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THE VOICE OF LEADERSHIP
Communication Practices and Styles of Lithuanuan *CEOS* in Managing Public Image

La voz del liderazgo: Prácticas y estilos de comunicación de los directores ejecutivos (*CEOs*) lituanos en la gestión de la imagen pública

MARIANA SUELDO (MARIANA.SUELDO@KF.VU.LT)[1]
GINTARĖ KRIAČIŪNAITĖ-LAZAUSKIENĖ (GINTARE.KRIAUCIUNAITE-LAZAUSKIENE@KF.VU.LT)[1]

[1]Vilnius University, Faculty of Communication (Lithuania)

KEYWORDS
leadership communication
chief executive officer (CEO)
organizational reputation
stakeholder engagement
media influence

ABSTRACT
This study analyzes the communication strategies of prominent CEOs in Lithuania and their impact on organizational reputation, employee engagement, and public perception. Using mixed-methods research (quantitative analysis of 440 media outlets, qualitative interviews, and comparison with global rankings) the study found that effective communication increases transparency and strengthens trust. Results highlight the importance of tailoring messages to different audiences and combining formal and informal channels. CEOs who address relevant issues such as energy, defense, and security receive greater media coverage, and those who actively engage on social media are perceived as more accessible, positively impacting their teams' morale and loyalty.

PALABRAS CLAVE
comunicación de liderazgo
director ejecutivo (CEO),
reputación organizacional
compromiso de las partes interesadas
influencia mediática

RESUMEN
Este estudio analiza estrategias de comunicación de CEOs de Lituania y su impacto en la reputación organizacional, el compromiso de los empleados y la percepción pública. Métodos mixtos (análisis de medios, entrevistas, rankings) permitieron identificar que la comunicación eficaz aumenta la transparencia y fortalece la confianza. Los resultados destacan la importancia de adaptar mensajes a distintos públicos y combinar canales formales e informales. Los CEOs que abordan temas relevantes como energía, defensa y seguridad obtienen mayor cobertura mediática, y quienes interactúan activamente en redes sociales son percibidos como más accesibles, impactando positivamente en la moral y lealtad de sus equipos.

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1. Introduction

In today's business environment, CEOs increasingly influence the public image of companies, their relationships with stakeholders, and their strategic direction. Research on executive communication examines how top executives shape the reputation of organizations, build trust, and contribute to market success. In the past, communication took place mainly through reports and official announcements, but digital channels and social media have made it much more direct and personal.

The style of executive communication may depend on the size of the company, the sector, and the leadership model. Some CEOs engage in executive activism, commenting on social, political, or environmental issues not necessarily related to the company's finances (Chatterji & Toffel, 2018). Others employ strategic ambiguity to balance openness with the need to protect the organization's interests (Melloni & Patacconi, 2019). Regardless of the strategy chosen, CEO communication directly influences stakeholder perceptions, investor confidence, consumer loyalty, and employee engagement.

The strengthening of the individualized leader image has led to the phenomenon of "star CEOs", whereby leaders become the face of their organizations (Huaman-Ramirez & Merunka, 2021). The media further encourages this trend by shaping the perception of leaders as innovators or, conversely, as obstacles (Love et al., 2017). Due to the high reputation risk, it is extremely important to understand the mechanisms of leadership communication and their impact on a company's performance. This article summarizes the latest research on executive communication, activism, media attention, and strategic positioning in order to reveal their significance for organizational strategy.

In Lithuania, as in other post-Soviet countries, the legacy of Soviet propaganda after the media reform of 1990 has led to public caution and criticism of the media (Jastramskis, 2015). Freedom of the media has become the foundation of democracy, but the public remains critical in its assessment of transparency and accountability. Digital media strongly shapes public opinion and consumer behavior, although traditional channels remain relevant to older audiences, ensuring trust in organizational communication.

2. Theoretical framework: The CEO as the corporate voice

Corporate communication has evolved from an ancillary function to a core element that shapes the image and identity of an organization. Researchers emphasize that "the CEO is the ultimate representative of the company and its culture" (Men, 2014). The development of digital technologies has further strengthened this role, as managers increasingly communicate with audiences on social media (Yue et al., 2019). The ability to craft appropriate messages and maintain open communication is becoming a prerequisite for achieving public legitimacy for an organization (Frandsen & Johansen, 2013).

Academic interest in leadership communication in the last decades has focused on how CEOs execute corporate strategies and manage public relations through social media (Tsai & Men, 2016), how they seek to build and maintain trust and credibility thus contributing to their companies' reputation (Yim, 2021) as well as attract more media attention through due to CEOs' growing power to shape corporate stories (Kantola, 2014).

If traditional media were the primary channels for CEOs showcasing their strategic vision, with the advent and exponential growth in variety and reach of social media, CEOs have actively taken this fast track to connect directly communicate with a wider range of stakeholders (Saavedra & Capriotti (2024; 2025). In social media platforms CEOs craft both their personal and corporate and can respond much faster to challenges or crisis, thus strengthening their role as the face and voice of the company (Men, 2014).

2.1. Strategic CEO activism beyond corporate boundaries

"CEO activism" - understood as business leaders speaking publicly about issues which concern them outside the realm of business - has been driven by practices often linked to internal motivations, particular ethics, or simply a means to strategically stand out (Melloni & Patacconi, 2019). This growing phenomenon prompts both praises as legitimate leadership and criticism as a manipulative strategy of corporate branding (Chatterji & Toffel, 2018).

Expectations on CEOs taking an active role as a social leader are growing higher both on customers as well as other stakeholders' end. As per data from the Edelman Trust Barometer, 43% of respondents believe a CEO should speak out on social issues (Edelman, 2021). However, the impact of CEO activism on organizational performance remains debatable. While some studies argue that taking a clear stance can strengthen customer trust and loyalty, others highlight possible negative reactions and alienation of certain stakeholder groups (Bedendo & Siming, 2021). Social media coverage further amplifies both the potential benefits and risks of activism (Hambrick & Wowak, 2021). CEO activism also has broader strategic implications. It is viewed favourably when it is perceived as authentic and aligned with the organization's values (Yim, 2021), but inconsistency with the company's strategy can cause internal conflicts and damage its reputation (Cewe, 2020).

2.2. CEO public visibility in a mediatized environment

The visibility of the CEO in the media has a significant impact on the company's brand and public opinion. Research shows that well-known leaders increase the visibility of the organization, attract investment, and strengthen its legitimacy (Love et al., 2017). However, publicity also poses risks, as negative news can damage reputation and reduce stakeholder trust (Bednar et al., 2013).

The reciprocal influence model reveals that executives' communication often changes depending on how they are portrayed in the media (Kepplinger, 2008). Negative attention can lead to a loss of reputation, investor skepticism, and stricter regulatory control (Graffin et al., 2012), while positive attention strengthens the credibility of the manager and his or her status as an industry leader.

Intense media attention also creates higher expectations for executives to be open, accountable, and communicate ethically (Gorska, 2021). However, excessive publicity can cause a feeling of insecurity, especially when media narratives deviate into analyzing the manager's decisions or personal behavior (Bruijns, 2003).

2.3. Trust and Media Credibility in Lithuania

In today's information-saturated public sphere, research focuses particularly on the changing role of traditional media. One of the key questions is whether public media remains a significant part of the market and a reliable source of information. In Lithuania, although its audience is smaller, public media still enjoys a high level of trust, often surpassing commercial channels (Jõesaar, Rožukalne, & Jastramskis, 2022). In the first half of the decade, Lithuanians' trust in radio was lower than the EU average, but by 2019 it had reached 62-65% in the Baltic countries and exceeded the EU average (57%). Trust in television also grew. In a dual media system, LRT (Lithuanian Radio and TV) competes with entertainment-oriented commercial media, but remains an important broadcaster of news, education, and political debate. When assessing the credibility of the media, it is important to distinguish news from other types of content, and objectivity remains an essential criterion. The Lithuanian audience considers LRT to be more objective than commercial media, which further strengthens its position as a reliable source of information (Jõesaar, Rožukalne, & Jastramskis, 2022).

The media, especially digital channels, have a strong influence on public opinion and consumer habits (Laužikas, 2017). While digital media is expanding, traditional channels such as TV and print are still important, especially for the older generation of consumers. It is also noticeable that Lithuanians value brands that not only meet quality standards but also draw on local culture and traditions (Laužikas, 2017).

Other Lithuanian scholars state that media responsibility and transparency, as core values after the restoration of independence, remain key issues to maintain trust in both media and corporate communication (Vaišnys & Kėvišas, 2024). The impact of the media on corporate image and brand reputation is particularly strong, so crisis management strategies are becoming increasingly important in Lithuania to protect consumer trust.

Media freedom has become a cornerstone of democracy, but Lithuanians are still cautious and value transparency. The relationship between media and government has a lasting impact on trust in information sources, as well as on the formation of corporate brands (Vaišnys & Kėvišas, 2024). In this context, companies need to ensure high standards of transparency and accountability in order to gain a foothold in the market and secure consumer trust. Given the significant influence of the media on the image of organizations and brand reputation, crisis management in the Lithuanian context is becoming increasingly important to protect and maintain consumer trust. Embracing a wider stakeholder's spectrum beyond consumers is a strategic move of any mature organization and timely, professionally managed CEO communication is becoming a powerful tool for Lithuanian organizations as well.

2.4. Strategic positioning of the CEO

Strategic positioning of the CEO means shaping the leader's identity in a way that meets the needs of the organization and the expectations of stakeholders. Companies seek to increase visibility and credibility by managing impressions through traditional and digital media (Zerfass et al., 2016). The positioning of a leader often becomes institutionalized as it is structured by communication departments to ensure consistency with the organization's narratives (Fredriksson & Pallas, 2014).

Personalization is an essential element of this process, as the media increasingly portrays leaders as the "face of the organization" (Denner et al., 2018). This has led to the phenomenon of celebrity CEOs, where the personal brand becomes an integral part of the company's identity (Cottan-Nir & Lehman-Wilzig, 2018). However, such visibility also increases attention to the personal attitudes and actions of managers, which directly contribute to the overall reputation of the organization.

Summing up, research emphasizes that the CEO is becoming a strategic communication figure who has a significant impact on the image and trustworthiness of the organization. The increasing visibility of leaders raises expectations for social responsibility and ethical leadership but also poses risks to reputation. Future research should explore how leaders can balance openness, digital communication, and image control to achieve long-term organizational resilience and competitive advantage.

3. Aims of this study, research questions and methodology

This study examines the communication of top CEOs in Lithuania in terms of their visibility of in the media and social media and its impact on the image and reputation of the organization. To achieve this, the following research questions are proposed:

- How does the visibility of leaders in the media differ in terms of frequency, channels, and sectors?
- How do media types influence the assessment of communication effectiveness?
- How does the social media activity of Lithuanian top CEOs compare with international trends?

Methodology: The study was conducted using a mixed methodology combining quantitative media content analysis related to public statements made by CEOs on television, radio, in print, on internet portals, and on social media, with qualitative interviews with the heads of seven leading Lithuanian companies.

Quantitative analysis ensures an objective and systematic assessment of text characteristics, allowing the identification of behavioral factors revealed in digital media (Tidikis, 2003). It involves a quantitative assessment of the frequency, importance, engagement, and effectiveness according to established criteria in order to identify behavioral determinants embedded in media texts and analyze the impact of managers' communication on different audiences.

The data was collected from the 2024 reports of two Lithuanian research companies, covering 440 major media sources (Mediaskopas & INK Agency, 2024). The analysis covered traditional reports, media initiatives, and social media mentions, excluding commissioned content and advertising; the data was processed using monitoring software with categorization algorithms, applying descriptive statistics to assess frequency, reach, and coverage.

The sample selection was comprehensive, covering all relevant sources; the unit of analysis was individual mentions of CEOs, evaluated according to frequency, position, engagement, tone, and authenticity. The coding scheme was based on the literature on communication effectiveness (Zerfass et al., 2016), covering leadership indicators, clarity, consistency, authenticity (Likert scale), and social engagement. Coding consistency is ensured by clear rules, examples, and software (MaxQda 124.9). Reliability is assessed using the Cohen's Kappa method.

The variables include the frequency of messages and engagement (number of mentions, potential contacts), clarity of communication, and topics (innovation, stability, geopolitics), rated on a 1–5 Likert scale by two experts (intercoding reliability κ=0.82). The categories are weighted at 33% each, with the final score reflecting visibility (4.8), clarity (4.7), and engagement (4.4).

The quantitative results were triangulated with interview data: the comparison confirmed the findings (e.g., the importance of authenticity corresponds to high clarity scores), the contrast revealed limitations (visibility does not always equal success), and the integration combined themes (channels, values), strengthening the reliability of the study despite the limited sample size.

In-depth interviews with experts: the qualitative part is based on in-depth interviews with experts to reveal the subtleties of CEO communication in the social, economic, and cultural context of Lithuania (Gaižauskaitė & Valavičienė, 2016). Interviews with top-level managers provided an in-depth understanding of communication processes and challenges.

Data collection procedures and participant characteristics: Semi-structured interviews were conducted online in March–April 2025 and lasted 30–45 minutes. The sample consisted of seven CEOs (out of the initially targeted 10) selected based on their experience and recognition as the best communication specialists in Lithuania. To ensure confidentiality, respondents were anonymized (R1–R7).

Participants had diverse experience: R1 – aviation and digital business strategy, 15 years; R2 – real estate development and management, >30 years; R3 – banking, >10 years; R4 – technology entrepreneur, start-up founder, 10 years; R5 – energy management and strategy, >20 years; R6 – banking and corporate management, 20 years; R7 – e-commerce and retail, 10 years.

The interview guide covered three main areas: 1) Communication effectiveness – media preferences, readiness to communicate, balance of authenticity and tone, reflection on communication; 2) Impact on public image – influence of the CEO, role of the media in shaping opinion, proactivity in communicating with the media, internal communication, involvement in social and political issues and 3) Impact of communication channels – audience engagement management, positive and negative attention management, differences in strategies between traditional and social media.

Data analysis: All interviews were transcribed and coded using a systematic thematic method to identify recurring themes, patterns, and differences between leaders' perspectives. Qualitative content analysis was conducted in a phenomenological context, and the results were linked to leadership communication theories such as authenticity, strategic alignment, and stakeholder engagement.

Comparative analysis of Social Media presence and Activity: Using the methodology developed by Saavedra & Capriotti (2024; 2025), we compared the activity of Lithuanian CEOs on six platforms (LinkedIn, X/Twitter, Instagram, Facebook, TikTok, YouTube), classifying them as active, moderately active, or passive based on the number of platforms and frequency of posts. Sample: 18 executives from the TOP20 list (2 excluded due to changes in position).

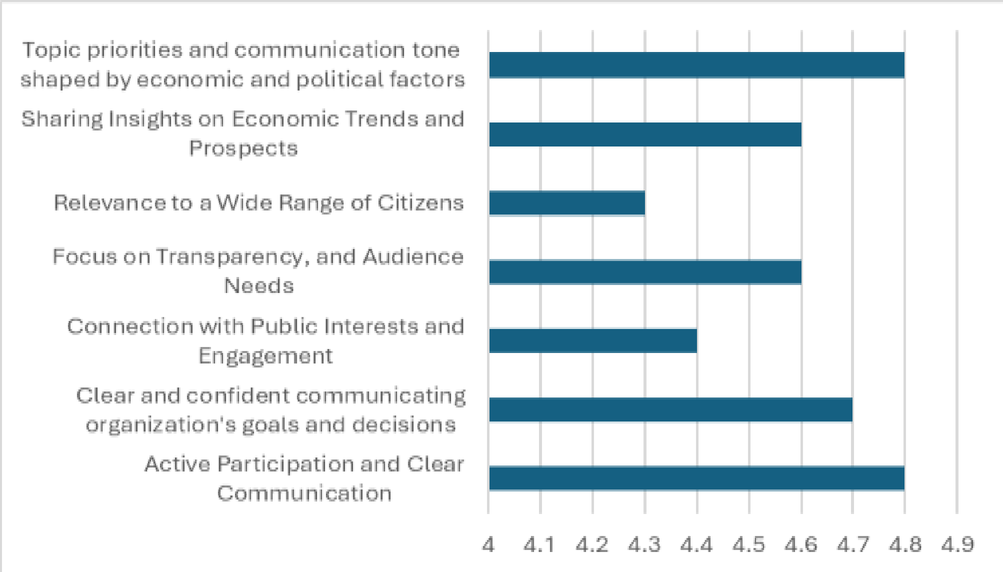
Ethical considerations: The study was conducted in accordance with the principles of privacy, anonymity, and voluntary participation. Participants' identities were coded, and social network data was collected from public sources in accordance with platform policies. Verbal consent was obtained prior to interviews, and data was anonymized to ensure confidentiality.

4. Analysis of results

4.1. CEO Communication and its Impact on Organizational Image and Reputation

Quantitative content analysis revealed that CEOs with higher levels of media engagement and message frequency—measured by an average score of 4.8 on a 1-to-5 scale—demonstrate increased visibility in public discourse. However, it is important to note that these metrics primarily reflect activity and presence rather than actual communication success or stakeholder impact. Without direct validation through stakeholder response data—such as trust, perception, or engagement surveys—these indicators should be interpreted cautiously as proxies for communication activity rather than definitive measures of effectiveness. CEOs communication excels in articulating the organization's objectives and decisions, earning a score of 4.7. Their communication prioritize clarity, transparency, and audience needs, effectively aligning the interests of the organization with public expectations. This approach is evidenced by significant audience engagement 4.4.

Figure 1. Factors Shaping CEO Visibility, Clarity, and Audience Resonance



Source: Own elaboration, 2026.

The CEOs at the top of the ranking are influential entrepreneurs who run companies in sectors that are important to many people, so their opinions are also of interest to the media. Similarly, the 2024 CEOs have mostly appeared in the media as experts, sharing their insights on geopolitics, market trends, innovation and the outlook for the sector. They determined the priorities, themes and tone of CEO communication. For example, some CEOs had to talk openly about redundancies and restructuring of organisations - topics that receive a lot of public attention but carry a certain emotional burden.

The in-depth interviews with seven CEOs from diverse sectors in Lithuania support the quantitative content research findings. The discussions revealed several common themes as well as varying perspectives on topics: communication aligning with organizational values, media engagement, authenticity of communication, and personal reflections. The insights have been organized according to the questions posed during the interviews.

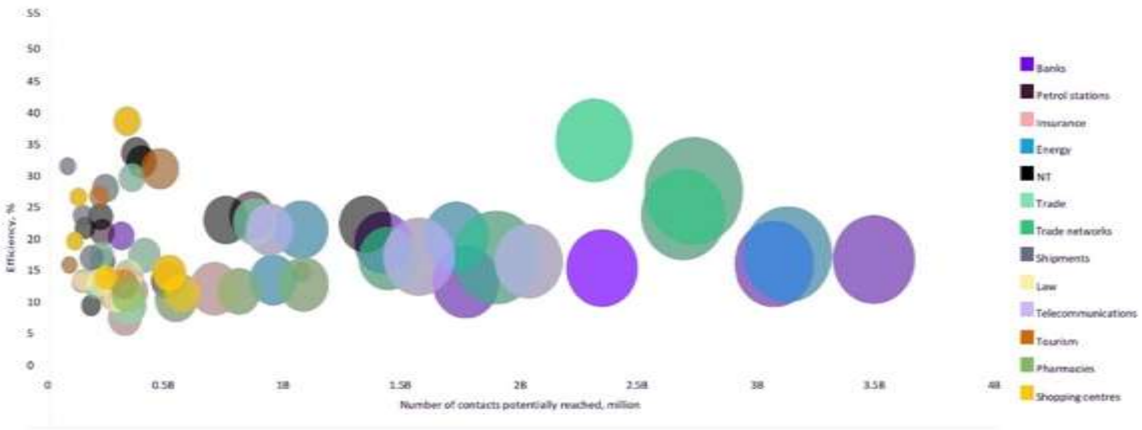
Most CEOs emphasize the importance of aligning communication themes with their organizational values and current societal trends. Strategic topics varys across the industries: R1 and R7 state that some CEOs focus on innovation and technology as key themes.R3, R5 and R6 prioritize themes around stability and security, particularly in the finance sector. Regarding Media Engagement and on-line platforms R1, R4 and R7 claim that CEOs acknowledge the significance of online platforms for reaching a broader audience, especially younger demographics. They prefer media outlets that resonate with their target audience. Meanwhile, R2, R5 favour traditional media, like press, radio and TV for its credibility. Preparation for communication involves the use of PR specialists. Most of CEO collaborate with communication managers or PR teams, some stress the importance of preparation to ensure coherent messaging and acknowledge that may engage more in hands-on preparation, while others may delegate more to their teams (R2). Authenticity is crucial to build trust: R1, R2, R5 state that CEOs generally agree that authenticity is crucial for building trust, but they also recognize the necessity of strategic messaging to meet organizational goals. Reflection on communication is related to seeking transparency: CEOs ponder on the evolution of their communication styles, often citing increased transparency and adaptability as key lessons learned.

Interviews with CEOs revealed that effective communication depends on aligning the organization's values with public interests and social trends, with topics varying by industry sector, such as technological innovation or financial stability. Lithuanian CEOs emphasize the importance of online platforms, especially for reaching young audiences, although some also value the credibility of traditional media. Most collaborate with communication specialists, although the intensity of this collaboration varies. Authenticity is considered essential for trust, but strategic communication is required to achieve the organization's goals. The communication styles of leaders place particular emphasis on authenticity, transparency, and adaptability.

4.2. CEO prominence and Public Perception

This study analysed 440 major Lithuanian media sources, covering all communication - both organic news and on-demand publications- with the highest efficiency being observed in Trade and trade networks, shopping centres and the greatest number of contacts permanently reached in the Telecommunication and Banking sector (the heaviest investors in brand advertising).

Figure 2. Media Visibility of Major Sectors in Lithuania.



Source: adapted from Mediaskopas & INK Agency, 2024.

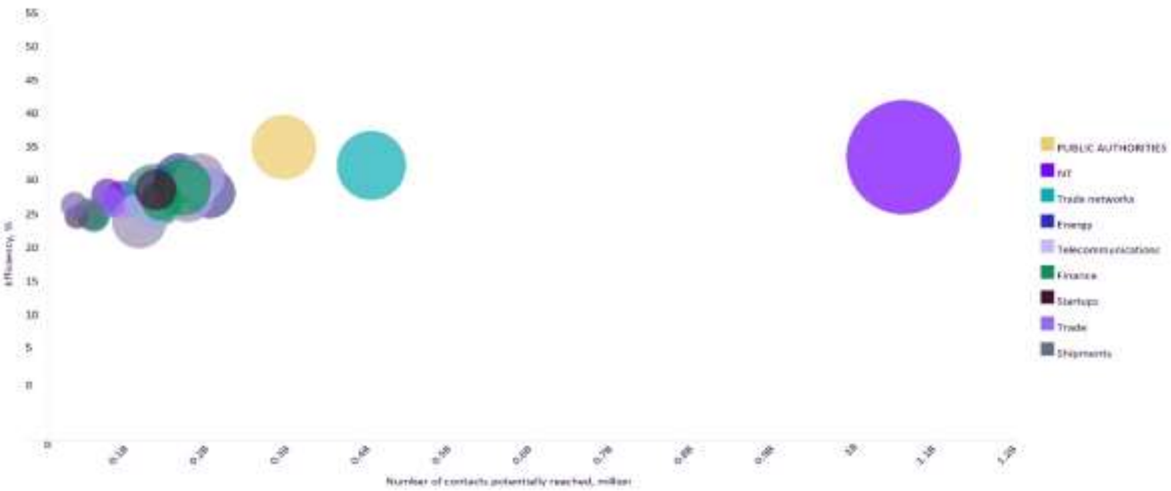
The most prevalent issues include challenges in the energy sector, national defence and security concerns, the ongoing conflict in Ukraine, and considerations of social responsibility. It is noteworthy that in 2024, the relevance of these topics decreased by 9% on average, while Défense and security increased by 24.7%. The year 2024 also saw the elections to Parliament of the Republic of Lithuania, which led to a significant rise of 38.7% in the election theme.

Figure 2 shows the ranking of industrial sectors and represented companies according to the effectiveness of CEO communication, the number of messages, and potential contacts; the size of the bubbles reflects the number of mentions.

The analysis, covering 440 major Lithuanian media sources (including organic and paid communication), revealed the highest effectiveness in the areas of real estate, retail chains, and public institutions (e.g., Lithuanian airports). The highest number of regular contacts was recorded in the telecommunications and banking sectors, where there is intensive brand investment.

Figure 3 shows the visibility rating of TOP CEOs based on communication effectiveness, number of messages, and potential contacts; the size of the bubbles reflects the number of mentions. The analysis (covering the same Lithuanian media sources) revealed the highest effectiveness in the areas of real estate, retail chains, and public institutions (e.g., Lithuanian airports, under label "public authorities").

Figure 3. TOP CEO visibility



Source: adapted from Mediaskopas & INK Agency, 2024.

Interview findings supported general belief that a CEO's public image directly influences the organization's reputation. R4 and R7 think that their global presence enhances the company's brand, while others focus on local impacts. When pondering on communication purposes, respondents mentioned the importance of aligning external communication with internal messaging is crucial for maintaining credibility, and most CEOs use regular updates and feedback mechanisms to ensure consistency. While R1 emphasizes direct communication, R2, R3, R5 may rely more on digital tools and newsletters. Crisis Communication was also briefly mentioned: R1, R5, R6 sustain that proactive crisis communication is fundamental, with many CEOs having established protocols for responding to negative media attention. The specifics of these strategies differ; for instance, R7 may focus on rapid digital communication, while R3 emphasizes stakeholder engagement. Media monitoring was discussed in terms of feedback analysis as key success factor of effective communication: most CEOs utilize surveys or media monitoring of public sentiment. R4 and R6 are more agile in adapting their communication based on feedback, while others may take a more measured approach.

4.3. Lithuanian CEOs Messaging Effectiveness across different communication channels

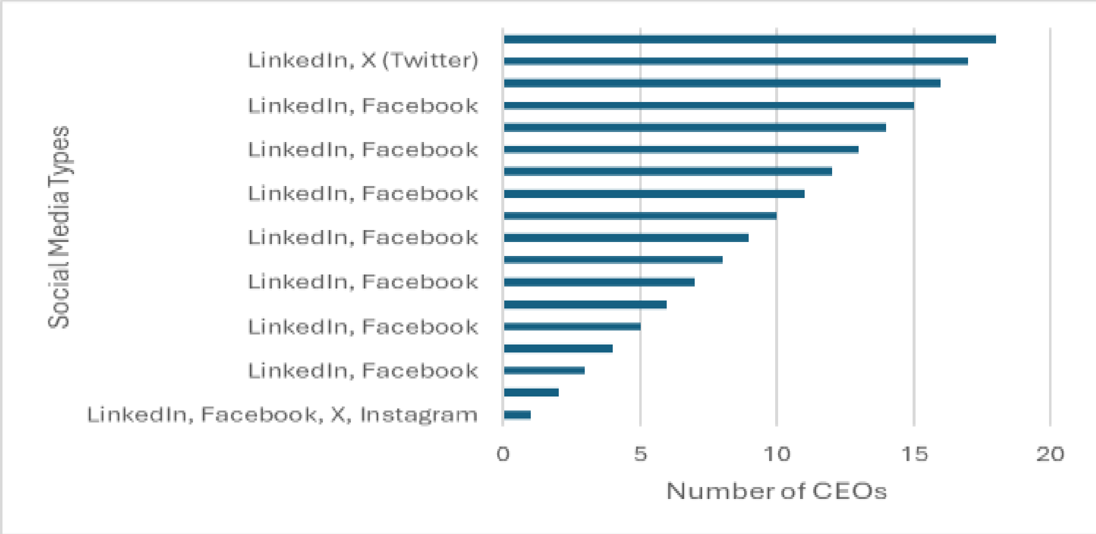
CEOs recognize the impact of the media on public opinion: positive attention strengthens reputation, while negative attention poses challenges. Views differ – R3 actively seeks media opportunities to shape its image, while R5 takes a reactive stance, managing existing opinion. All recognize the importance of national issues in increasing credibility, but the level of involvement varies: R2 participates in broad discussions, while others focus on specific industries.

Media coverage shows differences: online media dominates (87.72%), providing quick information about leaders in the digital environment. Regional publications (4.52%) emphasize local leaders, while national publications (2.78%) emphasize business trends. Television (1.84%) and radio (2.14%) prioritize breaking news, while magazines (0.99%) focus on entertainment content, skipping leadership analysis.

4.4. Social media activity of TOP Lithuanian CEOs: a comparative view

When analyzing the TOP 20 Lithuanian CEOs for 2024–2025, the final list consisted of 18 executives (two no longer in those companies). Of the 18 executives 2 had 4 active social media accounts (LinkedIn, Facebook, X/Twitter, Instagram), ranking 1st and 7th in the 2024 national visibility rating (Balčiūnienė, 2025);4 did not have any accounts, and 12 used 2 platforms (11 – LinkedIn + Facebook; 1 – LinkedIn + X/Twitter).

Figure 4. Passive use of social media accounts by top Lithuanian CEOS. Source: own elaboration



Source: Own elaboration, 2026.

In summary, 2 CEOs correspond to the average activity profile (3–4 platforms), 16 – to the passive category, thus displaying similar levels (though scoring slightly lower) to their global counterparts.

5. Discussion, limitations of the study and conclusions

5.1. Discussion

The results reflect the importance of the media and social networks for the visibility of leaders, but the true effectiveness of communication has not yet been fully assessed by stakeholders. Leadership communication is changing rapidly: In 2024, they most often appeared in the role of experts, commenting on market trends, innovations, and social issues (defense, climate change), emphasizing the strategic importance of communication for strengthening trust and public leadership.

This shows that leadership communication goes beyond the boundaries of companies and focuses on broader social issues. At the same time, the activity of leaders on social networks in Lithuania remains limited, which may hinder greater audience engagement and dialogue. The influence of sectors on communication strategies is also evident, with some leaders participating more actively in national discourse, while others focus on industry issues, reflecting diversity and personal priorities.

These aspects confirm that, in order to be effective, it is necessary to evaluate not only quantitative dimensions (number of mentions, visibility), but also qualitative elements of communication, such as audience response, relevance of topics, and the ability of leaders to adapt to a rapidly changing media environment. This is important for further research on the impact of communication on image, reputation, and public trust.

5.2. Limitations of the study

The mixed methodology of this study, based mainly on qualitative interviews with 7 CEOs, has several limitations. The small sample size limits generalization to the entire population of Lithuanian executives, and subjective responses may introduce bias that contradicts quantitative data. The indirect indicators used (frequency of reports, media mentions) do not reflect deeper impacts, such as changes in stakeholder trust or opinion. There is a lack of reputation indices. The time frame (2024–2025) does not reveal long-term trends in a rapidly changing media environment, requiring further research.

5.3. Conclusions

This study highlights the significant role that CEO communication plays within the Lithuanian business environment, suggesting that effective communication strategies—such as tailoring messages to diverse audiences and actively engaging with media platforms—are associated with positive perceptions of transparency and stakeholder relationships.

Our research suggests that CEOs who employ a combination of formal and informal channels and address pertinent political and economic issues are more frequently featured in media outlets, potentially enhancing their visibility and reputation. However, it is important to recognize that the evidence presented is correlational, and causal claims—such as asserting that CEO communication directly leads to increased stakeholder trust or improved organizational reputation—should be approached with caution.

The research also underscores the importance of proactive media engagement and audience interaction in shaping public perceptions, although further investigation is needed to understand the nuances of these relationships fully. Overall, the study contributes to our understanding of leadership communication in Lithuania, emphasizing its potential influence on organizational visibility and stakeholder engagement, while also highlighting the need for future research to explore causal pathways and long-term impacts.

Research on digital leadership shows that CEO communication on social media is becoming an important part of organizational reputation management and public dialogue. However, global and Lithuanian data show that social networks are still not systematically used in top-level management communication. Compared to global trends, Lithuanian CEOs stand out for their even lower level of engagement and narrower choice of platforms, while signs of dialogical communication are extremely rare. This creates opportunities for future research to analyze cultural, organizational, or reputational factors which determine the limited participation of executives and how it affects the public visibility of organizations.

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