

# The Impact of Marketing Communication on Social Innovation in the case Study of the Bottle and Returnable can Deposit System in Slovakia

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**Abstract:** Social innovation brings new solutions that contribute to improving people's quality of life and its role is to develop society. This can be development in different areas such as poverty, unemployment, climate change or ecology. Some social innovations are often perceived negatively by society at large, and it is the role of the institution introducing the innovation to correctly communicate the reasons for and impact of social innovations. Modern society includes modern communication through different communication channels. In order for a social innovation to be successfully introduced and accepted by society, a communication strategy needs to be developed. Organizations implementing social innovations are aware that marketing communication has a major impact on social innovations and can be a decisive factor in achieving behavioral change in society in relation to the problems the social innovation is intended to address. The aim of this study is to highlight social innovation in the environmental field in Slovakia using the example of the bottle and returnable can deposit system. In its government programme, the Slovak Republic has committed to increase the return rate of returnable packaging from the current 60% to 90% by 2025, while the returnable packaging deposit system was only introduced in Slovakia in 2022. In this paper, we will analyze the impact of marketing communication and its impact on the results of the introduction of social innovation in the field of returnable packaging deposit.

**Keywords:** social innovation, ecology, deposit return system, bottle, PET, can marketing communication

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## 1. Introduction

At its core, social innovation seeks social change. Social innovation brings new solutions that contribute to improving people's quality of life and its role is to develop society. This can be development in different areas such as poverty, unemployment, climate change or ecology. In order for social innovations to be accepted by society, marketing communication to the public is important. In addition to bringing new solutions, social innovations address a number of societal problems. Social innovation is not only addressed by scientists, but also by legislation. Social innovation, as understood by the European Union, is meant to "empower people and lead change" in the sense that it leads to social change that creates sustainable social inclusion (Fougère, Segercrantz & Seeck, 2017). However, there are many opinions and definitions of what social innovation is. We can understand it as: "A social innovation is a new solution to a social problem that is more effective, efficient, sustainable, or equitable than existing solutions and whose value created accrues primarily to society as a whole rather than to private individuals" (Phills, Deiglmeier, & Miller, 2008, p. 39). Social innovation is present in human history as a manifestation of humanity's creative capacity and as a result of humanity's efforts to develop answers to its needs and to improve its quality of life (Cajaiba-Santana, 2014). The concept of social innovation is also related to social entrepreneurship. Social entrepreneurship strives for the common good, namely sustainability for both people and the planet (Muscat & Whitty, 2009). Green entrepreneurship is also an important area of social entrepreneurship. Social entrepreneurship is essentially a type of entrepreneurship; a social entrepreneur is a type of entrepreneur (Dees, 1998). There are a number of works that attempt to clarify what social entrepreneurship is. Nevertheless, social entrepreneurship is still a complex concept because it is difficult to draw clear boundaries between what is social entrepreneurship and what is not (Peredo & McLean, 2006). If we talk about social entrepreneurship, it should have elements of social innovation, i.e. to improve the social condition. One area is the Deposit return system, which is based on the legislation of countries and aims to make beverage containers more recyclable by a system of returning the packaging to the store. The Slovak Republic is one of the countries where this system is in place. Approximately 1.3 billion beverage containers are sold annually in Slovakia, with a target of collecting at least 60% of recyclable containers by the end of 2022 and up to 90% by 2025. Slovakia would thus be four years ahead of the targets set by the European Union's Single-Use Plastics Directive, which requires Member States to separate 90% of single-use plastic bottles by 2029 (Tomra, 2022). This is a social innovation that should have a positive impact on the environment. Less pollution of rivers or forests is expected. Deposit return schemes are now recognised as a very effective tool to reduce waste and ensure proper recycling.

## 2. Deposit return system in Slovak republic

In November 2022, the European Commission (Commission) presented a proposal for a Regulation on packaging and packaging waste. The proposal contains various measures on recyclability and packaging minimisation, including a requirement for each Member State to introduce a deposit and return scheme (DRS) for all single-use plastic and metal beverage packaging of up to 3 liters by 1 January 2029 (excluding packaging containing wine, spirits and dairy products). Member States are exempted if they can demonstrate a recycling rate of at least 90% of the materials covered by the Regulation in the two years prior to the entry into force of the Regulation. On 1 January 2022, the Slovak Republic became the eleventh EU country, along with Lithuania, to operate a Deposit Return System.

**Table 1: Europe Countries with deposit return system**

Country	State of DRS	PET bottles collection rate	Implementation year
Denmark	Implemented	96 %	2002
Estonia	Implemented	86 %	2005
Finland	Implemented	92 %	1996
Netherlands	Implemented	65 %	2005
Croatia	Implemented	86 %	2006
Iceland	Implemented	87 %	1989
Lithuania	Implemented	92 %	2016
Latvia	Implemented	54 % (first six months)	2022
Slovakia	Implemented	69 % (first seven months)	2022
Germany	Implemented	95 %	2003
Malta	Implemented	no data (implemented in november)	2022
Norway	Implemented	88 %	1999
Sweden	Implemented	86 %	1984

Source Own processing

The administrator was established by four non-profit organizations authorized by the Ministry of Environment of the Slovak Republic. They are (Deposit Return System Administrator's Annual Report 2021, 2021):

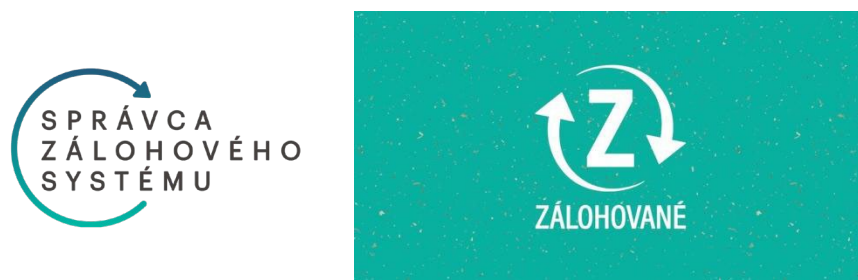
- Association of producers of soft drinks and mineral waters in Slovakia (Asociácia výrobcov nealkoholických nápojov a minerálnych vôd na Slovensku),
- Slovak Association of Beer and Malt Producers (Slovenské združenie výrobcov piva a sladu),
- Slovak Modern Business Alliance (Slovenská aliancia moderného obchodu),
- Association of Commerce of the Slovak Republic (Zväz obchodu Slovenskej republiky).

Slovakia has committed to increase the current collection rate of beverage packaging from 60% to 90% in 2025 (Deposit Return System Administrator's Annual Report 2021, 2021). Every consumer who buys a drink will pay a deposit of €0.15 for the returnable packaging in addition to the price of the drink. This money will be refunded if the returnable packaging is returned to a shop that has a machine for collecting returnable packaging.

## 3. Case study: Marketing Communication of Deposit return system in Slovak republic

The Deposit Return System in Slovakia was launched in 2022. This social innovation needs to be accepted by the public. The communication was aimed at two target groups (Deposit Return System Administrator's Annual Report 2021, 2021):

- the professional public - manufacturers, distributors and retailers - the brand of the Backup Scheme Manager,
- consumers - Slovakia backs up.



**Figure 1: the logos of the communicated brands - the first brand aimed at wholesale and the second brand aimed at consumers.**

Prior to the launch of the backup system, an integrated marketing communication was launched. It was targeted at all stakeholders, who passed the information about the back-up system on. In 2018, a survey was conducted in Slovakia, which indicated that 70% of Slovaks support backup and 30% reject it (Backup System Administrator Annual Report 2021). We can say that Slovakia had a good starting line in the case of adopting a backup system. The campaign aimed at consumers started in September 2021 and ended in April 2022. The aim of the communication was first of all to prepare people for backup and to set a positive emotion towards the system and the overall change in consumer behavior that the introduction of backup brings, and at the same time to stimulate in each one of us a social responsibility towards the future of our country and the environment in which we live (Annual Report of the Backup System Administrator 2021). The campaign involved social figures - media personalities, influencers. The pre-launch campaign was cryptic, with billboards carrying the message "The change comes from 1 January." The billboards (figure 2) depicted a well-known personality with the logo "Z - backup", which was not known to the public at the time. The billboard campaign resembled a political campaign and raised many questions. The campaign also focused on PR, with the aim of raising awareness of the back-up system in Slovakia through the media.



**Figure 2: Billboard campaign**

Source FLEMA Media Awards 2022

The campaign aimed to change consumer behaviour and teach people a new habit - to back up. The marketing goal of the campaign was to collect up to 60% of beverage packaging (PET bottles and cans) by the end of 2022. The campaign had to break down the initial barriers to returning beverage containers, clearly explain the principle of deposit and reach the whole population, including children and residents in every region.

### **3.1 Vratko Štupeľ advertising campaign**

The 13-year-old boy Vratko Štupeľ became the face of the advertising campaign in Slovakia. His name in Slovak is a play on words *Vratko* from the word return, back up and *Štupeľ* as a colloquial expression for the lid of a PET bottle. Vratko is an ECO lover and his slogan, as well as the main motto of the campaign, is "*I back up, rap and enjoy life*".

It is typical for Vratko to introduce generation Z, a green influencer who cares about the protection of nature and especially the elimination of plastics for the environment. He communicates his passion very creatively and playfully through social networks for his peers and also older age groups. Vratko Štupeľ does not see waste as a problem, but as an opportunity. That's why he advances by one hundred and six - he earns extra by collecting

bottles and cans wherever he goes. His generation is the greenest generation ever. "We believe that he will support his peers to bring change to their parents, grandparents, aunts, uncles, neighbors... We all want to live in a more beautiful and cleaner world, but young people are the ones who are more willing to step out of their comfort zone to bring change. Vratko's mission is to support them and show them that they are not alone in this", said the creative director of the concept Branislav Macko from the Ponyhouse agency.



Figure 3: Vratko Štupel logo and character

Source <https://vratkostupel.sk>

As an influencer, Vratko tries to apply all the current music and dance trends on TikTok, Instagram and Facebook and creatively connects them all with the topic of backing up and returning bottles to PET machines. Of course, he answers the "diss" of fans, explains, educates, makes "how-to" videos and instructions on how easy it is to return bottles to stores, how exchange cards work, what the inside of bottle return devices looks like and why containers can't be bent, etc. His most watched videos reach over 100,000 views on TikTok and Instagram.

Table 2: Number of interactions on Vratko Štupel's profiles (as of 7/15/2023)

Social network	Videa name	Number of views	Number of likes
Instagram	"Štupel, how to contribute to a more beautiful nature?" Look 🤓👍	247 000 views	434 likes
Instagram	Hello friends! I hope you like my new ad as well as the backup. 📺 We had a great time with @fero_joke. 😊	150 000 views	612 likes
Instagram	And what type of backup are you? 😊 It's clear to me 🙌	7 890 views	158 likes
TikTok	Replying to @Neviem You guessed several. 😊 Follow me on IG and join the competition. 🙌	16 500 views	477 likes
TikTok	The best thing in the world. 😊	11 100 views	204 likes
TikTok	Thanks to Backup, we have a cleaner nature! ❤️	7 890 views	158 likes
Facebook	Hi, I'm Vratko Štupel and I love backing up plastic bottles and cans. And you? Don't forget to follow me on TikTok and Instagram for more of my videos!	27 500 views	232 likes
Facebook	These are your most frequently asked questions about me and backup.	12 600 views	62 likes
Facebook	Just me, PETs and cans. You can find more of my videos on my Instagram.	11 200 views	100 likes


### 3.2 Results of Deposit return system in Slovak republic

Campaigns are often difficult to measure because we need to know the reality of the situation before the campaign is launched. The backup system administrator measured several indicators before and after the campaign. Seven Key Performance Indicators were measured:

- spontaneous knowledge (PET/Can, PET, Can),
- supported knowledge - knowledge of the backup system,
- clarity of the system,
- interest in getting involved - I'm certainly interested for 15 cents (PET, Can),
- Knowledge of the "Z - I back up" logo,
- Knowledge of the brand "slovenskozalohuje.sk",
- Knowledge of the message "The only effective solution".

The actual survey of the seven indicators was conducted by 2muse after Q1 in 2022. Deposit return system in the spontaneous knowledge before the campaign itself ranged from 6% to 15%. Post-campaign, spontaneous familiarity was 18% to 36%. At the end of the campaign, spontaneous knowledge ranged from 64% to 90%. Within the spontaneous familiarity, we see the impact of marketing communication on the adoption and familiarity of the social innovation within the deposit return system. Awareness of the deposit return system before the campaign was at 85% and after the campaign was up to 97%. Within this inquiry question, we see that marketing communication had an educative impact on the adoption and understandability of the social innovation in this case. Only 50% of respondents were interested in participating in the deposit return scheme in June 2021, whereas this was already 76% after the campaign and the impact of the marketing communication. The marketing communication had a large impact on the familiarity of the brand "Z" (Deposit). This brand that appears on PET and can was only at 7% in the month of June 2021, before the launch of the system. After the communication itself, this knowledge was up to 81%. In Table 2 we see more detailed data that shows the importance of marketing communication in the adoption and knowledge of a social innovation, in our case the deposit return system in Slovakia.

**Table 3: KPIs of campaign**

Key Performance Indicators		June 2021	October 2021	April 2022
Spontaneous knowledge	PET/ sheet metal	15 %	36 %	90 %
	PET	14 %	34 %	80 %
	Can	6 %	18 %	64 %
Supported knowledge		85 %	86 %	97 %
Clarity of the system		22 %	26 %	52 %
Interest in getting involved (I'm certainly interested for 15 cents)	PET	50 %	57 %	76 %
	Can	50 %	58 %	74 %
 Knowledge of the		07 %	15 %	81 %
Knowledge of the brand "slovenskozalohuje.sk"		05 %	10 %	34 %
Knowledge of the message "The only effective solution" („Jediné účinné riešenie“)		65 %	67 %	74 %

Source: 2muse agency

Prior to the launch of the deposit return system, well-known celebrities who are close to green issues or who have a large influence and impact on the public were involved in the awareness campaign. These were personalities such as Adela Banášová (popular TV presenter), Sajfa (TV and radio presenter), Fero Joke (influencer) and others. Well-known faces also did an awareness campaign for this social innovation. It was necessary to get the letter "Z" into people's awareness. PR also played an important role, involving politicians, government institutions and other authorities. For example, people were introduced to the deposit return system, its benefits and the way it works through TV news reports. It was necessary to highlight the positives in order for the population to accept the system. Because of the campaign, only 50% of the population was willing to participate in the deposit return scheme. This has just changed with the campaign, where we are seeing an increase in willingness to participate of up to 26%. It should be noted that without marketing communication, this social innovation might not have been successful or would have taken much longer to be adopted by the discoverers, which would have had an impact on the environment.

### **3.3 Impacts of social innovation Deposit return system in Slovak republic in practice**

The deposit return system has delivered real results not only in numbers but also in real life. This social innovation also has a positive impact on the environment. The media are interested in the environmental impact of the deposit return system. On 13 March 2023, the Markiza television station broadcast a report on the voluntary cleaning of the Liptovská Mara reservoir in its news bulletin. The report stated that the waste around the reservoir from PET bottles and cans has decreased by approximately 70% (PET bottle deposit..., 2023). In the case of this example, we see the real impact of social innovation in practice. The deposit return system also has a positive impact on national parks. Tomáš Dražil, Director of the Slovak Paradise National Park Administration, told the public broadcaster Rozhlas a Televízia Slovenska. "The idea of the deposit system itself is excellent. It is already a much better situation than it was years ago." He was referring to the litter situation in national parks, with conservationists saying 2020 would see the biggest pollution in the park's history. In both cases, the positive impact of social innovation is seen to have improved the situation that existed before the innovation was adopted.

## **4. Conclusion**

Society in the new millennium is facing questions concerning the sustainability of life on planet earth. Governments, companies and individuals are trying to make a difference through social innovation. Slovakia adopted a similar social innovation in 2022: the deposit return system. In this paper, we have discussed the importance of marketing communication of social innovation, as non-adoption of social innovation by the society is a common phenomenon. It is the communication of positive messages that is an important element to positively influence companies to adopt a social innovation. Our paper described the relationship of marketing communication to innovation adoption. Today's times are full of information, often misinformation, that can influence the adoption or non-adoption of an innovation. It is therefore necessary to implement marketing communication that targets the public in the case of innovations, taking into account that the public itself is made up of several target groups (young to retired). In our case, the marketing communication was targeted at the whole of Slovakia, and was implemented in different environments - billboard campaign, television, press and internet. If we take the Internet, this is of course the communication channel that targets young people. Young people, on the other hand, do not watch television and television news, so this channel was primarily targeted at the middle and older generation. If we look at the results of the campaign that has taken place in Slovakia, we can consider it a success. The 'Z' symbol itself, which stands for deposit return system, was known to only 7% of the Slovak population before the campaign. After the launch of this campaign, the figure rose to 81%. In the context of this paper, we see that marketing communication must be an important part of the changes we want to achieve in social innovation.

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