

## CSR AS A TOOL OF BUILDING THE COMPETITIVENESS OF BUSINESSES

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**Abstract:** In this article, author analyzes the application of CSR as a tool of building the competitiveness of business. She assumes that corporate social responsibility (CSR) could be a useful tool in giving a competitive edge to an enterprise.

The idea of CSR as a part of the tool creating the position of the company in the market is explored by the author. Besides, an attempt to define and comprehend CSR is undertaken. The author explains the necessary requirements that must be fulfilled for CSR to play the role of a useful tool for creating the competitive edge and spheres of activity for the individual, which should be taken into consideration while creating strategic CSR.

**Keywords:** CSR, strategy of CSR, competitiveness of enterprise, area CSR.

### 1 Introduction

Globalization has caused significant changes in business activities. Today a competing enterprise does not mean a company that produces useful and innovative goods at an expected price level and required quality. In the 21st century, enterprises must face new challenges apart from traditional requirements. A contemporary determinant of how the enterprise performs in the market is having positive contacts with clients and creating a positive image of the brand. CSR is a useful tool for that purpose.

Numerous research studies show that more and more consumers pay attention to how the company is involved in the aspect of business performance. A good example is Research Global CEO Study conducted by IBM Institute for Business Value. A total of 1130 members of senior staff of many global enterprises were asked about consumers' behavior. Findings indicated that consumer's expectations for the role that companies play in aspects such as pro-social activities and the environment are increasing steadily. The research indicates that enterprises have a significant role in pro-social action with regard to the competitiveness of businesses [1, p. 11].

An instrument that shapes the social sensitivity of companies and builds their competitiveness in the market is CSR. Although the concept of CSR seems to be relatively new, this concept has been a subject of public debate from the beginning of the last century. The literature on the subject does not show the ambiguous CSR definition. Authors have provided various definitions and have implicated many roles for CSR. Irrespective of authors, all CSR definitions concern

the problem of companies benefiting from social actions taken.

A growth of innovation and adaptation, reducing cost, increased motivation and satisfaction of employees are benefits to enterprises that come from implementing the idea of social responsibility. Research studies evaluating the effectiveness of CSR were conducted in Poland by the Institute for Private Enterprise and Democracy. According to the results, companies that use CSR have a higher financial liquidity, make better use of their capital assets and human capitals, attain higher profitability and more often invest in employees.

The second and third subsections of the study describes the literature on the source of comprehending the CSR as a tool, which improves competitiveness of companies in the market. These subsections also explain comprehending the competitiveness of businesses. In the remaining part of the article, the author presents conditions that must be fulfilled in order for CSR to fulfill the function presented in the title of the study. This part is based on examples taken from the economic reality and other numerous literatures on the subject.

### 2 Comprehending the competitiveness of businesses

According to W. Glabiszewski, in universal meaning, the word CSR is associated with the positive feature, which distinguishes companies in the market. It is identified with the state of superiority of a business entity in relation to its competitors. It is a state which they are aspiring in the economic reality. One should emphasize

that it is the feature desired by market participants, which is worthwhile having [7, p. 31].

In the literature analyzed on the subject, a diversity of comprehending the definition of competitiveness was noticed. This diversity results from the varied use of this idea in different fields. It is possible to observe a deeper interest in this phenomenon among others in economics, but also in the social and economic sphere and numerous macro and microanalysis.

Competitiveness is a crucial issue that is being considered with reference to every economic entity, their groups, layouts of individual units and factors, which have an influence on them.

The definition of competitiveness is most often to get to the macroscale [7, p. 32].

This type of definition of competitiveness was introduced in the report of international competitiveness of the economy. This document explains this notion as an ability to create larger wealth than other competitors in the world market [7, p. 32]. Such an understanding of the theme was presented in deliberations by M. Porter. The author shows certain relations, which points to the existence of this phenomenon in international markets. According to the author, if enterprises of one country, more often than enterprises of other country, gain an advantage as a result of competing, it is possible, and one should deal with the matter of the competitiveness of national economies [6, p. 11].

A definition of competitiveness referring to both total economies and local economies was presented by B. Winiarski. The author explains this notion as an ability to achieve success in economic rivalry [25, p. 9].

A European Commission presents the general definition of the competitiveness. According to that institution: "the competitiveness reflects a position of one business entity (for example: country, company or household) towards other business entities through comparing the quality of action and results in categories of the superiority/inferiority" [10].

The subject is presented differently by P. Krugman. The scientist claims that only enterprises can compete with themselves that is why it is not possible to talk about competing of economies in international markets [6, p. 11].

The competitiveness of the region is measured with the competitiveness of businesses located in the region

and it is "an ability of struggle with the international competition enterprises [...] to draw relatively high-level incomes and employing" [17, p. 21].

Companies that develop these elements create their own competitive edge in the market. By creating immaterial factors of competitiveness, these companies build in the process the competitive edge of the region. The competitiveness of the company in the market is a result of the influence of many mechanisms and internal factors and extrinsic factors.

The definition of the competitiveness of the enterprise including the product and service aspects was presented by D. Korenik. The author writes that comprehending the competitiveness is "an ability to design, produce and sell goods and services which prices quality and other advantages that are more attractive than appropriate goods offered by competitors..." [11, p. 13].

A notion that competitiveness refers to the purposes of the company was introduced by M.J. Stankiewicz. The author claims that the notion describes "an ability to efficiently carry out purposes in the market arena of the competition" [21, p. 36].

The possibility of comprehending the competitiveness in dynamic and static presentations is an important fact [7, p. 34]. The first perspective is an evaluation of the competitiveness on based on the analysis of factors determining the long-term ability to compete. It must be underlined that it includes the analysis of changes happening in the time; however, the static take reflects the evaluation at that particular moment. The greater practical significance of including competitiveness in the long term should be stressed.

W. Glabiszewski noticed rightly that such a type of division was presented by J. A. Stoner. The author defined competitiveness as "readiness of the given country to take competitive action in the future" or "a measure of the effectiveness of acting in the past" [7, p. 33].

To sum up, it is possible to state that the competitiveness of the enterprise is an ability to fight off competition in the market. A step of competitiveness of the individual depends on step of his or her progression in the sector. In other words, an enterprise, which is able to meet the action of other operators on the market, is a competing enterprise.

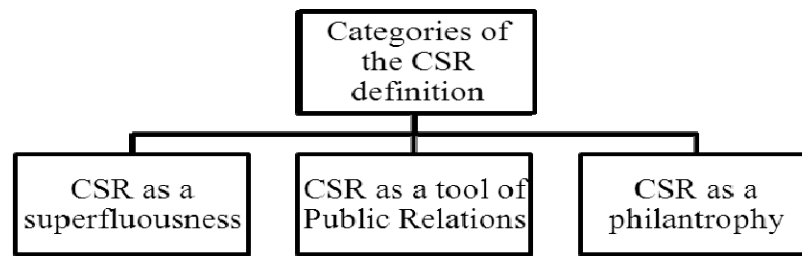


Figure 1. Categories of defining the CSR notion in the analyzed literature on the subject  
(sources: based on [27])

### 3 Approaches of authors towards CSR as tool of creating the competitive edge of enterprises

It has been already recalled earlier how the approaches of authors towards analyzing literature on the subject of profiting from CSR and consequently understanding CSR as a tool for creating competitive edge of enterprises are ambiguous and come from all manners of categories defining this notion. The following approaches to this problem were distinguished [27, p. 32].

The first approach towards the subject presented in Fig. 1 does not take into account the need to apply the practice of being socially responsible. Supporters of this theory claim that an improvement in performance of the company is the basic aim of the enterprise. According to the authors, an action that often leads to grave financial losses is a distinctive feature of this aspect of the CSR perception. Representatives of this point of view do not notice potential advantages that come from the business of being socially responsible. It means that the authors do not notice a chance in creating competitiveness of the individual by applying social and environment-friendly action. M. Friedman is the promoter of such a definition of the CSR.

A second type of understanding of the CSR notion presents social responsibility in the broader aspect of the subject. Representatives of this theory propagate a disinterest of action taken in social responsibility.

They treat this kind of action as a need of someone's heart and a public obligation [22, p. 304]. It should be underlined that supporters of such an understanding of CSR do not take responsible social action in order to gain benefits. According to them, it is not possible to implement social action with force in order to provide competitiveness for the individual in the market.

The last approach towards CSR presents social responsibility as a tool of public relations. It assumes that socially responsible action simultaneously expects the reimbursement of costs carried during this action

and as a result obtaining profits. Representatives of this theory can see in CSR a financial benefit and promotion of a corporate's image [22, p. 304]. Growth in sales or generating additional earnings is ranked among financial benefits. The image benefits are an improvement in the image, building the reputation, or improving the competitiveness in the market.

The CSR theory as a tool of public relations is the source of all further analyses. CSR is an effective strategy, which contributes to increasing the competitiveness of businesses on the global level by leading a social dialogue on the local level. This way of understanding the CSR is an achievement of commercial success by taking into consideration ethical values, employee entitlements, development of the community and protection of the natural environment.

### 4 CSR, in the context of tool, shapes the competitive edge of enterprises

M. Bienkiewicz undertakes the attempt to define CSR as a tool that shapes the competitive edge. The author determines conditions, which must be fulfilled in order that social responsibility of enterprises could be considered in this aspect. The author begins his deliberations with the definition of the social responsibility presented by R. Szarfenberg. The definition describes CSR as "a concept assumes voluntary including in the activity of companies social objectives which lead to satisfying existential needs and developmental wide social layers and protection issue of a preservation of environment. This activity goes beyond obligations result from legal norms." [1, p. 5].

In this study, CSR is a concept, which is not isolated and independent of surroundings. CSR is an instrument for satisfying the need of people connected with the enterprise and is a tool that builds the competitiveness of the enterprise in the market.



Figure 2. Model CSR by A.B. Carroll  
(source: based on [20, p. 56])

This way CSR is understood as an integral part of a long-term corporate strategy. What is more, it is a point of reference with regard to all current decisions and reflects in all current business decisions, as well as in all aspects of the business activity of the enterprise.

A few fundamentals must be fulfilled in order that CSR could bring a real benefit in the form of the structure of the competitive edge in the market. We should note a strategy, a long-term nature, a defining of expectations and purposes, an identification of crucial groups of clients and a correct choice of CSR instruments [1, p. 11].

A.B. Carroll described the interesting attempt to join the matter of competitiveness of the individual and its social responsibility. The researcher is an author of the model CSR presented in Fig 2.

According to the author, if a company carries its economical obligations out first then we can judge its performance on social responsibility. Carroll's model shows that a business activity should be led in order to bring essential profit to further functioning of the company. It means that an economic responsibility should be the priority of the enterprise. Carroll claims that such a system of values guarantees that legal liability preserves a social order [27, p. 33].

It seems that, according to the theory of Carroll, there are three levels of social responsibility. The first con-

tains demanded aspects, which ranks among economic and legal responsibility. The next level presents expected values, which reflects the ethical responsibility. The last level is a desired state, which reflects the philanthropic responsibility [27, p. 33].

This structure presents a pyramid of needs of the enterprise. According to the opinion of the author actions that aim to provide the company with a desired profit should be taken first. Following the responsibility of business economics, companies should care among others for keeping their competitiveness [8, p. 35]. In this respect it is possible to tying together the theory A.B. Carroll and the issue of building the competitiveness of the individual socially responsible. This conclusion confirms the fact of making economic aspects the priority activity of the company.

## 5 Process of formation strategy of CSR serves creating competitiveness of the company on the market

CSR strategy is a tool that defines long-term directions and the range of activities that a company uses for the realization of market plans and coping with expectations of chosen groups of people. All had resources of the unit are used for that purpose. The process of formation of CSR strategy should take place in stages [24].

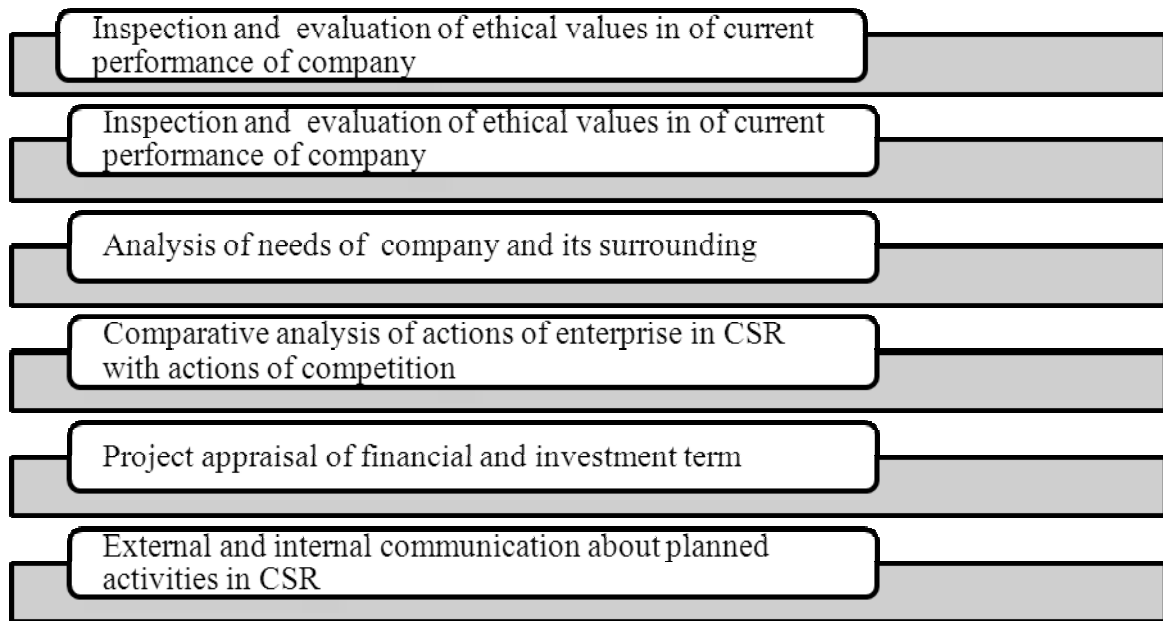


Figure 3. Stages of creating the CSR strategy  
(source: based on: [4, pp. 28-29])

The senior staff should give problems prominence shown in Fig. 3.

The first step in creating a CSR strategy should be an inspection and assessment of the degree of exploiting social values so far applied in the enterprise. All present initiatives taken in this respect in all stages of the operations of the unit should be assessed. It is necessary to analyze how acting socially responsible is taken on the stage of manufacturing, distribution and relation with employees, scope of protection of the environment or relations with the local community.

This analysis helps to define areas of CSR, which have or can affect the company. Indicating crucial recipients and their expectations regarding the enterprise is also important. The last step seems to be analysis of strong and weak points of the individual in regard to implementation of CSR.

The next stage is the analysis of needs of the company and its surroundings. It is important to discover unconverted spaces in social operations of the enterprise and integrate them with requirements of surrounding towards the individual. Knowledge collected at this stage should constitute a basis for conducting comparative analysis with regard to the competition. It will help in expressing conclusions, which, if used properly, will cause that enterprise to become unrivalled in the market.

The created strategy must undergo the process of approval. Actions socially responsible must be accepted not only on account of their functionalities, usefulness and benefits, which they will generate for the company, but also in financial terms and investment. The reason is that the activity of CSR is connected to expenses.

Internal and external communication is the last stage. Internal communication is the process of creating new awareness inside the company, which is a perfect match for the adopted strategy. It is necessary to get to know new values by employees, accepting and incorporating them into their professional and private life. The external communication consists of informing surroundings of the adopted strategy.

This process takes place by using such tools as: the Internet, the radio or television. Information shows the operations of the unit and is given by spokesmen of enterprises' departments the public relations, or reports of the social responsibility. This information should be systematized and given according to adopted universally norms and guidelines [2, p. 60].

It should be emphasized that this way of constructing CSR only gives a chance for generating the benefit. In this context, the CSR strategy becomes an investment that gives expected profits.

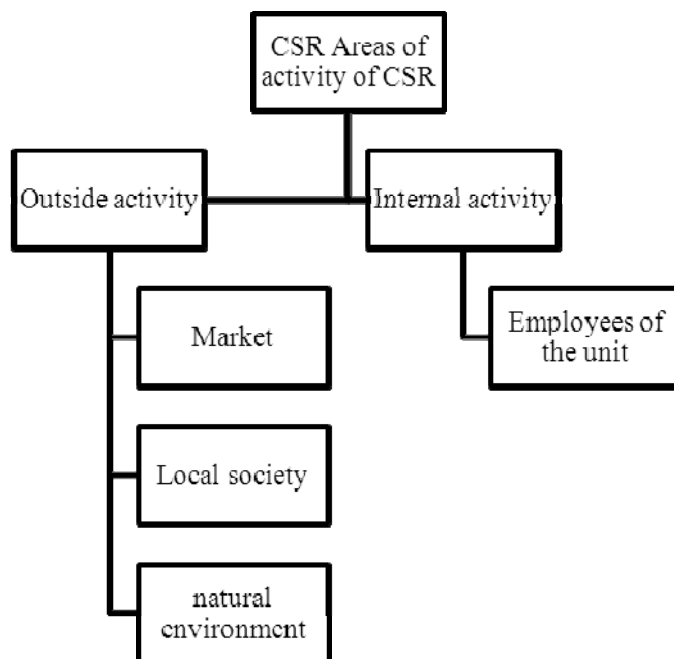


Figure 4. Areas of activity of the CSR  
(source: based on: [1, p. 5; 12, p. 57])

It should be recalled that the most essential stage of the structure of CSR strategy for creating competitiveness of the individual is the correct analysis of needs of the company and its surrounding. This stage leads to an understanding of the needs of recipients of products or services and their requirements. Company becomes a more attractive individual with regard to competition existing in the market by satisfying their needs and expectations. What is more, it helps to make correct choice and prevents from implementing mistakes at the very beginning of building the strategy.

## 6 Areas of the CSR activity taken in order to build the competitive edge of enterprises

The activity of the enterprise on field of CSR should contain a lot of areas of activity of the company. These spheres are presented in Fig. 4.

Among the basic forms of CSR, internal and outside activity is distinguished. First among them is the employee aspect, an internal group of people associated with the company. To rank among this sphere, we should take care of the prosperity of employees, working conditions, planning assignments and following ethics, as well as take care of professional development of employees, satisfaction from the work, and fair treatment.

The prosperity of employees is above all care of the medical needs of employees, helping in paying the debt off, payment of sick leaves. The next aspect relates to conditions and standards of the work and possible benefits, which are guaranteed by the employer. This element is very essential as it affects productivity and its results. The last two aspects concern increasing the satisfaction of employees and ethics of the work.

According to Łukasiewicz-Kamińska, an ethical code is a crucial element of ethical programs [13, p. 25]. They are substantiated principles of the value and action for compliance to which, in writing, employees and the senior staff commit themselves. This document has the function of indicating internal values and principles of operation of the company. What is more, applying the code of ethics contributes to the reduction in the number of cases of lies, corruption and embezzlement, and other bad practices. It curbs the possibility of conflicts of interest, increases credibility of the staff, as well as the loyalty of employees.

The following types of ethical codes applied in enterprises are distinguished: code of aspiration, education and control. The first kind of documents shows ideals to which an individual should aspire for.

Education codes are provided with comments; however, control codes are a set of rules along with sanctions behind the non-observance of the rules [9, p. 149].

P. Fobel and D. Fobelowa claim that the ethical code should refer to the following aspects [5, pp. 61-62].

- dignity, equality, freedom
- observance of the law
- protection of health and safety on-the-job
- conflict of interest
- methods of hiring and dismissing
- marketing practices
- negotiating and entering into agreements
- corruption and recruiting and using information
- political activity
- environmental protection
- protection of the intellectual capital
- source of finances
- protection of the interests of the organization
- enforcing the code.

In CSR, companies concentrate on the construction of the human capital by education. Employees are one of the more important groups of people involved in the enterprise. That is why improving their ability is so important. It widens the knowledge and practical skills of the staff, which are difficult to copy, and they are crucial competences of the company.

Trainings and other forms of the teaching shape the human capital, which can also be used by other economic operators in the market in the future. Orlen should be mentioned as a good example of a company that takes numerous steps in favor of employees. Conducting trainings and conferences improves employees' performance and improves their knowledge, experience and competences.

In this aspect, the important actions are those that develop the entrepreneurship of employees. We rank among them the benefits given to employees who finish work for the company, including active techniques of job-hunt or setting up their own company [26].

BRE Bank organizes internal MBA college dedicated to its employees. Alcatel-Lucent carries programs aimed at encouraging the innovation and development of competences of employees [19, p. 24].

An internal business process in CSR performs a significant function for forming competitiveness of the individual by maintaining positive relations with

employees of the unit. They inform their acquaintances about the social performance of the company and convince potential customers of the company about its attraction. They also build reputations and create a positive image of the individual.

The outside form is the next CSR form. Following factors were ranked among this group: a natural environment and activity devoted to the local community. Actions in favor of the environmental protection should be assumed by enterprises at every stage. Starting with supplies department where rank belongs among others: purchase of raw materials and of semi-finished products produced with the respect of the natural environment whether elimination of elements or the substances dangerous to the health.

In the production phase and packing the product, it is necessary to pay attention to reducing the consumption of electricity and water, reducing noise level and emissions of harmful substances, correct management of waste and health and safety at work.

In this respect, the policy of quality of the company is really important. The area of storing and transport creates the possibility of improving activity for the natural environment. We rank among them: choice of means of transport with a limited emission of greenhouse gases, optimization of the storage space, elimination of losses and the creation of waste during storing [15, p. 153].

It must be underlined that the implementation of environment-friendly action to the strategy of the individual leads to creating competitiveness of the individual by profiting from the following operations [9, p. 152]:

- cost-cutting,
- thaw in relations between company and people involved,
- raising of work output,
- saving of time,
- facilitation in receiving permissions.

The reduction in costs by limiting power or water consumption leads to increasing profits. Profit is a tool that lets taking the activity and action that distinguishes the company from its competitors. Thanks to it, the basic task of the enterprise is fulfilled and what is more, it is possible to take numerous investments, which leads to increasing the goodwill, innovation and attraction for current and potential clients and competitors in the market. Information of ecological activities of the company has a positive effect

on contacts between a unit and its clients and employees.

Information about the operations of the unit in the environmental protection, which is passed to outside agencies who publish this information through CSR reports or media, also singles the company out from the competition and causes it to become more attractive according to recipients. Closely named conditions increase the productivity and save time. An advantage of environment-friendly action, which increases the competitiveness of the individual, is increasing the confidence and credibility of the company rapidly with public institutions and customers. As a result, there is facilitation in receiving permissions. This fact eliminates restrictions barriers that make further business progress impossible.

The market is the next outside CSR aspect. Responsible proceedings socially in this area are equal to not selling certain products in certain markets, following of standards of fair advertisement and solid cooperation with suppliers and recipients of products or services. Responsibility towards them includes following honest commercial principles and compiling a list of suppliers, which should not be taken into account in business action. The timely regulation of obligations and improvement of the quality and safety of offered products are extremely important. This action also builds the competitiveness of the individual by creating a positive image, which is noticed by present and potential users.

The last factor is the activity for the local community. This aspect is associated most strongly with CSR. It is related to sponsoring local undertakings (infrastructure) or supporting community actions [12, p. 57] or material or financial support of local institutions of the public utility. Activities that serve the integration of the local community are really important too [1, p. 11].

These operations are possible, thanks to applying such instruments as CSR, socially employed marketing (CRM) or community actions.

## 7 Summary

To sum up, it should be underlined that permanently building the image and positive relations with surroundings is essential for a company. Based on these actions, a company is able to compete in the market.

Competing should be understood as the process of rivalry between units that aspire for the same benefits, at the same time and the same rules, and completion of business one threatens the completion others [18, p. 33].

The tool that enables achieving such a result is implying to the strategy of individuals the CSR. This way perceived CSR should be prepared and actually implemented.

Additionally, it is possible to back the thesis up by results of research conducted on 128 companies of a branch of industry. It proves that CSR brings one more advantage. Programs based on it can increase the innovation of the organization. The CSR concept seen with this prospect stops being a marginal issue and becomes an important factor of competitiveness and increases the potential of the company [14].

One should underline that only CSR that is appropriately prepared and checked in every respect could bring expected benefits. We should plan all actions according to the principle "inch-by-inch" which bring long-term effects [16, p. 87].

The strategies of social action and their long-term nature are an essential condition to meet these demands. It is also important to imply social actions with greater precision and accuracy. Also, completeness of action is a relevant aspect as far as CSR is concerned. The CSR should be reflected on every level of operations of the company. Moreover, important feature of social actions that should bring an increase in the competitiveness of the company is perseverance in pursuing a goal. Making a promise by the individual that would not find cover can lead to adverse effects in the form of loss of credibility of the company.

However, actions in CSR are implemented occasionally as one-off event and their scope are regarded only as sponsorship of sports and cultural events or the completion of public campaigns. It should be underlined that the scope should be treated as an element of CSR strategy but not as the main goal.

The next important notion is aspect, which shows the impact of actions in CSR on competitive position of the company. It indicates that creating competitive edge by CSR is not the direct result of conducting social operations. M. Bienkiewicz claims that benefits come directly from the improving image of the individual, greater loyalty of customers or better relations between employer and employee [1, p. 21].



In this study, the rise in the competitive position of the enterprise in the market is the consequence of mentioned advantages. In this respect, the notion that CSR is a tool is justified and it should be emphasized that CSR creates the competitive edge in the market not directly but after analyzing and taking into account relations in the CSR strategy.

In conclusion, CSR is a tool for effective business strategy. The importance of CSR is emphasized for building the competitive edge of individuals. A. Pienias indicates that simply formulated CSR strategy can be one of the ways that helps an enterprise to build effectively its position in the market [16, p. 86].

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