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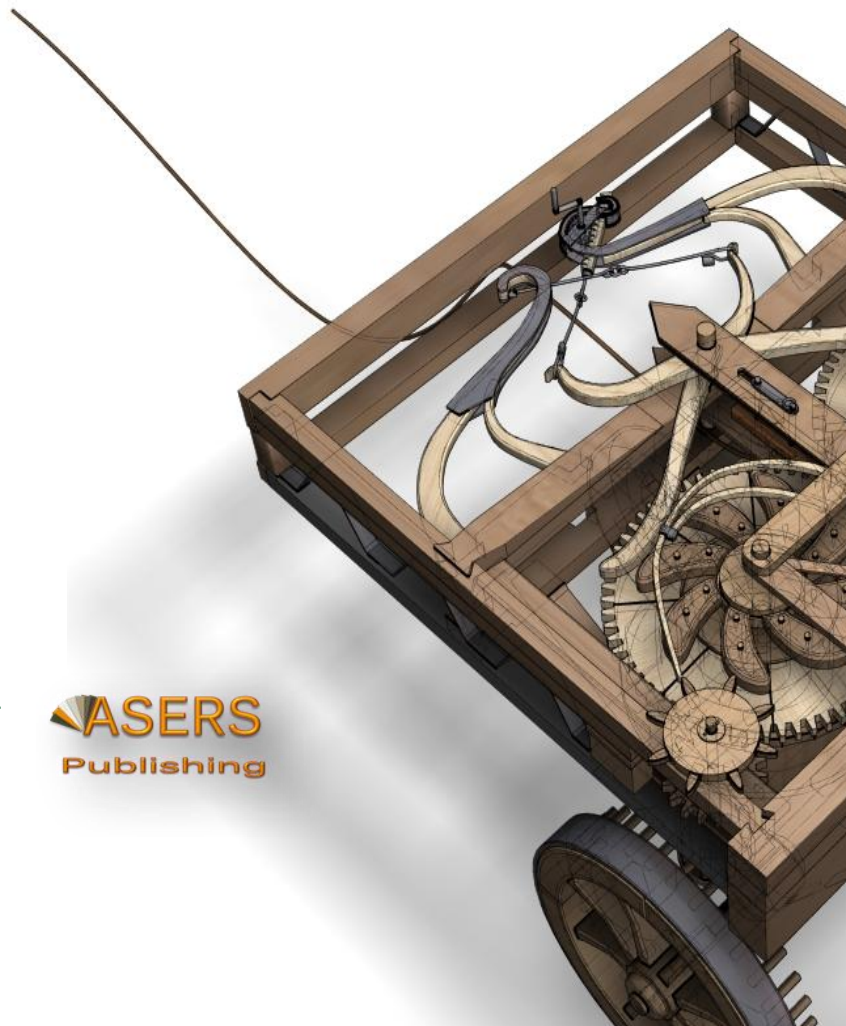
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Impact of Marketing Activities on the Image of an Energy Company: A Case Study of Electricity Suppliers in Poland

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Abstract: In the energy sector, building a positive image has gained particular importance due to rising energy prices and the ongoing transformation. Companies in this sector now focus on operating with respect for the natural environment. Their activities align with the concepts of sustainable development, ensuring the security of electricity supply, and providing consumers with freedom of choice in goods and services. In the strategic document "Poland's Energy Policy until 2040", it is assumed that by 2040, zero-emission sources will account for more than half of the installed capacity. At the same time, decentralized and citizen-driven energy production, based on local capital, will continue to develop. This means that energy companies will compete for the prosumer market, which consists of individuals generating energy from small-scale renewable energy installations at home. From the perspective of an energy company, image creation therefore plays a crucial role in building market position and achieving a competitive advantage. Managing marketing activities to establish a positive image is therefore one of the key elements of the marketing management process within the company. There is a clear need for research and analysis in the field of marketing activities in the energy sector, as there is still a lack of publications dedicated to this topic. Moreover, the ongoing energy transition in Europe, aimed at achieving climate neutrality by 2050, presents energy companies with the significant challenge of shaping their image in alignment with the vision of the "European Green Deal". Therefore, the objective of this article is to determine how marketing activities undertaken by electricity suppliers influence their image.

Referring to the resource-based view (RBV) of the firm and signaling theory, research hypotheses were formulated, and a model was developed, assuming a positive impact of selected marketing activities on a company's image. To achieve the study's objective, a quantitative survey was conducted using the Paper-and-Pencil Interview method among a randomly selected sample of 503 electricity consumers. The collected data were subjected to statistical analysis.

The results show that marketing activities undertaken by electricity suppliers, such as offering energy products bundled with energy (packages), offering discounts, providing an online customer service platform, operating a physical customer service office and engaging in sponsorship activities, have a positive impact on their image.

This study is one of the first empirical investigations into the relationship between specific marketing activities and the corporate image of electricity suppliers in Poland. By integrating the resource-based view and signaling theory in the context of the energy sector's transformation, it offers a novel conceptual and methodological approach to evaluating image-building efforts in a highly regulated and evolving market.

This study has three main limitations. Focuses on selected elements of the marketing mix, omitting other potential factors that can influence the corporate image. Data were collected from household consumers, which can limit the depth of insight into perceptions of marketing activities. This study was carried out within the Polish energy market; therefore, it should not be assumed that the findings will apply to electricity providers operating in other countries or under different regulatory conditions.

The findings suggest that electricity providers can enhance their public image by implementing selected marketing activities. Specifically, offering other products along with electricity (packages), providing discounts, offering physical customer service offices and remote customer service offices, and sponsoring are recommended as effective tools for image building in the energy sector.

Keywords: marketing activities; marketing management; corporate image; energy market.

JEL Classification: L11; L14; M31; M37.

Introduction

The functioning of the Polish energy market has been shaped by European law, as Poland created and implemented the Energy Law in 1997, following the EU Directive 96/92/EC. Poland's subsequent accession to the EU in 2004 and its compliance with the EU Energy Package in 2007, along with its framework documents, granted households direct access to the competitive electricity market and the right to choose any electricity supplier. As a result of this liberalization, many new electricity suppliers emerged, leading to increased competition in the market (Wojtkowska-Łodej, Michalski, and Hawranek, 2014). With the liberalization of the energy market, electricity ceased to be treated as a commodity and became a product, with former consumers becoming customers (Taminiau, 2025). Today, electricity is one of the key resources and the fundamental product offered by energy companies' marketing efforts.

The Polish energy sector is one in which building a positive image has gained particular importance due to rising energy prices and the ongoing transformation (Wójcik-Jurkiewicz, Czarnecka, Kinelski, Sadowska, and Bilińska-Reformat, 2021). Companies in this sector are now focused on operating with respect for the natural environment (Rosak-Szyrocka, Żywiłek, and Mrowiec, 2022). Their activities align with the concepts of sustainable development (Stefańska, 2016; Hamed *et al.* 2025), ensuring the security of electricity supply, and providing consumers with freedom of choice in goods and services. In the strategic document "Poland's Energy Policy until 2040", it is assumed that by 2040, zero-emission sources will account for more than half of the total installed capacity. At the same time, decentralized and citizen-driven energy production, based on local capital, will continue to develop. This means that energy companies in Poland will compete for the prosumer market (Rodríguez-Vilches *et al.* 2024), consisting of individuals generating energy from small-scale renewable energy installations at home.

From the perspective of an energy company (Karltorp and Perez Vico, 2025), image creation plays a crucial role in building market position and achieving a competitive advantage (Sheykhani *et al.* 2024). The company's image is linked to its marketing activities (Fosu and Asiedu, 2024; Fosu *et al.* 2024), typically classified within the framework of the "4Ps" (product, price, place, and promotion). These activities encompass all marketing actions aimed at achieving goals (Kotler and Keller, 2018) such as fostering a positive company image (Holloway, 2025) or stimulating a positive consumer recommendation (Penc, 2001). Managing marketing activities to establish a positive image (Koch and Denner, 2025) is one of the key elements of the marketing management process within the company (Elhajjar, 2024; Krawiec and Krawiec 2017). Moreover, the ongoing energy transition in Europe, aimed at achieving climate neutrality by 2050, presents energy companies with the significant challenge of shaping their image in alignment with the vision of the "European Green Deal". There is a clear need for research and analysis on the impact of marketing activities on the image in the energy sector, as there is still a lack of publications dedicated to this topic. Previous Polish studies have focused on specific components of the marketing mix, most often promotion, and its influence on the image of entities in the banking sector (Fałowski, 2010), dairy industry (Parkita, 2017), hotels (Orfin-Tomaszewska and Sidorkiewicz, 2019), and in the FMCG sector (Oleś, 2017). Research conducted worldwide has primarily focused on issues related to advertising in terms of expenditures incurred, as well as sales promotion, distribution efficiency, core product, and price level in terms of their impact on a company's image. These studies encompassed entities from the sectors such as food and beverage (Sembiring, 2021), IT services (Kim and Hyun, 2011), and retail in the food industry (Mukonza and Swarts, 2020). However, research on the impact of marketing actions of electricity suppliers on their image is still lacking.

Therefore, the objective of this article is to determine how marketing activities undertaken by electricity suppliers influence their image. The relationship between marketing activities and the image of an energy company, which is the subject of this study, is grounded in the resource-based view (RBV) theory. This perspective considers a firm utilizing its tangible assets and capabilities in marketing efforts to achieve its objectives, including shaping its corporate image. However, since this relationship involves two parties – enterprises and consumers – the authors also frame the discussion within the signaling theory. According to this theory, a company conveys specific signals, but it is the recipient (consumer) who observes and interprets these

signals to form their perception of the signaling company and its products. Referring to the RBV of the firm and signaling theory, research hypotheses were formulated, and a model was developed, assuming a positive impact of selected marketing activities from 4Ps on a company's image. To achieve the study's objective, a quantitative survey was conducted using the paper-and-pencil interview (PAPI) method among a randomly selected sample of 503 electricity consumers in Poland. The data collected were subjected to statistical analysis using Statistica 13.3, IBM SPSS 26, and MS Excel spreadsheets. The findings demonstrate that marketing activities undertaken by electricity suppliers, such as offering bundled products with energy (packages), offering discounts, providing an online customer service platform, operating a physical customer service office, and engaging in sponsorship activities, have a positive impact on their image.

1. Literature Review

Management actions refer to specific activities aimed at achieving organizational goals (Kotarbiński, 1975) or intended results (Mucha-Kuś, Softysik, Zamasz, and Szczepańska-Woszczyna, 2021). Marketing activities, as controlled actions taken by a company, seek to evoke desired responses from buyers and shape a positive, trustworthy image among consumers (Koch and Denner, 2025). These activities are often categorized within the marketing mix, known as the "4Ps" of marketing: product, price, place, and promotion (McCarthy and Perreault, 2002).

The term "image" in management science was first conceptualized in the 1950s (Martineau, 1958) and has since evolved in essence, complexity, and importance. By the 1990s, it became clear that success could not solely rely on product quality and pricing but also required a distinct company image to aid consumers in decision-making (Bombiak, 2015). Consumers make choices based on their perception, often with incomplete information. Negative perceptions may deter purchases, while positive ones can lead to buying and recommendations (Rudnicki, 2012). For this article, the authors define a company's image as associations triggered by the company's interactions with its environment, shaped by individual experiences, values, and benefits (Zawadzka, 2010). It influences perceptions (Lemmink, Schuijf, and Streukens, 2003) beliefs (Pomeroy and Johnson, 2009), and impressions about the organization. A positive image contributes to success and value creation in the competitive market (Spyropoulou, Skarmeas, and Katsikeas, 2010), leading to customer satisfaction and loyalty (Hart and Rosenberger, 2004). Companies aim to cultivate a positive image to enhance perceived value and achieve their goals through marketing activities.

The desire of today's organisations to have a specific image that distinguishes them in the market leads them to use various resources at their disposal to build their image in the eyes of customers, *i.e.* how they are perceived (Sziis, 2020). Therefore, if creating a desired image is a goal in the company's strategy and it is assumed that marketing actions based on the company's resources are used to achieve this goal, the relationship model between selected marketing actions within the "4P" framework and the corporate image aligns with the RBV theory. For the purpose of this article, the authors adopt the definition of corporate image as the associations formed in response to the messages and signals sent by the company to its stakeholders, where each individual evaluates the organisation based on his or her own experiences, values, and benefits (Connelly, Ireland, Certo, and Reutzler, 2011).

To the best of the author's knowledge, there is a lack of research on the impact of marketing activities on the corporate image of electricity suppliers, as stated in the introduction. In the following part of this chapter, research hypotheses related to each category of the marketing mix will be developed. The literature suggests that product-related marketing activities are important in shaping how a company is perceived by its customers. Characteristics of these activities include, among others, building product quality, service levels, provided warranties, and creating product lines in the company's offerings (Armstrong and Kotler, 2012; Rafiq and Ahmed, 1995). Customers' perceptions of a company arise from the accumulation of information through which buyers evaluate the company's offerings (Nguyen and Leblanc, 2001). In accordance with the signaling theory, this information stems from the marketing activities of companies that highlight certain aspects, such as the promise of high quality through warranties or the creation of product packages tailored to customer needs. This is intended to influence the positive perception of the energy company by its customers. A 2021 study shows that a green (ecological) product line has an impact on the perception of a company. This study focused on entities in the food industry in Indonesia and was conducted among firms (Sembiring, 2021). In another study conducted in the Korean market among companies in the IT industry, it was also shown that delivered quality, in this case through levels of service warranties, impacts the company's image (Kim and Hyun, 2011). In the context of the activities carried out by energy companies in the product area, it can be observed that in addition to the core product, which is electricity, for which uninterrupted electricity supply is guaranteed by companies (a fundamental

quality criterion at the core product level), additional products are also offered, such as eco-friendly options (indicating electricity sourced exclusively from renewable energy sources or photovoltaic installations for homes with contracts for electricity purchase/sale). Offers for other products are also created in conjunction with electricity, such as natural gas or home appliances like boilers or air purifiers, signalling the satisfaction of various customer needs. Considering the above, the following hypotheses have been formulated:

H1: Offering other products along with electricity by the supplier positively influences its image.

H2: Ensuring the continuity of electricity supply positively influences its image.

Marketing activities related to pricing can be utilized to shape a company's image. Price is recognized as an initial attribute that influences the process of shaping a company's image (Dowling, 1986). The price can signal the quality of the purchased product (Yoo, Lee, and Donthu, 2000). The price level can suggest the product quality and can thus be associated with how the company is perceived (Kim and Hyun, 2011; Adhikari *et al.* 2025). An excessively high price for homogeneous products can have a negative impact on the company's image, as customers realise that they are simply paying more (Kim and Hyun, 2011). On the other hand, the use of discounts and rebates can suggest lower prices, and contribute to a positive perception of the company (Herbig and Milewicz, 1998). Characteristics of marketing activities in the area of pricing have been attributed to, among other things, setting discounts for the purchase of additional products, applying moderate or the lowest prices in the area/region (Poh, Ling, Saludin, and Mukaidono, 2011). In the context of the actions carried out by energy companies in the area of pricing, it can be observed that psychological discounts are already widely applied in fixed fees, for example, a monthly subscription fee of PLN 9.90. Seasonal promotions and discounts are less common. In light of the above, the following hypothesis has been formulated:

H3: Providing price discounts by the electricity supplier positively influence its image.

Distribution channels, owned by the company and its ability to create them in line with the expectations set by customers, as well as the standards offered in the market, can be used to shape the image (Dowling, 1986). By adjusting the intensity of the company's distribution channels, signals are sent to increase the level of convenience for customers, who engage less and sacrifice less in the purchase of products, thereby increasing their satisfaction level (Yoo *et al.* 2000). It has been shown that the intensity of distribution channels has a positive impact on the company's image (Ebeid, 2014), as does the performance of the sales channel (Kim and Hyun, 2011). Characteristics of marketing activities in the area of distribution have been attributed to, among other things, the creation of channels expressed by the distribution range, sales area, location of sales points, and customer service (Rafiq and Ahmed, 1995). Their attractiveness in terms of decor and convenience for customers, including convenient parking, short distance from the place of residence, or the possibility of reaching them by public transport (Poh *et al.* 2011). It is noted that customers prefer companies that have mastered online distribution channels, making them available to buyers and enhancing user convenience (Shpak, Kuzmin, Dvulit, Onysenko, and Sroka, 2020). In the context of activities carried out by energy companies, it can be observed that the largest ones operate physical customer service points, albeit in varying numbers and locations. The locations of these points also vary, with some companies having them exclusively in shopping centers, while others have them in county and provincial towns, often situated on main streets and city centers. Some electricity suppliers do not have physical service points at all. Additionally, the majority of energy companies, including smaller ones, offer alternative distribution channels in the form of websites and electronic platforms, thereby influencing the distribution reach and sales area. In this regard, the following hypotheses have been formulated:

H4: Providing a physical customer service office by an electricity positively influences its image.

H5: Providing a remote customer service office by an electricity supplier positively influences its image.

The ability to undertake and create appropriate promotional activities, including communication and sponsorship, can be used in shaping the image. Advertising is perceived as one of the most visible marketing activities (Buil, 2013). When consumers encounter a company's advertisement, they automatically form an image of it, not necessarily positive. Corporate advertising objectives, in line with the theory of attitudes, would be actions aimed at creating awareness and knowledge of the company among consumers (Dowling, 1986). The amount spent on advertising indicates the company's investment in its brand (Yoo *et al.* 2000). Characteristics of promotional activities include not only advertising but also engaging in events and consciously, purposefully, systematically and strategically influencing the environment through sponsoring entities and events (Rafiq and Ahmed, 1995). In the context of activities carried out by energy companies, it is common to observe advertising

on the Internet, the use of billboards in urban areas, displays in sales points, as well as promotion through sponsorship and supporting sports, cultural, or other local community events. In light of the above, the following hypotheses have been formulated:

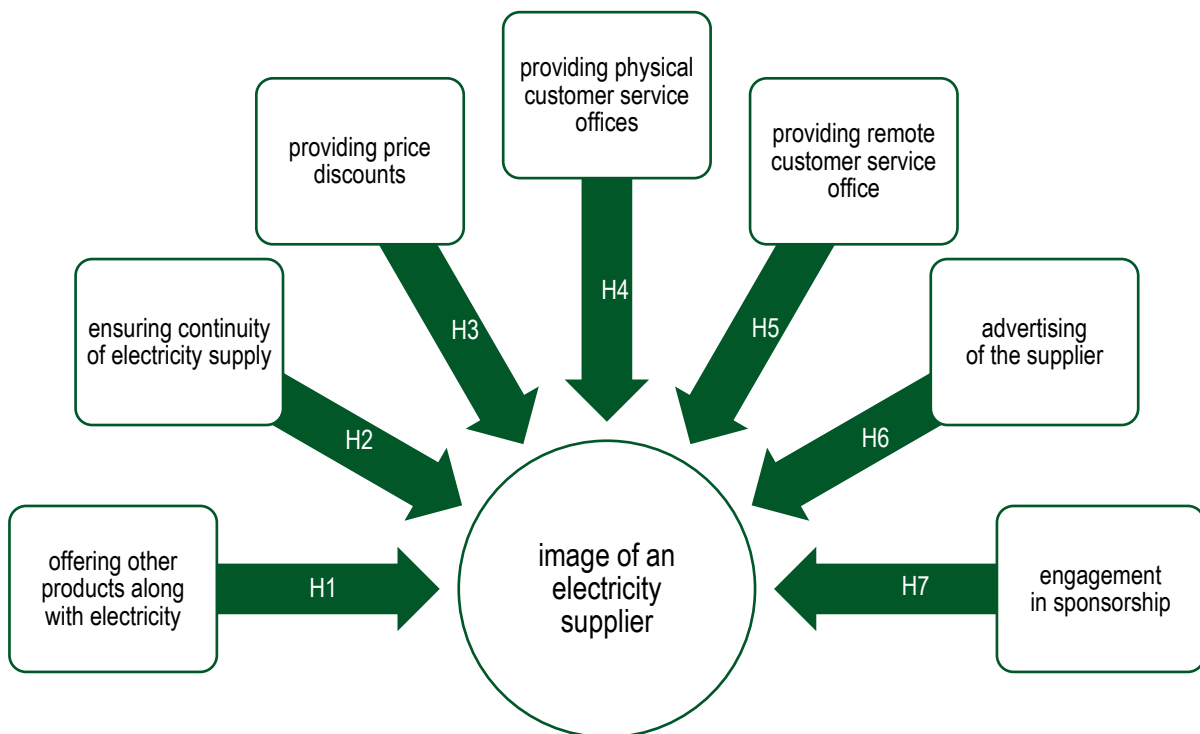
H6: Advertising by the electricity supplier has a positive impact on its image.

H7: Engagement in sponsorship by the electricity supplier has a positive impact on its image.

2. Methodology

To examine the relationship between specific marketing activities within the scope of the marketing mix and the image of an electricity supplier, a research model was developed (Figure 1).

Figure 1. Research model



Source: Own work.

The verification of research hypotheses and the achievement of the study's goal were facilitated by a quantitative study conducted based on primary sources. To gather empirical material, a survey (PAPI) was carried out among individuals responsible for cooperation with the electricity supplier in households in Poland.

The units of the studied population were households in Poland purchasing electricity for their own needs. The sample selection utilized a natural list of population units, considering the geographical distribution of households resulting from their place of residence. The sample size was 503 units, and the "random-route" method was used for its selection. Face-to-face interviews, using a standardized questionnaire, were conducted within households among individuals responsible for cooperation with the electricity supplier in a household.

In the random-route method, 80 randomly selected starting points were used. Firstly, the map of Poland was divided into territorial units according to the Nomenclature of Territorial Units for Statistics (NTUS). Sixteen voivodeships were assigned to six regions and based on the analysis from 16 provincial offices of the Central Statistical Office in Poland – specific towns for the survey were identified, meeting the criterion of the size of the place of residence (local NTUS level). The selected towns were assigned a street name randomly chosen from the publicly available Google Maps service. The first housing unit (*i.e.*, an apartment or a single-family house) was selected as the starting point. Subsequently, the interviewer moved to the next apartment or house, interviewing residents, while interviews were not conducted at the starting points. Buildings were counted by moving to the right from the selected house, on the same side of the street.

Concerning the questionnaire, the Likert scale was used to measure the independent variables describing the marketing activities of the electricity supplier. For each of these variables, a positive statement was constructed, and respondents were asked to indicate the extent to which they agree or disagree with the statement. The degree of agreement was assessed on a five-point scale, with points defined verbally from “strongly disagree” to “strongly agree”. On the other hand, the measurement of the dependent variable, expressing the image of the electricity supplier, involved evaluating this image based on a five-point scale, with points described verbally from “decidedly negative” to “decidedly positive”. The questionnaire was tested in a pilot study before conducting the main survey. A pilot study was conducted using the direct personal interview technique (PAPI) employing the snowball sampling method. It encompassed a sample of 53 Polish residents, all consumers over the age of 18 who purchase electricity for household use. The pilot study included 39 women, accounting for 74% of the respondents, and 14 men, representing 26% of the sample.

The evaluation of the image of the energy company, based on respondents' opinions, was verified in relation to specific factors associated with the characteristics of the supplier. The results of the analyses conducted allow for the verification of research hypotheses. The decision to reject individual null hypotheses in favor of alternative hypotheses was made based on statistical analyses using the chi-square test of independence. It was assumed that individual null hypotheses would be rejected at a significance level of $p > 0.05$. Tabular summaries were created while conducting chi-square tests using Statistica 13.3.

The participants in the sample were classified based on their gender, age, and the size of their place of residence. Regarding gender, there were slightly more women (52.0%) than men (48.0%) in the sample. The majority of the participants resided in rural areas (33.4%), followed by cities with a population of over 200,000 (28.6%), then cities with a population ranging from 20,000 to 200,000 (24.9%), and the fewest participants resided in cities with less than 20,000 inhabitants. The majority of the respondents were in the age range of 30 to 49 years (50.9%), followed by the age group of 50 to 59 years (31.8%), then those over 60 years (14.7%), with the fewest participants in the age group of 18 to 29 years (2.6%).

3. Research Results and Discussion

In the considered research model, the independent variables included: offering additional products along with electricity, ensuring continuity of electricity supply, offering price discounts, providing a physical customer service office, providing a remote customer service office, advertising by the supplier, and engagement in sponsorship activities by the electricity supplier. The dependent variable was the image of the electricity supplier. The results are presented in Table 1.

Table 1. The effects of independent variables on the image of the electricity supplier

Variable	χ^2	P-value)
Offering other products along with electricity	47.156	0.000
Ensuring continuity of electricity supply	8.188	0.085
Providing price discounts	29.985	0.000
Providing physical customer service offices	15.408	0.004
Providing remote customer service offices	13.912	0.008
Advertising by the supplier	9.107	0.058
Engagement in sponsorship	21.104	0.000

Source: Own work.

The results presented in Table 1 indicate that the following factors positively affect the image of the electricity supplier: offering other products along with electricity ($\chi^2 = 47.156$, $p < 0.001$), providing price discounts by the electricity supplier ($\chi^2 = 29.985$, $p < 0.001$), providing physical customer service offices ($\chi^2 = 15.408$, $p < 0.01$), providing a remote customer service office ($\chi^2 = 13,912$, $p < 0.01$), and engagement in sponsorship activities by the electricity supplier ($\chi^2 = 21.104$, $p < 0.001$). Therefore, the following research hypotheses were accepted: H1, H3, H4, H5, H7. However, no statistically significant impact on the electricity supplier's image was observed for the following variables: ensuring continuity of electricity supply ($\chi^2 = 8.188$, $p > 0.05$), and advertising by the electricity supplier ($\chi^2 = 9.107$, $p > 0.05$). As a result, the following research hypotheses were rejected: H2 and H6. The analysis results verified the research hypotheses. For hypotheses H1 and H2 related to the product category, offering additional products alongside electricity positively impacted the energy company's image. However, contrary to expectations, ensuring continuity of electricity supply didn't show

the same effect, which was unexpected. Previous studies in the IT industry have shown that service quality influences company image. The result here may suggest that the reliability of electricity supply is now a basic expectation, not affecting energy companies' image. Regarding the price category and hypothesis H3, offering price discounts positively influences the image of the electricity supplier. This is likely because consumers benefit from lower electricity fees. Previous research supports this positive impact of pricing activities on the company's image (Herbig and Milewicz, 1998; Ling *et al.* 2012). Regarding distribution, providing physical customer service offices and providing remote customer service offices positively influences energy companies' image, as hypothesized (H4) and (H5). This aligns with other studies showing the positive impact of sales channel performance (Kim and Hyun, 2011) and proprietary distribution channels (Ebeid, 2014) on a company's image. In the promotion category, where hypotheses H6 and H7 were proposed, the results may seem surprising due to the rejection of the sixth hypothesis (H6). Previous studies have shown a positive link between advertising spending and company image, but these focused on product categories other than electricity, such as FMCG and food products. These products often use costly television ads for wider reach, unlike electricity suppliers. These differences may explain the varied results in advertising impact. However, regarding the seventh hypothesis (H7), it is clear that sponsorship positively influences energy companies' image, aligning with expectations and previous research (Rafiq and Ahmed, 1995).

Conclusions and Further Research

The study investigated how selected marketing activities affect the image of electricity suppliers. Seven activities across different marketing categories were examined. Drawing from the RBV and signaling theory, each activity was assumed to positively impact on the supplier's image, as hypothesized. These hypotheses were tested using survey data collected from households that use electricity.

The adopted research model assumed the influence of the analyzed marketing activities on the image of electricity suppliers. The results of the empirical study demonstrated that out of the seven examined marketing activities, five had a positive impact on the image of electricity suppliers. These activities spanned the following marketing mix categories: offering other products along with electricity (packages) in the product context, providing discounts in the price domain, offering physical customer service offices and remote customer service offices in the distribution realm, and sponsoring in the promotion domain. The results of the analysis indicate that these marketing activities, encompassing different elements of the marketing mix, have a positive impact on the image of electricity suppliers. This is a significant theoretical insight from the study and contributes to the field of marketing management in electricity supply companies.

Based on the findings, practical recommendations for electricity suppliers are provided. They should integrate the following marketing activities into their marketing mix to enhance their image among households: offering additional products alongside electricity (*e.g.*, private healthcare, access to technicians for minor home repairs), providing discounts (*e.g.*, reducing energy prices for contract extensions), ensuring access to remote customer service and physical customer service offices (*e.g.*, setting up service points in accessible shopping centers), and engaging in sponsorship (*e.g.*, sponsoring local sports events).

This study has limitations. One of these concerns its focus on specific determinants of electricity suppliers' image, namely selected marketing activities. Other unexplored factors may also influence suppliers' image, such as unique marketing activities or factors beyond the marketing mix. Additionally, adopting a consumer perspective, while suitable for image evaluation, has limitations in assessing marketing activities due to consumer perception levels. Conducted on domestic electricity suppliers, the study's results may not directly apply to other industries or countries. The limitations listed suggest potential avenues for future research. Future studies could explore additional determinants of company image beyond those in the marketing mix, such as environmental responsibility or operational transparency. Long-term research assessing marketing activities at the company level and image at the consumer level could provide valuable insights. Testing the research model in different countries is another avenue for exploration, with adjustments made for specific local conditions. Further research could also delve into the outcomes of a company's image, such as customer advocacy or engagement with supplier actions.

Credit Authorship Contribution Statement

Jakub Dąbrowski: Conceptualization, Investigation, Methodology, Project administration, Software, Formal analysis, Writing – original draft, Supervision, Data curation, Validation, Writing – review and editing, Visualization.

Edyta Gołąb-Andrzejak: Project administration, Writing – original draft, Supervision, Writing – review and editing, Visualization.

Declaration of Competing Interest

The authors declare that they have no known competing financial interests or personal relationships that could have appeared to influence the work reported in this paper.

Declaration of Use of Generative AI and AI-Assisted Technologies

The authors declare that they have not used generative AI and AI-assisted technologies in the writing process before submission.

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