

THE ROLE OF ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE IN ENHANCING CORPORATE IMAGE OF GROCERY RETAILERS

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1. INTRODUCTION

Integrating artificial intelligence (AI) tools into corporate image building is becoming increasingly vital in today's tech-driven consumer landscape (Buhmann & Gregory, 2023). Traditional strategies such as manual media monitoring and stakeholder interviews have become ineffective in responding to the rapid shifts in public perception. The surge in digital media has complicated the selection of representative samples, which underscores the necessity of AI in enhancing corporate image and fostering customer loyalty (Singh & Singh, 2024).

AI technologies, particularly natural language processing (NLP) and sentiment analysis, have revolutionized media analytics by facilitating in-depth scrutiny of vast datasets from diverse sources, including social media and customer feedback. (Loureiro et al. 2020). This advancement enables firms to align their communication strategies with stakeholder sentiments and narratives in real time, resulting in personalized customer experiences and heightened engagement. In the contemporary marketplace, where brand trust and loyalty are paramount, strategic communication is essential for customer-oriented businesses. The incorporation of AI into communication strategies not only improves

efficiency but also nurtures trust-based relationships with consumers, contributing to long-term business success (Wiencierz & Röttger, 2017). The integration of AI into public relations practices underscores the need for narratives that not only promote corporate values but also address societal concerns (Coombs & Holladay, 2018). This study uniquely investigates the strategic application of AI tools to measure and enhance the corporate image of grocery retailers. While prior research has primarily concentrated on AI within operational areas like inventory management and personalized marketing (Adi, 2023), this study fills the gap in understanding AI's influence on corporate communication content understanding (Buhmann & Gregory, 2023; Roggeveen & Sethuraman, 2020). It utilizes advanced technologies such as NLP, sentiment analysis, and machine learning algorithms. AI-powered sentiment analysis can be used in competitive research to assess interest in specific issues, identify market conditions, and investigate competitors (Taherdoost & Madanchian, 2023). Despite the promising prospects of AI in corporate image management, challenges persist, including concerns over data collection without consent, profiling, and a lack of transparency in AI decision-making (Dwivedi et al., 2021). The study addresses the imperative for AI tools in managing the corporate image of grocery retailers in a competitive, technology-driven environment that is emerging right now: integrated multiple sources of data collected automatically by mechanical AI (e.g., IoT, sensors, and wearables); unstructured behavioral, opinion, and sentiment data; data are real-time, during a customer's experience, and in context; big data analytics for unstructured data; data-driven exploration; feeling analytics for customer insights with scale; understand customers in their own words and expression; deep learning and NLP for contextual customer thinking and feeling; feeling AI interacts with customers; mechanical AI automates promotional executions and media planning, AI for content creativity and for emotion sensing and reaction. (Huang & Rust, 2021). Research method employed in the article: employing scientific literature analysis alongside quantitative content analysis.

Keywords: Artificial Intelligence (AI); Corporate image; Data privacy; Grocery retailers.

2. OBJECTIVES

The main aim of this research is to explore how AI tools for media analytics can enhance and support the corporate image-building efforts of grocery retail companies in Lithuania.

The objectives:

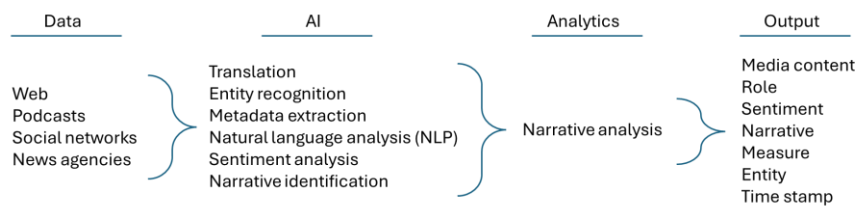
1. Identify and assess existing AI tools and technologies that are currently being used in the grocery retail sector for corporate image management.
2. Assess the efficiency of AI tools as a leverage to measure, maintain, and build corporate image, by conducting quantitative content analysis of digital media about grocery retail industry and top market players in Lithuania.
3. Discuss potential challenges, including ethical considerations, in employing AI in an organization for image measurement.
4. Provide recommendations for the companies by employing AI for corporate image building.

3. METHODOLOGY

Research method used in the paper: quantitative content analysis, such as corporate sentiment analysis and narrative analysis, image identification and definition, but it also contains features of competitive analysis, because revealing the full picture of the research requires the comparison between competitors and public discourse about them.

Data collection: all data was collected using Lithuanian startup “Repsense Ltd.” owned proprietary AI powered online tool that collects all digital media content, assigns coding categories and time stamps, provides links to each media content in the database. Data collection, analysis and categorization model is presented in figure 1.

FIGURE 1. *Data collection, analysis and categorization model*



Source: created by the authors

Data coding categories: data was coded using the mentioned “Repsense Ltd.” proprietary tool, which analyzes media content and assigns coding categories to each piece of content. Coding categories and sub-categories that are relevant for this study were selected:

1. Retailers (entities) industry analysis: “Iki”, “Lidl”, “Norfa”, “Maxima”, “Rimi”.
2. Role of entity: primary, secondary, neutral. The term entity role refers to the significance or relevance of an entity (such as a person, organization, or location) in the context of a particular piece of content, such as a news article, social media post, or broadcast segment. This role often indicates the degree of involvement or focus the entity has in the narrative or discussion being analyzed
3. Sentiment detection is possible within NLP that focuses on identifying and categorizing opinions expressed in a text. This technique determines whether the sentiment behind a piece of content is positive, negative, or neutral.
4. Narrative: Measuring and precisely dissecting narratives helps to understand if your company is on the right track. In some cases, if most narratives about your brand are positive, they might balance out and withstand some unavoidable communication crises. As a standard, Repsense measures 5 key narratives: employer branding, leadership, price & quality, sustainability, and scandals (crisis).

5. Time stamps: date (year, month, day).

Sample size: all digital media content about Lithuanian grocery retail industry – 9070 pieces of media content from 1st of June till 1st of November. This period was mainly selected because it covers all the time range the tool contains. In the ideal scenario one year or even two years of data would be more appropriate to cover full seasonality, but this study is more focused on a competitive environment rather than seasonal differences. Therefore 5 months and a sample of 9070 pieces of media content should be enough to meet the objective and draw conclusions. The distribution of media content is across 345 different media sources (websites in this case).

Glossary of quantification measures used:

- Mentions – an output or outcome consisting of counts of incidents of a company or product or person appears in the media, one mention constitutes a media placement; the number of times a tweet, blog, or other social media output is talked about by other social media users. In a case where one content unit mentions 5 of brand's entities or mentions a single entity 5 times, it is still considered as a single mention for brand (entity), not +5 mentions.
- Contacts (within mention) define how many people have seen, read, or interacted with a piece of content about brand. It encompasses the total audience exposed to the article through various channels, including social media shares and website visits. Contact is a crucial metric for understanding the potential visibility and awareness generated by a content piece. High reach indicates that a significant number of individuals are engaging with the content, which can amplify your brand's message and extend its influence. By analyzing reached contacts, brands can gauge the effectiveness of their distribution strategies and identify which platforms or channels yield the highest audience engagement.

Research ethics. Data collection methods and use are compliant with ethical standards and terms and conditions of data owners. All the analyzed content is publicly available, and no personal data was collected. This data collection method was selected due to the possibility to have real time and high coverage data for higher accuracy of the research and corporate image analysis.

4. RESULTS

4.1. RETAILER INDUSTRY ANALYSIS

The retail market in Lithuania is primarily dominated by five major chains: Maxima (31.23% market share), Iki (12.92%), Lidl (12.69%), Norfa (11.42%), and Rimi (6.61%), which together accounted for 75% of the market turnover in 2023. (An analysis using the Repsense tool revealed a total of 15,632 mentions of these retailers in digital media, with Maxima and Lidl being the most frequently mentioned (30% and 28% of mentions, respectively), followed by Rimi (19%), Iki (13%), and Norfa (9%).

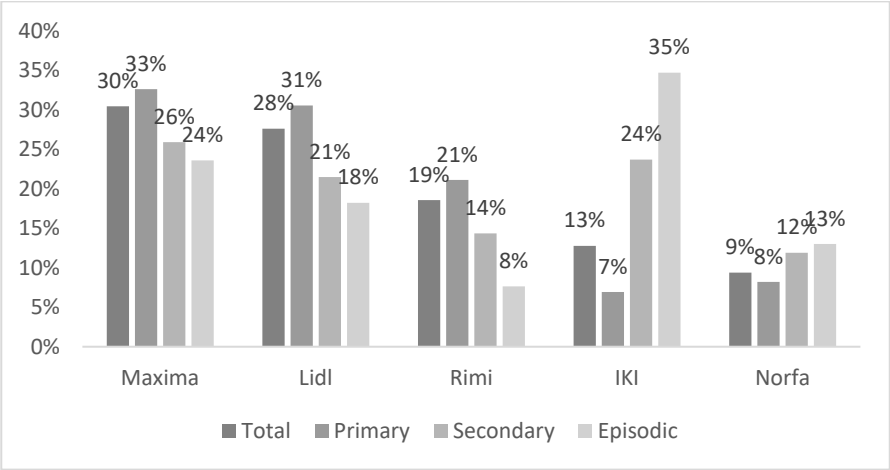
The visibility of these retailers fluctuated over the analyzed period. Maxima and Lidl consistently led in mentions, with Lidl gaining slightly more visibility during specific months. Iki showed a notable upward trend, moving from the least mentioned retailer to the third most mentioned by October, while Norfa also increased its visibility. However, both Maxima and Lidl saw a decrease in their share of voice (SOV) from June to October, indicating a shift in audience engagement towards the less visible retailers.

4.2. ROLE OF ENTITY

The analysis focuses on the breakdown of retailer mentions in media content by their roles: primary, secondary, and episodic. "Maxima" leads with 33% of primary role mentions, followed closely by "Lidl" at 31%. Other retailers, such as "Rimi" (21%), "Norfa" (8%), and "Iki" (7%), have significantly lower figures. Notably, "Iki" comprises 35% of episodic mentions and 24% of secondary mentions, suggesting that

its name, which means "until" in Lithuanian, may be confused with generic language in text analysis.

FIGURE 2. *Share of mentions by retailer by role*



Source: created by the authors

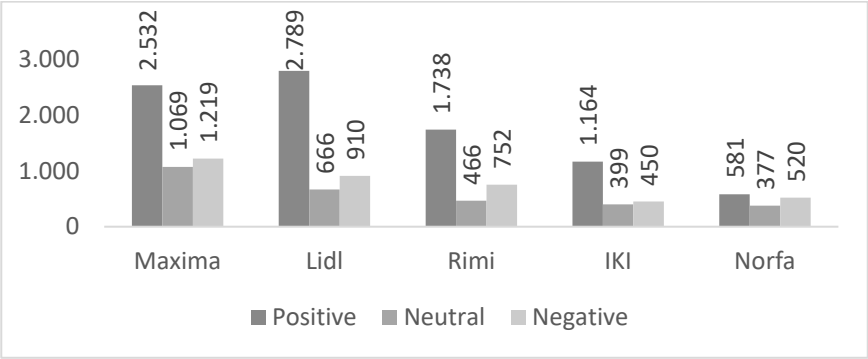
"Iki" and "Norfa" are less frequently mentioned in primary roles, while "Maxima," "Lidl," and "Rimi" dominate this category. The analysis also reveals that "Maxima" sees an increase in primary role mentions during peak months, while "Lidl" shows a consistent decline. "Rimi" exhibits inconsistency, trending negatively in the last three months.

The dominance of "Maxima" in primary mentions indicates a strong brand presence and recognition, likely bolstered by effective advertising and community engagement efforts. In contrast, "Lidl's" decline in primary mentions may point to challenges in maintaining visibility or resonance with consumers, necessitating a reevaluation of their promotional tactics. The analysis suggests that "Rimi" faces challenges in retaining consumer attention, as evidenced by its negative trend in the last three months. This could suggest a need for revitalization strategies, such as new product offerings or enhanced marketing campaigns, to recapture market interest.

4.3. SENTIMENT ANALYSIS

This section analyzes the context of media mentions related to various retailers, categorizing them into five sentiment types: very positive, positive, neutral, negative, and very negative. The study combines very positive and positive mentions into one positive category, and very negative and negative into one negative category. Overall, 56% of the mentions were positive, 25% negative, and 19% neutral, indicating a predominance of positive sentiment in media discussions about retailers.

FIGURE 3. *Mentions by context by retailer*

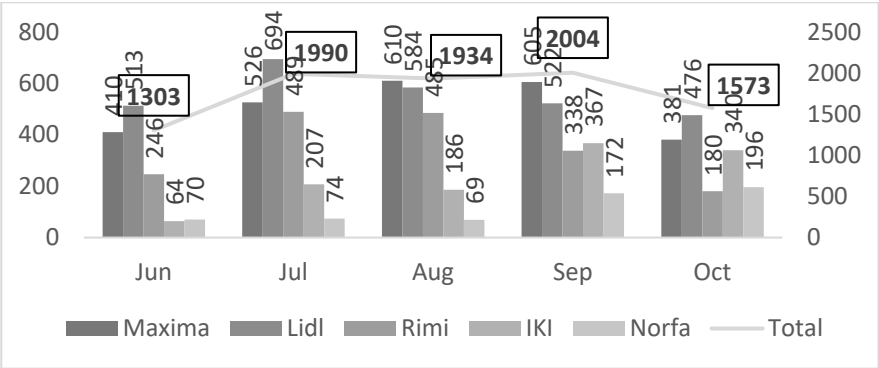


Source: created by the authors

Among the retailers, "Lidl" had the highest number of positive mentions (2789) and the highest percentage of positive sentiment (64%), making it the most effective in creating a favorable public opinion. Conversely, "Maxima" received the most negative mentions (1195 very negative), which is attributed to its market leader status, although it had a lower market share compared to "Lidl." Relative comparisons show that "Norfa" had the highest percentage of negative mentions (35%), while "Lidl" maintained the lowest.

In analyzing monthly trends, "Lidl" consistently led in positive mentions across several months, with peaks in July and August. "Maxima" dominated in August and September but showed weaker performance in October, suggesting a potential decline in public perception.

FIGURE 4. Mentions with positive sentiment by 2024 Jun-Oct



Source: created by the authors

The fluctuations in sentiment for "Maxima" could be linked to various factors, including customer service issues, product availability, or pricing strategies that may not have resonated well with consumers during that period. Interestingly, "Norfa" displayed a more volatile sentiment pattern, with significant spikes in negative mentions during certain months, indicating that specific events or controversies might have influenced public opinion. This volatility suggests that "Norfa" may need to adopt more proactive public relations strategies to mitigate negative sentiment and improve its overall brand image.

In contrast, "Lidl" not only maintained its lead in positive sentiment but also demonstrated resilience against potential negative impacts, possibly due to effective marketing campaigns or strong community engagement initiatives. This consistent performance positions "Lidl" favorably in the competitive landscape, allowing them to leverage their positive public perception for growth and expansion.

The analysis also highlights the importance of monitoring media sentiment as a key indicator of brand health. Retailers should consider implementing strategies to enhance positive media coverage and address negative mentions promptly. Engaging with consumers through social media, responding to feedback, and promoting positive stories can further bolster favorable sentiment.

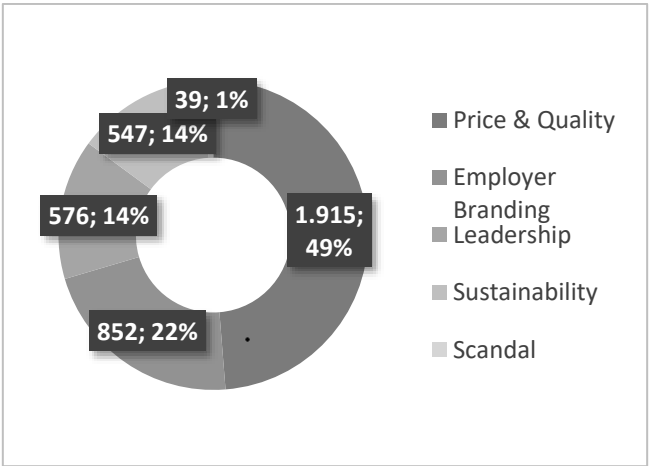
4.4. NARRATIVE

The five narrative sub-categories were predefined in the analytics tool: price & quality, employer branding, leadership, sustainability, scandal. The total content analyzed is the same across the whole research, but in narrative analysis database, number of analyzed lines is 16989 compared to previous database of 15632 lines used in earlier chapters. The reason why narratives database is bigger, because the same piece of media content can contain more than 1 narrative.

The first exercise was to check what part of the content matches these predefined narratives. It appeared that 23,1% of all media content matched any of the mentioned narratives. Therefore, the following analysis and discussion about narratives is based on this smaller sample of media content. However, the fact that 76,9% of cases do not match the mentioned narratives, already indicates that communication about grocery retail industry in Lithuania has high differentiation. Also, it presumes that additional analysis could be done to identify if more narratives in Lithuanian grocery retail market communication exist.

The next step in narrative analysis is to check the frequency of narratives within the sample. The split is presented in Figure 5.

FIGURE 5. Count and share of mentions by narrative



Source: created by the authors

Almost half (49%) of all mentions within a certain narrative are classified as being in the context of price & quality. It shows that price and quality topic is obviously the most important in digital media. The following topics in the order of their share are – employer branding (22%), leadership (14%), sustainability (14%), and scandal (1%).

If compared to total average proportion of positive and negative context in media content, employer branding has the biggest part of positive sentiment – 90%. It gives an indication that this is the way for retailers to communicate a positive message about them as a good place to work and it's successfully achieved.

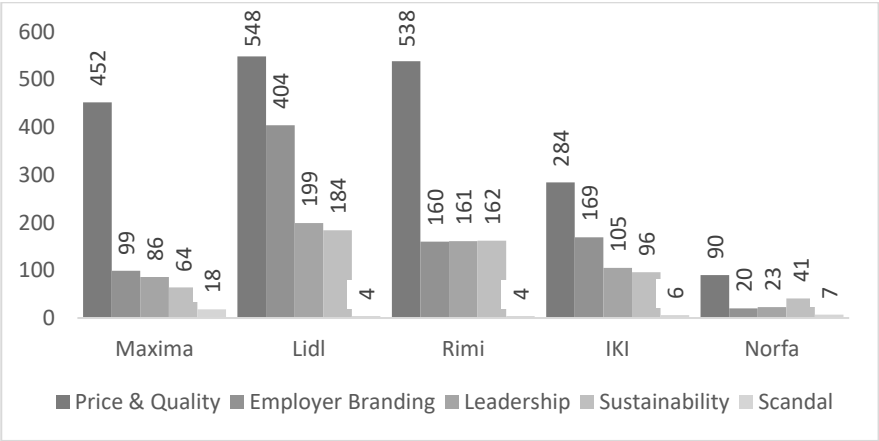
Another topic with very similar proportion is price & quality with 87% of mentions with positive context. As it was discovered earlier – price and quality topic is dominating in communication about grocery retail market and the result of sentiment analysis shows that retailers manage to keep this topic in a positive tone. It also might be an indication of high competition in the market and a way to attract more customers by trying to communicate good prices and offers in the media.

Leadership related topics drive a higher percentage (19%) of content with negative sentiment than price & quality and employer branding topics and it's mainly related to some changes in retailer processes like introduction of innovations that might impact customer experience. Sustainability has even more retailer mentions in negative context (28%) – this media content is also related to changes of customer experience or increasing prices due to implementation of sustainability related requirements like paid plastic bags.

The biggest negative context is naturally within the scandal type of content – 77%. However, 23% of the mentions are still in positive context of the scandal. It means that in some cases the retailer itself plays a positive role in some critical situations. It is treated as a good communication example from retailer. However, it's worth mentioning that scandal narrative in general is very insignificant compared to other narratives.

The main part of narrative analysis is the identification of each retailer image based on the narrative match level. First, the absolute retailer mentions by narratives was checked to identify how competitors are matching analyzed narratives (Figure 6).

FIGURE 6. *Mentions by retailers and narratives*



Source: created by the author

All retailers’ communication is firstly about price and quality. “Lidl” (548) and “Rimi” (538) are leading with a very small difference between each other, followed by “Maxima” (452). There is a big gap between “Maxima” and “Iki” in fourth place (284) and “Norfa” (90) in fifth place. “Lidl” is widely known as having “value for money” strategy and it successfully holds the lead in price and quality topic. “Lidl” is also holding a definite leader position in employer branding narrative. “Iki” and “Rimi” have the second and third place with 169 and 160 mentions respectively. Leadership and sustainability topics are similarly led by “Lidl” and “Rimi”, followed by “Iki”, “Maxima” and “Norfa”.

“Maxima”, which is one of the top 2 leaders in SOV overall, is among the leaders within the match of price and quality narrative only. All other narrative match scores, except scandal, are ranked only in 4th place. It indicates that “Maxima” might be focused and perceived in other narratives that are not defined in the tool used for this research.

Lidl” has the lowest relative coverage of price & quality narrative, but it’s important to remind that in absolute numbers “Lidl” is also a leader. It shows how well balanced this indicator is. The second highest indicator is employer branding with a proportion of 30% and it’s the highest in the market. It shows that “Lidl” in digital media is communicated as

the best employer, which is a very important part for retail business – usually the biggest retailers are also among the biggest employers in the country. Leadership and sustainability are the next covered by “Lidl” and almost equal with each other, but competitors are not having bigger differentiation here, except “Norfa”, which is discussed in another paragraph. “Rimi” covers price and quality narrative (52%) less than “Maxima”, but more than “Lidl” among content with its mentions. The match of the other 3 narratives (employer branding, leadership and sustainability) is well balanced and equal – 16% each. “Iki” has the most similar proportion of narrative match with “Lidl”. It’s more noticeable in the topics about price and quality (43%) and slightly less in employer branding (26%). Leadership and sustainability topics are also matched on a very similar level with “Lidl” and “Rimi”.

Half of the content with “Norfa” mentions is related to price and quality. Employer branding is the least covered narrative among all competitors (11%). Leadership (13%) is slightly more covered and on similar level with “Maxima”. The most differentiating part for “Norfa” is sustainability – it has 23% entity mentions within this narrative and this is the highest number of sustainability match among all competitors. It’s important to note that “Norfa” has the lowest absolute number of mentions overall, but even considering this fact, sustainability remains the second most covered narrative for “Norfa” after price and quality.

In summary, general narrative match in Lithuanian grocery market is at low level, which lays a ground for additional investigation of other narratives and implies improvement of the tool. Another important insight is that almost half of the stories that match any kind of narrative fall under price & quality narrative. It indicates the importance of value for money topic in Lithuania from customer perspective, but also shows high level of price and quality competition among retailers.

5. DISCUSIÓN

Combining the insights throughout the whole research with reference to research objectives, the following conclusions were made:

1. Digital media about Lithuanian grocery retail is overall dominated by positive sentiment with 56% of total mentions.. Neutral mentions share is 19%, negative mentions – 25%.. Threats – overall negative sentiment is increasing in the market and it's applicable for all retailers. This trend leads to the assumption that there are some risky topics to manage. One of them is sustainability that has been relevant in the media with negative context recently. Other researchers have discovered that high positive sentiment is usually the result of proactive communication. For example, during COVID-19, supermarkets that actively addressed emerging issues saw gradual increases in positive sentiment as customers acknowledged efforts to improve service quality (e.g. hygiene policies, supply chain reliability) (Li et al., 2023). Also, predominance of positive feedback is observed during the periods of heightened demand (Srivastava, 2022). The rising overall negative sentiment across retailers corresponds with studies highlighting market-wide challenges, such as sustainability concerns amplifying cognitive dissonance among environmentally conscious consumers. Recent negative media coverage of sustainability in Lithuanian retail reflects findings by Viet, de Leeuw and van Herpen (2023), where mismatches between brand actions and consumer expectations trigger backlash (Viet et al., 2023).
2. Dominating narrative in the market is price and quality with almost half of overall retailer mentions. The following narratives are employer branding, leadership, sustainability, and scandal. Price and quality is a dominating narrative across all retailers. Employer branding is the second for 3 of retailers, while 2 retailers have sustainability topic ranked in the second place. Looking at each retailer image profile from narrative match perspective, two retailers tend to be reflected within price and quality narrative mainly, while only one has bigger focus on two of the narratives – price & quality and employer branding. The dominance of the price and quality narrative in

the market reflects a long-standing consumer perception that higher prices often correlate with higher quality products. This phenomenon is well-documented in marketing literature, where the price-quality heuristic suggests that consumers tend to associate higher prices with better quality and increased liking for products. This heuristic influences consumer expectations and perceived quality, even if the actual quality does not differ significantly (Kurz et al., 2023). Employer branding emerges as a second significant narrative for several retailers, highlighting its importance in shaping organizational culture and employee retention. Research by Gilani and Cunningham (2017) emphasizes that employer branding should be integrated into an organization's core values and communicated effectively to attract and retain suitable talent (Gilani and Cunningham, 2017). Sustainability narratives also play a crucial role, but these narratives can sometimes perpetuate existing consumption patterns rather than promoting genuine sustainability (Heidenstrøm, 2025).

3. Looking from a purely competitive perspective, strategy of “Lidl” is what draws attention. This retailer manages to have almost the same number of mentions in digital media as the market leader “Maxima”, but “Maxima” has a significantly higher market share. “Lidl” also has higher number of mentions in positive context. According to Pedreño-Santos (2024), high media visibility can be related to effective risk communication strategies. Companies like shopping centers enhance their media visibility by using intuitive content that generates learning and security, as noted in a study, to get space in media during crisis periods (Pedreño-Santos, 2024). Composition of mentions with positive context might be misleading if entity does not have primary role in the content, but it’s secondary or occasional. For example, “Iki” positive mentions increase is basically driven by mentions in secondary role and that might cause lower stakeholder engagement. From employer branding narrative perspective, there are two retailers with

second high share of it and it can be seen as an attempt to build an appeal through social media platforms. However, there is a risk of "career-washing" if the promises do not align with reality. Authentic engagement and meaningful conversations on social media are crucial for successful employer branding (Alonso et al., 2022).. Sustainability narrative has relatively high negative sentiment behind compared to other narratives. It might be that stakeholders perceive the outcome of sustainability factor as negative for them (e.g. increasing product prices because of sustainable packaging). The negative sentiment associated with sustainability narratives, such as increased product prices due to sustainable packaging, highlights the need for retailers to educate stakeholders about the benefits of sustainability. This aligns with the importance of building credibility and brand awareness to effectively communicate during crisis periods (Pedreño-Santos, 2024)..

4. During the research, limitations that might impact the quality of results were identified and observed: due to data privacy, ethical concerns and unclear regulations for the use of scraped data, social media posts of private accounts are not tracked and not included in data sample by the provider of the data. It makes research results less holistic and lowers the measurement level of stakeholder engagement. This is consistent with discussions on how ethical and privacy concerns can limit the scope and quality of social media research (Di Minin et al., 2021). From privacy standpoint, this aligns with the ethical concerns raised by other authors regarding privacy policies and data collection on social media. For instance, studies have shown that privacy policies are often complex and difficult for users to understand, leading to uninformed consent (Hanlon & Jones, 2023). The research tool does not provide indication of entity-initiated media content. Having this categorization, by separating discourse of entities and stakeholders, would allow broader research possibilities – in relation to image building management models and two-way communication theory, it

would allow to compare the narratives communicated by retailers and narratives of stakeholders. This comparison would bring more valuable insights into how well the communicated content was perceived by the audience. AI algorithm how sentiment is attributed and how narratives are created and matched is a “Black box”. As mentioned in theoretical part of this study, AI algorithms are usually not transparent enough and might cause bias.

6. CONCLUSIONS

1. In analysis of academic literature about AI influence on corporate image building process, AI technologies were identified as revolutionizing corporate image building by enabling data driven, personalized, more accurate and quick way to understand and quantify stakeholder attitudes and emotions towards businesses. It was also detected that AI tools work best in cooperation with humans to minimize biases.
2. Results of quantitative content analysis demonstrated quantification possibilities of Lithuanian grocery retailers’ image in digital media. Analysis of media discourse revealed the ability to understand the sentiment behind media content and which narratives grocery retail market and each market player is matching and how it changes over time. From practical perspective, AI and NLP powered tool detected that grocery retail is dominated by positive sentiment overall and measured the players driving it, as well as a negative one. Lithuanian grocery retail market appeared to be dominated by price and quality and employer branding narrative showing the most actual topics discussed in the media. Improvement and decline of different market players for different measures were presented as an example of how to indicate reputational and corporate image risks and wins.
3. Analysis of research disclosed challenges that businesses face or might face by employing AI for corporate image building.

Businesses still struggle to integrate AI into decision making process and balance human intelligence with artificial intelligence. AI may suggest solutions that are not necessarily acceptable for all social groups and here human intelligence should interfere. There are also social ethical concerns – if the advantage of AI is personalization, there should be appropriate ethical protocols for what data can be used based on customer or business consent. It was obtained that there is still lack of clarity in AI algorithms used to analyze contexts of content, emotions and feelings identification. Decision makers are not always aware of what logic was used to arrive to a certain output.

4. Recommendations for AI employment in organizations. Businesses should analyze the possibilities of AI powered tools and structure their strategic and tactical goals mirroring the output the tool provides. For example, if the tool provides measurement of sentiment, there should be a key performance indicator set in corporate strategy at what level the sentiment of a company should be in public media. As retailers' reaction to consumer trends must be very fast (especially applicable to grocery retailers) due to high frequency of interaction with customer, real time AI based complex data interpretation would benefit in predicting crises and adapting to customer needs faster, engaging them with the relevant narratives. Perform competitor benchmarking in real time to identify areas where your image can stand out. For example, a grocery retailer can analyze customer sentiment around sustainability initiatives, such as eco-friendly packaging or reduced food waste, and build a story (narrative) to communicate it.

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COLECCIÓN CONOCIMIENTO CONTEMPORÁNEO

HORIZONTES DE LA COMUNICACION: TEORÍA Y PRÁCTICA EN LA ERA DIGITAL

Coord.

SANTIAGO MAYORGA ESCALADA

Dykinson, S.L.

2025



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Diseño de cubierta y maquetación: Francisco Anaya Benítez

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Madrid 2025

N.º 262 de la colección Conocimiento Contemporáneo

1ª edición, 2025

ISBN: 979-13-7006-134-0

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