sheltered or helped IDPs (Radiosvoboda.org, 2022).

**Figure 2. The biggest challenges for companies in Ukraine after 120 days of war (% of respondents)**



Source: American Chamber of Commerce in Ukraine, 2022.

Russian aggression in Ukraine became a challenge for enterprises as well. Over 700 of them were forced to change their location and establish business in another, safer place. According to the results of a survey of the American Chamber of Commerce (ACC) in Ukraine, conducted among companies-members of the ACC, it was the safety and security of their employees that they regarded their major concern, even 120 days after the war began (81% of answers). The quantitative study was carried out by the ACC in Ukraine in cooperation with Deloitte Ukraine from June 9 to 21, 2022, using a survey method among 127 ACC member companies. The findings are shown in Figure 2. Another serious challenge concerns problems with logistics and transport, which continue to create a burden on the economy due to disruption of supply channels, transport networks, decline in the activities of partners, destruction of energy infrastructure. Such conditions complicate the work of enterprise management and require marketing to focus on new trends in consumer behavior, adjust marketing strategies, optimize product assortment, and use more creative and emotional advertising campaigns to promote brands.

### Consumer behavior under conditions of Russian aggression in Ukraine

The war had a profound effect on consumer behavior. Due to reduced incomes and uncertainty about the future, consumers try to save by buying only the necessary goods and looking for cheap substitutes for well-known brands. During the war, the demand for spontaneous shopping, entertainment and services decreased significantly. According to Kantar data, in addition to the psychological problems mentioned by 70% of respondents, 68% of Ukrainians are forced to abandon many life plans. They save the most on entertainment (61%), recreation and sports (56%). Next comes beauty care (hairstylist, beautician), mentioned by 52% of respondents. Ukrainians also save money on hobbies and clothes. Only a third of respondents save on education. They save the least on food and utilities. In general, 53% of Ukrainians already resort to savings and consumer restrictions. Only one-third of the surveyed can have a coffee in a bar, one-sixth can afford new clothes. However, they indicate this is not about the actual lack of money, but rather about purchase decisions, i.e. the attitude: "I am not

bound to spend what I have on coffee or clothes". Another survey conducted in early September showed that Ukrainians do have money, but a delayed demand is being formed, which can be driven by an opportunity or some interesting offer (Maranchak, 2022). This means Ukrainians deliberately buy less, reducing their needs due to the war and the uncertainty about when and how it may end. When buying food, consumers try to support local producers by choosing Ukrainian products (see Figure 3).

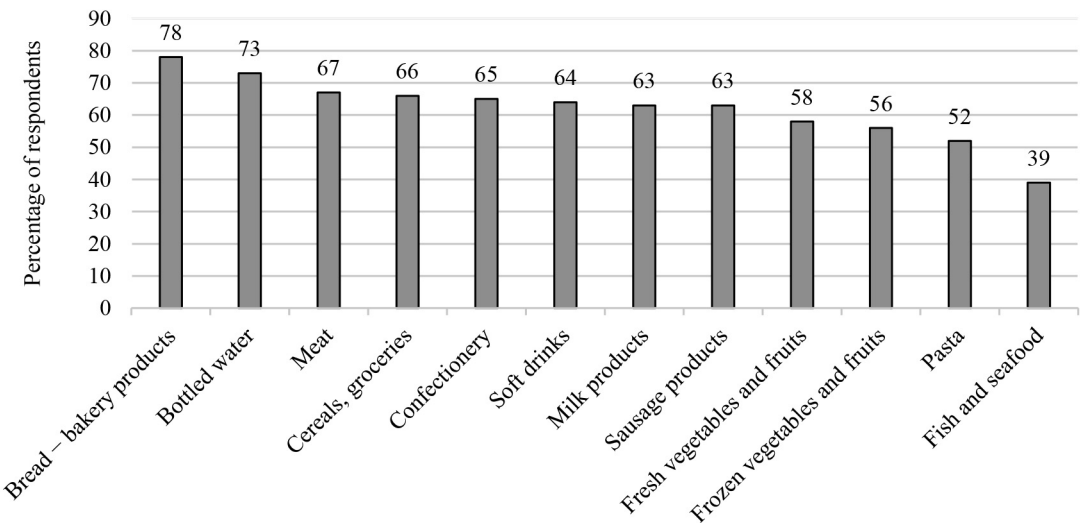
These diagrams show how "consumer patriotism" is manifested, which is seen not only in the food market. According to the findings of a joint study by Google and Kantar, 53% of consumers prefer Ukrainian brands, and among consumers aged 18–35 this share is 50%. Among the reasons "why they prefer domestic brands", 76% answered: I support the Ukrainian economy; 55% – Ukrainian brands transfer funds to the Armed Forces of Ukraine; 25% – Ukrainian brands are cheaper. Consumer patriotism also manifests itself in relation to foreign brands. The most important thing for Ukrainians is whether the brand has connections with countries that are aggressors – this was declared by 54% of respondents. This factor is even more important than the price, which was indicated by 52% of consumers, while 49% of respondents pointed out that it is important for them whether the brand transfers funds to the needs of the Armed Forces of Ukraine from each product sold. Ukrainian consumers have an even more categorical attitude towards global brands that have

remained on the Russian market after the start of the war – 71% boycott and do not buy their goods (Borodii, 2022).

For the first time this trend of boycotting goods from the aggressor country became pronounced in Ukraine after the events of 2014, when consumers massively refused to buy Russian goods, and special labelling of products "manufactured in Russia" appeared to facilitate their identification on the shelves of stores. Because of this, many Russian enterprises were forced to use intermediaries or transfer the production of goods to other countries, with a change in the packaging of the "manufacturing country". Now, as evidenced by the above research results, this trend has affected not only the aggressor country. Ukrainian consumers prefer brands and manufacturers from countries that condemn Russian aggression, organize fundraising, involve in support for Armed Forces of Ukraine, and appeal to stop the war. On the contrary, brands that have remained in Russia and continue their activities despite military aggression and sanctions, or countries that support aggression, are condemned.

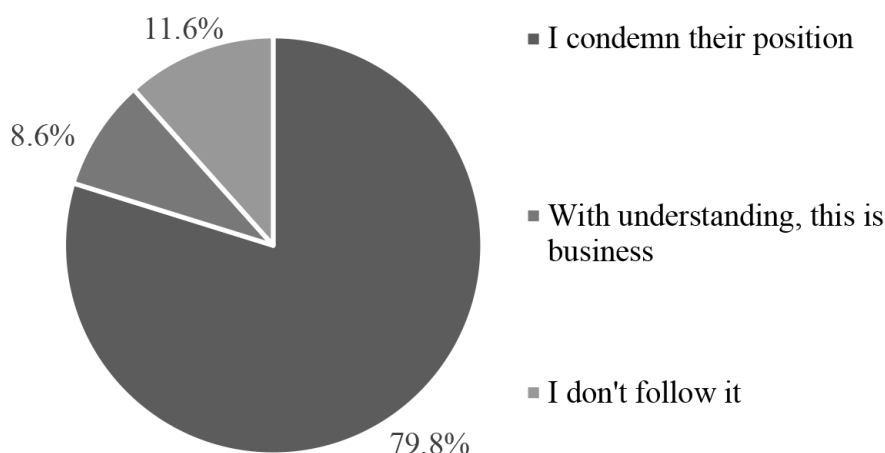
A study conducted by the author in September 2022 showed the same trends: almost 80% of consumers aged 18–25 condemn international corporations and brands that remained on the Russian market after February 24. Only 8.6% treat this fact with understanding, because of their commercial purposes, and 11.6% answered they did not follow these processes (see Figure 4).

Figure 3. The share of consumers who choose products of Ukrainian production



Source: research by Deloitte in Ukraine (Birovash, 2022).

**Figure 4. Answers to the question "How do you feel about international companies that remained in Russia after February 24?"**



Source: own research.

The research sample is deterministic, not representative; 198 respondents from universities of Kyiv, Sumy, Poltava, Vinnytsia, Dnipropetrovsk, Kharkiv, Ternopil, and Lviv regions took part in the survey using the Google Forms platform. Moreover, the level of "intolerance to brands" is higher in the East, where active hostilities are taking place, than in the western regions of the country, less directly experiencing the war.

As can be seen from the above figures and diagrams, changes in consumer behavior against the background of resistance to Russian aggression contributed to the development of consumer ethnocentrism in the domestic market, and "consumer patriotism" can be considered one of its manifestations. Consumer ethnocentrism is a phenomenon that is studied in social and economic sciences and is known as consumers giving preference to goods of certain countries of origin (or groups of countries), or, conversely, refusing to consume goods from certain countries, for some reason. Most authors investigate this problem from the standpoint of achieving a balance of global and local markets (Wolanin-Jarosz, 2015; Mazurek-Łopacińska, 2021; Bartosik-Purgat, 2017). In particular, Wolanin-Jarosz (2015) studied the ethnocentric attitudes of consumers from five countries of the Carpathian Euroregion (Poland, Slovakia, Hungary, Ukraine, and Romania), taking into account national differences in the process of making decisions about the purchase of consumer goods. Motives of consumer ethnocentrism can be different: economic (for example, for the sake of preserving jobs in the country), cultural, religious, moral and ethical. Now, the most revealing is the manifestation of consumer ethnocentrism on

a morally patriotic basis. Namely, supporting the economy of Ukraine, helping the Armed Forces of Ukraine, is a more important motive for buying domestic goods and brands, while the economic motive i.e. that the price is lower compared to foreign equivalents, is indicated by only 25% of respondents and ranks fifth in the ranking of importance (Borodii, 2022).

### **Application of the theme of patriotism as the creation of a unique value of marketing communications**

Russian military aggression in Ukraine changed the civil behavior of Ukrainians who united and rallied around the idea of resistance and victory over the invaders. This idea became a powerful impetus in the society and contributed to the formation of new values related to consolidation of the national identity and its protection, which in turn influenced the value attitudes and requests of individual consumers. That is why, since the first days of the war, demand for patriotic values has become visible, and consumers have preferred brands that denominate the same, as evidenced by the above-mentioned marketing research findings. Against the background of general reduction of the advertising market in Ukraine, patriotic colors, slogans, and logos are present in the advertising campaigns of most enterprises and successfully influence consumers united around the idea of the common victory. Whereas earlier the theme of patriotism was used exclusively in social advertising, now it has acquired a mass character.

Under such conditions, marketing communications increasingly become social communications and actively use the emotional factor of influence. In marketing research, most scientists observe the social nature of marketing communications (Wiktor, 2013; Taranko, 2015; Sanak-Kosmowska, 2018; Romat, 2022).

Modern marketing communications in Ukrainian society should unite consumers around common national values. Therefore, during the war it is extremely important for companies and brands to express their civic position and their attitude to the current events taking place in the country. Ukrainian manufacturers change names of their products to "Javelins" and "Bayraktars", which have become symbols of victory, and the slogan "part of the funds goes to support the Armed Forces" is actively used not only as means of declaring their active position in the protection of national interests, but also as a marketing technique – consumer incentives. This is explained by the high level of trust of Ukrainians in the Armed Forces of Ukraine. According to the results of a survey of citizens of the Rozumkov Center, conducted in late October 2022, the highest level of trust in the society is represented precisely by the trust in the Armed Forces which exceeds 95% (Ukrinform, 2022). This is the highest indicator of trust in public institutions in the entire history of similar studies in Ukraine.

As our own research has shown, the youth audience perceives manifestations of patriotism in marketing communications very positively. The results are shown in Figure 5. As can be seen from the diagram, a third of young consumers prefer

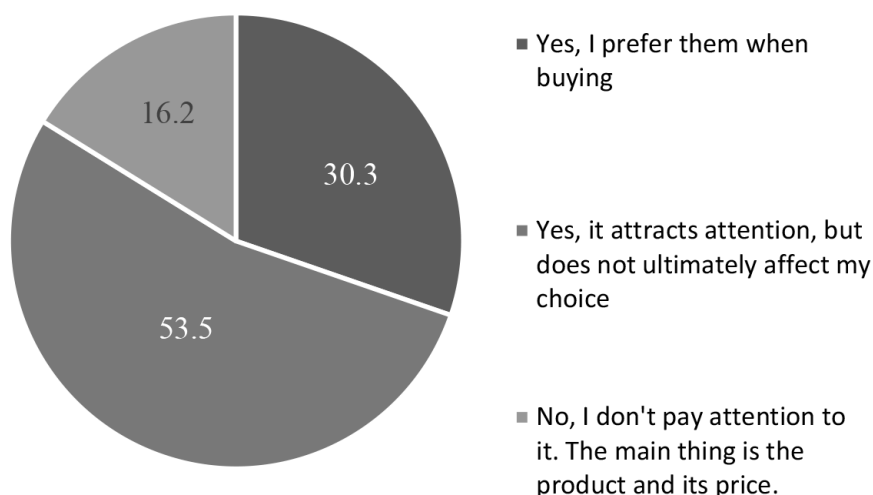
goods and services that are promoted using patriotic advertising. And almost 84% of consumers pay attention to it (in the figure, 30.3% and 53.5%). Such data correlate with the data of Kantar research, which was conducted at the national level in different age categories of respondents: 92% consider it appropriate to use a patriotic theme in advertising at the moment (Borodii, 2022).

Among the examples of use of patriotic advertising most remembered by young people, the following were mentioned most often: Monobank (the first virtual bank in Ukraine), which changed the design of its cards already on the fourth day after the beginning of the war (Figure 6), and the dairy company Halychyna, which placed names of different regions of Ukraine on the labels of its products (Figure 7).

The company's marketing director explains this step as follows: "the company was inspired by Ukrainian unity and decided to implement this idea in its products. Now the brand Halychyna has become Poltava Oblast, Donbas and all historical regions of the country. Why so? Because now there is no separate 'self' for Ukrainians. Now everyone is one big 'WE'. And during this time, Ukrainians have repeatedly proven that they are ready to protect each other and unite for a common goal" (Hmarochos, 2022).

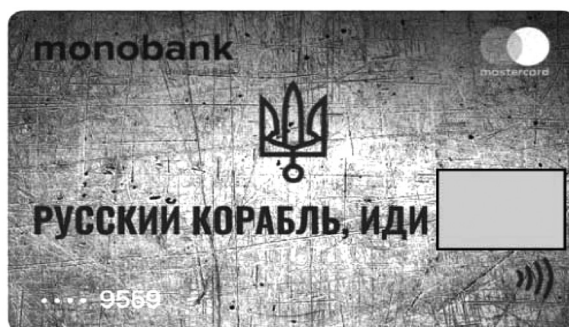
Among successful examples we can also mention the PR action of the Shakhtar soccer team, whose players went to a charity match in Greece with Olympiakos, wearing T-shirts with the names of 10 hero cities that fiercely resisted Russia's invasion of Ukraine. Instead of surnames, the following cities are written on the T-shirts:

**Figure 5. Answers to the question "Does 'patriotic advertising' influence your decision to buy products and services?"**



Source: own research.

**Figure 6. New design of Monobank cards**



Source: Economichna Pravda, 2022.

**Figure 7. Products of the Halychyna company on supermarket shelves**



Source: Hmarochos, 2022.

**Figure 8. Uniforms of players of Shakhtar soccer club with the names of the Cities-Heroes of Ukraine**



Source: Leonichev, 2022.



Mariupol, Irpin, Bucha, Gostomel, Kharkiv, Volnovakha, Chernihiv, Kherson, Okhtyrka and Mykolaiv. Figure 8 shows a photo of the uniforms of the team's players.

The effectiveness of the influence of patriotic advertising on the consumer has its own theoretical justification from the point of view of brand capital theory. Sanak-Kosmowska (2018, p. 31) considers 14 factors that affect the value of a brand in the market, including "modernity" (the brand is perceived as modern); and nature of associations (positive or negative); recognition on the market (the brand is easy to distinguish from others); country of origin (the country is prestigious for this category of goods). Szymoniuk (2019, p. 33) points out the importance of a brand's visual identification system for forming its image and building relationships with the environment: "Visual and non-visual identification is an important element of building relationships with the environment, so they should be treated as a total communication tool that should to be used in all possible marketing messages addressed to all interested parties: internal and external, near and far." In addition, he notes that marketing communications should reflect the value attitudes of the organization: "Marketing communication, separated from the value and organizational culture of the offerer, loses its authenticity which is currently one of the main determinants of its effectiveness." The role of the emotional component of brand communication policy was studied by Bogusiewicz-Kreft (2009). She calls emotional marketing tools the most underestimated resource that influences consumers, their satisfaction with purchased goods, and prompts them to make decisions.

In the conditions of the war in Ukraine, brands that use patriotic symbols and advertising are simultaneously perceived as "their relatives" – and modern, recognizable, and positive – because they are situated on the "same wave" with the consumer. They demonstrate their corporate values, support for the freedom and independence of Ukraine, and have huge psycho-emotional impact on the consumer: they support, reassure, lift up, give hope. Thus, they create an emotionally-positive background for contact with the consumer, and the efficiency of the process of decoding the information contained in the communication message and which the brand seeks to convey to the target audience. This behavior meets the expectations of Ukrainian consumers as 38% of them believe that brands should reduce anxiety and try to understand what worries consumers (Borodii, 2022).

It can be argued that during wartime, marketing communications of enterprises based on the patriotic values of citizens acquire a "unique communicative value." In addition to performing

traditional functions, such communications unite the supporters of brands and their friends who share their patriotic values. Such advertising is mainly aimed at creating positive image of the brand and the company, and building customer loyalty. This mechanism was studied in more detail by Wiktor (2013, p. 180). Brands that have a unique communicative value become more competitive, as noted by Taranko (2015). Analyzing the functions of marketing communications, she emphasizes that, in addition to traditional ones, they also have modern ones, which include the so-called "competitive function". Referring to Levit, the author reminds that "competition arises not at the expense of what the enterprise produces, but at the expense of what it adds to its products and the type of packaging, services, advertising" (Taranko, 2015, p. 27–28).

Brands that use patriotic advertising help the armed forces of Ukraine, refugees, victims of the war, that is they show empathy for their citizens, become closer to consumers and acquire additional value due to such communication efforts.

## Conclusions

The Russian military invasion of Ukraine has become a challenge for society and for enterprises promoting their brands on the market. Under such conditions, marketing communications acquire a more socially responsible character and actively use the tools of emotional marketing as a means of psycho-emotional support for consumers in conditions of stress caused by war. The change in consumer behavior and the formation of new values in society, which are focused on the formation and protection of Ukrainian national identity, the emergence of new national heroes, new leaders of public opinion and new symbols of Ukrainian independence, explain the popularity of the use of patriotic and military themes in marketing campaigns for brand promotion. What consumers demand from brands is empathy, a clear position regarding the events taking place, and firm national identity. Bright military images and patriotic symbols play the role of an emotional "anchor" that attracts, soothes and unites like-minded people around the brand, creates positive emotional connection and supports Ukrainians in difficult times. Creative advertising using patriotic images, names and symbols to promote brands acquires "unique advertising value", sets new trends in marketing communications and is becoming increasingly popular.



## Notes/Przypisy

<sup>1</sup> The publication is the result of scientific research conducted within the framework of a grant from the National Science Center in Poland (UMO-2022/01/3/HS4/00039), which provides funding for scientists from Ukraine to continue research in Poland.

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