

FEMINATIVES IN MARKETING COMMUNICATION: A CASE STUDY OF SELECTED CAMPAIGNS

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Purpose: The aim of this article is to analyze selected Polish marketing campaigns focusing on the use of feminatives.

Design/methodology/approach: To achieve this, a narrative literature review was conducted alongside a qualitative content analysis of examples of marketing campaigns emphasizing feminine noun forms.

Findings: The analysis highlights various strategies employed by companies to incorporate this topic into their communication and addresses broader social contexts, such as conducting studies on feminatives and educating audiences through brand initiatives.

Research limitations/implications: Further research could focus on consumer attitudes towards the use of feminatives by companies in marketing communication, as well as the perception of brand inclusivity by audiences in the context of their addressing the topic of feminatives or inclusive language.

Practical implications: The conclusions drawn from the analysis may serve as guidance for companies in shaping marketing communication strategies based on inclusive language.

Social implications: The article contributes to raising public awareness about feminatives.

Originality/value: The article brings new value by analyzing examples of marketing campaigns in Poland in which feminatives constituted a significant element of the message.

Keywords: feminatives, inclusive language, inclusivity, marketing communication.

Category of the paper: Research paper.

1. Introduction

Broadly understood inclusivity has become an increasingly prominent topic in the context of management and marketing. Its manifestations can be observed in activities related to marketing communication, socially engaged marketing, corporate social responsibility (CSR), femvertising, employer branding, diversity, equity and inclusion strategies (DEI), and diversity management within organizations. Increasing attention is being paid to eliminating

discrimination, promoting equality, and reflecting social diversity across various dimensions, including linguistic ones.

The primary objective of this article is to analyze selected Polish marketing campaigns focusing on feminatives. Several specific goals have also been outlined:

- To compare the concepts of inclusivity, inclusive language, and feminatives.
- To identify examples of actions involving feminine noun forms in marketing communication.
- To review literature and research on feminatives in the Polish language.
- To analyze cases where feminine noun forms serve as a central element of marketing campaigns.

The research problem concerns verifying how feminatives can be utilized in marketing campaigns. Additionally, specific research questions have been posed:

1. What are the concepts of inclusivity, inclusive language, and feminatives?
2. What examples exist of actions utilizing feminatives in marketing communication?
3. What is the current state of research on feminine noun forms in the Polish language?
4. What are some cases where feminatives have been used as a central element in marketing campaigns?

The article is structured as follows: Section 2 reviews key theoretical concepts and previous research on feminatives in Polish and international contexts. Section 3 outlines the research methods. Section 4 presents the main findings from campaign analysis. Section 5 discusses these findings in relation to existing literature and broader implications. Section 6 provides conclusions and future research directions.

2. Literature review

The Polish Language Dictionary PWN defines "inclusive" as "combining or encompassing a whole; intended for everyone" (PWN). Inclusivity broadly refers to practices that involve and consider all individuals regardless of characteristics such as gender, race, sexual orientation, disability status, or age. It also signifies behavior that respects and accepts diversity (Zabratańska, Triuskaite, 2024). According to Dorota Murzyn, social inclusion is "the process of integrating marginalized individuals into mainstream life through full participation in societal activities" (Murzyn, 2018).

Inclusivity can also be discussed in terms of inclusive language – linguistic constructions that do not exclude anyone and reflect social diversity. One definition describes it as:

A way of communicating that aims to include diverse social groups and ensure equal opportunities for each one. It is a tool that helps build an inclusive society where everyone has equal opportunities and access to resources. Inclusive language is free from words or

phrases that reflect prejudice or discriminatory stereotypes about specific individuals or groups. It is also language that does not unintentionally exclude people from feeling accepted (Jankowska-Rangelov, 2024).

Inclusive speech also involves avoiding stereotypes or using offensive terms for certain social groups (Chmura-Rutkowska, Szpyra-Kozłowska, 2022). Examples include using terms like “osoby z niepełnosprawnością” instead of “osoby niepełnosprawne” ("people with disabilities" instead of "disabled people") or „osoby czarnoskóre” instead of „murzyni” ("Black individuals" instead of outdated terms like "Negroes"). Regarding gender specifically, it includes using gender-neutral expressions, such as both masculine and feminine forms i.e. “studentki i studenci” (female and male students) or neutral terms like “osoby studiujące” (studying individuals), and respecting preferences related to gender identity.

Inclusive language also encompasses feminatives and other constructions that emphasize women's visibility. Linguists Małgorzata Karwatowska and Jolanta Szpyra-Kozłowska highlight the phenomenon of women's linguistic invisibility: "The use of masculine nouns as generic terms is often referred to as 'linguistic invisibility of women', as their usage makes general texts, laws and regulations sound like they pertain exclusively to men" (Karwatowska, Szpyra-Kozłowska, 2005). This invisibility can be countered by using feminatives – feminine personal nouns referring specifically to women (Latos, 2020). The use of feminatives aims to enhance linguistic precision and acknowledge women's roles across various domains.

In Polish society, attitudes toward feminatives vary widely. The Polish Language Council at the Presidium of the Polish Academy of Sciences has addressed this issue twice. In 2012, it stated that while feminatives might be permissible linguistically, their lack of widespread use stems from negative reactions among speakers. The position was concluded with the statement:

Language cannot be imposed upon; no legal regulation will make Poles begin using forms like „inżyniera” or „inżynierka” (female enginner), „docentka” bądź „docenta” (female docent), „ministra” or „ministerka” (female minister), „maszynistka pociągu” (female engine driver), „sekretarza stanu” (female secretary of state) or anything such as these (Polish Language Council, 2012).

In turn, in 2019, in another position of the Polish Language Council on the discussed issue, it was emphasized that the arguments of opponents of using feminine personal nouns are mostly unfounded. Linguists stated that it is up to the speakers to decide whether to use feminatives or not. Approval was also expressed for linguistic symmetry:

greater, possibly full symmetry of masculine and feminine personal names in the vocabulary is needed in Polish. The use of feminatives in statements, for example, the alternating repetition of feminine and masculine nouns “Polki i Polacy” (Polish women and Polish men) is a sign that speakers feel the need to increase the visibility of women in language and texts (Polish Language Council, 2019).

It can therefore be noted that there are some differences in both opinions expressed by the Polish Language Council over the course of several years. In the newer position, greater understanding for the use of feminatives or even support for the symmetrical use of personal forms in the Polish language is visible (Latos, 2020).

In the context of marketing communication, understood as "the process of interaction and dialogue between a company and its target market" (Wiktor, 2013), inclusivity refers to a strategy aimed at incorporating social diversity into the brand's message, so that as many recipients as possible can identify with it, regardless of gender identity, psychosexual orientation, ethnic origin, social status, and other diverse characteristics. Inclusivity is becoming an increasingly important element in building authentic relationships with customers and increasing brand loyalty.

One of the most important elements of building inclusive communication is inclusive language, including the use of feminine noun forms. According to Marta Jarosz, the themes of Instagram activities of inclusive language activists focus on women, non-heteronormative and non-cisgender people, people excluded due to appearance, and people with disabilities (Jarosz, 2021). Feminatives themselves are relatively rarely the main element of marketing campaigns – although such examples can be found – but brands can increase the inclusivity of their messages by using symmetrical personal forms.

The use of feminatives in brands' marketing communication falls within the scope of activities from various areas such as:

- Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR).
- Cause Related Marketing (CRM).
- Employer Branding (EB).
- Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion strategy (DEI).
- Diversity management in the organization.
- Femvertising, i.e., an advertising strategy aimed at women and promoting gender equality.

Examples of activities that include the use of feminatives include: their use in broadly understood content marketing (e.g., in content published on social media, newsletters, messages sent directly to a given customer), internal communication with employees, job advertisements, job titles and roles performed in the organization, advertisements targeted not only at women, creating social campaigns, or organizing training for employees on inclusive language.

Research on feminatives is conducted in various areas – feminine noun forms are analyzed linguistically, cases of their occurrence in the history of the Polish language are sought, and declarations regarding their use and opinions on the subject are also examined.

As early as 2011, research was carried out that showed that at least half of Polish women do not see the need to use feminatives in everyday life. Additionally, Katarzyna Hołojda writes that "the vast majority have no greater knowledge about feminatives and associate the creation

of feminine names of professions and functions with a 'fight against an imaginary enemy'" (Hołojda, 2011).

According to a study "Język ofert pracy" ("Language of job offers") conducted in 2021 by the "Pracuj.pl" portal together with the "Sukcesu Pisanego Szminką" Foundation, 83% of respondents support the use of feminine job titles, and 78% expect feminatives in job advertisements. 3/4 of respondents want to have an impact on the name of the position they hold, while less than 30% believe that feminine noun forms do not fit some professions (Pracuj.pl, 2021).

In 2022, as part of the larger campaign "Wystarczy słowo, by zacząć zmianę" ("All it takes is a word to start the change"), Bank BNP Paribas also conducted research on feminatives "Jak język kształtuje rzeczywistość" ("How language shapes reality"). 58% of adult Poles believe that language should keep up with changes in the world. In turn, almost 40% show "at least moderate enthusiasm for feminatives". Women show greater openness and willingness to use feminine noun forms. The conclusion that emerges from the research results is that the key factor in openness to feminatives is openness in general (BNP Paribas, 2022).

According to the PSMM Monitoring & More report "Feminatywy w mediach" ("Feminatives in the media") from 2023 on the occurrence of feminatives in the media in the previous three years, the frequency of the word "prezeska" (female president) doubled, "menedżerka" (female manager) – tripled, "wykładowczyni" (female lecturer) – quadrupled, while the word "naukowczyni" (female scientist) increased sixfold, compared to the previous study from 2020. However, the authors of the report draw attention to the still existing disproportion and the much more frequent use of male forms (PSMM Monitoring & More, 2023).

A report from a survey "Czy kobiety używają feminatywów?" ("Do women use feminatives?") by the Center for Research on Social Relations of the SWPS University from 2024 indicates that 46% of respondents used feminatives to describe their role. The use of feminine noun forms was more common among professionally inactive respondents, while among those professionally active, only one in three used feminatives to describe their professional role (Leszko, Formanowicz, 2024).

There is a lack of research on the use of feminatives in marketing communication on the Polish market. Only a relatively small number of publications devoted to inclusive language in social media or more broadly to inclusivity in marketing campaigns can be found. In 2021, Marta Jarosz examined the social perception of language that does not discriminate on the basis of gender, focusing on the assessment of the activities of inclusive communication activists on Instagram. 60% of respondents agreed with the statement that some features of the Polish language may negatively affect the pursuit of gender equality. When it comes to the use of feminatives, 19% of respondents declared that they always create them when the statement concerns a female person, and 39% chose the answer "sometimes" (Jarosz, 2021).

In turn, according to the report “Marka jest kobietą” (“Brand is a Woman”) from 2023 presented by the Streetcom agency, 71% of respondents believe that brands offering products for women should use feminatives. 61% of them, however, are in favor of using feminine noun forms in practice – in the names of professions, functions or positions (Streetcom, 2023).

3. Methods

This study employed a qualitative research design combining a narrative literature review with qualitative content analysis. The narrative literature review was conducted to compile key concepts and assess the current state of research on feminatives within the Polish language. It covered academic publications, institutional reports, and media texts on feminatives and inclusive language. The qualitative content analysis was applied to examples of marketing campaigns emphasizing feminine noun forms. It focused on four Polish marketing campaigns: Free Now (2021), Solar (2023), Your Kaya (2021), and BNP Paribas (2022). These cases were selected based on their explicit use of feminatives in marketing communication. The analysis identified how feminatives were incorporated into campaign narratives, language, and communication with customers.

The method is exploratory in nature, aiming to identify patterns of feminine use in marketing communication rather than establish causal relationships. Limitations of this approach include the small sample size, qualitative character of analysis, and focus on the Polish context.

4. Analysis of selected campaigns

An example of marketing communication incorporating inclusive language and feminatives can be seen in Free Now's 2021 campaign, which aimed to emphasize the brand's declared values: inclusivity, equality, and freedom. One element of this campaign was the introduction of the service “Dla niej” (“For her”), which provided taxi rides exclusively for women, driven only by female drivers. They also started using the term “kierowczynie taxi” (female taxi drivers) in their communication, referring to women working with the platform (Nowy Marketing, 2023).

As part of Free Now's campaign “Dla różnych i równych podróżnych” (“For Different and Equal Travelers”), promotional materials juxtaposed what the creators considered two opposing groups of customers to emphasize that, despite their differences, they are equally important to the company (Nowy Marketing, 2021). One of the graphics posted on social media featured the

text “Dla pań doktor i doktorek” (“For lady doctors and female doctors”). On the one hand, this demonstrates an attempt to reach female audiences who support the use of feminatives, and on the other, women who prefer to use masculine forms of nouns with the addition of “pani” (lady) before them.

In 2023, Solar launched the project „Przejdźmy na FeminaTYwy!” („Let's Switch to Feminatives!”). As part of it, several ambassadors of the campaign were selected from among the employees, as well as one ambassador – a man who volunteered as a feminist supporting women and feminatives. The company emphasizes that it wants to mark the presence of women, their contribution to the development of the brand, and their roles in the industry and society. The project description states: “We want feminine grammatical forms of job titles to become an expression of respect for women's work”. Part of the campaign was, among others, the collection “FeminaTYwy” (“Feminatives”) (Solar, 2023).

Brands can refer to the topic of inclusive language, including feminatives, not only by creating comprehensive marketing campaigns, but also, for example, in individual content posted on social media. An example is a post by Your Kaya from February 6, 2021, published on Instagram, which explains what inclusive language is and why it is worth using. The brand emphasized that the post was intended to answer questions from the audience that arose after it began using inclusive language in its communication. They also focused on education and encouraging discussion, instead of just informing about their activities, and recommended specific Instagram profiles whose creators deal with content in the field of inclusive language (Your Kaya, 2021).

In 2022, BNP Paribas, which describes itself as “a bank of a changing world”, conducted the campaign „Wystarczy słowo, by zacząć zmianę” (“All it takes is a word to start a change”) in the field of social marketing. It consisted of several parts – a study, a podcast, and a dictionary (BNP Paribas, 2022). It aimed to promote feminatives as a tool to combat gender stereotypes in the labor market. Its message was based on the idea that language has enormous power in shaping the perception of the world and can contribute to equalizing opportunities between the sexes. On the website dedicated to the campaign, you can learn about its elements in the form of the following tabs:

- Why feminatives – a brief explanation of the reason for addressing the topic of feminine forms of nouns in the campaign, which emphasized the aspect of equal opportunities in career choice.
- Study – a report from the research “Jak język kształtuje rzeczywistość?” (“How language shapes reality?”) conducted among two groups – children and adults, the aim of which was to show the impact of using masculine or gender-neutral job titles on their perception by children and the perception of personality in adults; the results showed that children more often associate specific professions with men if masculine forms of nouns are used.

- Read – articles prepared by the research partners, including the "Pracuj.pl" portal, whose research on feminatives has already been mentioned in this article.
- Podcast – a conversation with four experts in the field of feminatives (Ewelina Moroń – linguist, trainer of simple Polish and effective writing, Janina Bąk – statistician, author of a bestselling book, Joanna Czczcott – political scientist and reporter, and Agnieszka Konarzewska – Director of Marketing Communications Department at Bank BNP Paribas), who commented on the results of the conducted research and talked about feminatives and their impact on women's lives.
- Dictionary – the possibility of using an interactive dictionary of feminine job titles, in which, after entering the masculine form, the appropriate feminine appears along with a comment; you can also vote for the preferred variant if a given profession has several possible feminine forms, and report a missing job title.
- Partners – a tab with campaign partners.

Bank BNP Paribas' campaign included several different activities, including social research, for the discussion of which experts in the field of feminatives were invited. It is also worth paying attention to the active tab with a dictionary of feminine job titles. These elements can be an example of good practice in creating social campaigns, which are part of a broader marketing communication of companies.

5. Discussion

The findings of this study align with existing research indicating growing support for feminatives in Poland (Pracuj.pl, 2021; BNP Paribas, 2022; PSMM Monitoring & More, 2023). However, this support does not always translate into everyday language use, particularly among women themselves (Leszko, Formanowicz, 2024). This ambivalence mirrors the gradual linguistic normalization of feminatives in public discourse.

In marketing, feminatives can support inclusive communication strategies, strengthening a brand's image as socially responsible. This aligns with broader international trends in gender-inclusive branding (Eisend, 2019; Schroeder, 2020). However, unlike some Western markets, where gender-inclusive communication has become mainstream, the Polish context remains more polarized.

This study highlights the potential for feminatives to serve not only as linguistic forms but as strategic tools that align with CSR goals, DEI strategies, and femvertising. Nevertheless, the limited number of campaigns indicates that many brands still avoid explicit engagement with gendered language.

6. Conclusion

Feminatives are a popular topic, both as a subject of scientific research and as part of the marketing communication of brands. Scientific publications indicate that their use is supported by the majority of Poles, but women are not always as willing to use them for themselves. Most respondents also believe that feminine forms of nouns should be visible in job advertisements, names of positions, roles and functions, and professions, as well as in the communication of brands offering products for women. It should also be noted that, according to some people, not all words are suitable for creating feminatives. It should be emphasized that despite the growing social support for feminine forms of nouns, there is still a noticeable gender inequality in the Polish language.

Companies can address the topic of feminatives or, more broadly, inclusive language in marketing communication in various ways. Creating comprehensive social marketing campaigns can be one strategy. Activities aimed not only at influencing the brand image and creating it as inclusive, but also those that bring a real effect for society, such as conducting social research or educating audiences, seem important. In this light, the campaign „Wystarczy słowo, by zacząć zmianę” ("All it takes is a word to start the change") by Bank BNP Paribas, which consisted of various activities on several levels, was well-received. Another example of good practice in the area of feminine noun forms is simply using them in practice – in communication in social media, towards their female employees, clients, or all female recipients.

It is worth paying attention to the challenge that, in the context of feminatives and inclusivity in general, can be for companies to effectively combine marketing strategies with a social mission. One must also not forget about a key aspect in the evaluation of all activities in the field of corporate social responsibility, which is the consistency between declarations and practice. Instrumental treatment of feminine forms of nouns, devoid of a broader context of activities for equality, may meet with negative consumer reception.

The analysis revealed several ways in which feminatives were incorporated into brand communication strategies. Free Now used feminatives in the context of female taxi drivers as part of its inclusivity-focused campaign. Solar launched an internal and external communication initiative emphasizing feminine forms of job titles. Your Kaya applied inclusive language education through social media, explaining and normalizing feminatives. BNP Paribas conducted a large-scale campaign combining research, education, and interactive tools to promote feminatives.

The campaigns demonstrated different levels of engagement with inclusive language. Some focused on explicit linguistic representation, while others framed feminatives within broader social narratives, including gender equality and empowerment. Feminatives served both as linguistic markers and as symbols of brand values. The theoretical implications of this

study emphasize the link between language and social representation. Practically, brands can integrate feminatives through their communication strategies in a way that supports authenticity and inclusion.

Undoubtedly, further research on the topic addressed in this article is needed. It is worth conducting research on consumer attitudes towards the use of feminatives by companies in marketing communication, as well as the perception of brand inclusivity by audiences in the context of their addressing the topic of feminatives or inclusive language. An analysis of the long-term impact of using feminatives and inclusive language on the brand image and comparative analyses with international contexts would certainly also be valuable.

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