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Using New Marketing Technologies for Promoting Traditional Food Products

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ABSTRACT

This article aims to identify the ways in which producers of traditional Romanian food promote and commercialize in the digital era. Romanian manufacturers of traditional products are hardworking people preoccupied with the quality of the products that they so dearly prepare, but who are struggling to keep up with the latest marketing trends and technologies regarding advertising and commerce. This research is part of an ampler project aimed at identifying and describing consumer behavior of traditional products. It endeavored to find common factors between consumer behavior and the manner in which producers manage to fulfill consumer needs. Therefore, this study is qualitative in nature, based on personal interviews. The results of this research will be disseminated to the producers involved in the study, in hopes of implementing the findings in their businesses. One finding that was particularly interesting is that although producers are reluctant to use new technologies in their activities, they are willing to learn or ask help from the young and skilled.

KEYWORDS

Marketing Technologies, Promotional Strategies, Romania, Semi-Structured Interviews, SMEs, Traditional Food Products

INTRODUCTION

In the marketing framework, communicating and promoting value represent a logical sequence of steps that consist of creating and providing value, while elaborating the marketing strategy represents a later phase to the market segmentation, namely selecting the targeted segment(s). An effective marketing strategy is underlain by knowledge of the marketing environment, objectified as useful marketing information aiding proper decision-making. An adequate knowledge of the companies' environment and a well-grounded SWOT analysis are the first premises for making the right decisions in Project Management. As a consequence of the fact that traditional food products (TFP) are in increasing demand (Adams & Salois, 2010; Jordana, 2000), many companies acknowledged the need of understanding this phenomenon, and have thus conducted studies to bring forth new evidence towards consumer needs with respect to TFP in Romania (Gheorghe, Nistoreanu, & Filip, 2013; Istudor & Pelău, 2011).

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DIETARY TRENDS

Recent studies show a shift in consumer dietary habits all over the world (Ross, 1999; Conner, 2009; Cannon, 2005), including the Canadian Arctic area (Hopping et al., 2010). Consuming more processed foods with reduced nutritional values coupled with consuming less fruit and vegetables, traditional products, and indigenous products can in time lead to various chronic diseases. Medical conditions are closely linked to a change in dietary habits, as shown by some studies commenced since the early 90s (Hopping et al., 2010; Norberg-Hodge, Gorelick, & Merrifield, 2000; UNEP, 1999).

As stated in one of our previous research (Tarcza & Sana, 2015), these trends of changing dietary habits are influenced by industrial producers and mass-media, two entities that prey on those consumers who are unwary or less educated regarding healthy nutrition. This predicament is considered a consequence of the economic and technological progress (Lang & Heasman, 2004; Kessler, 2009; Chandon & Wansik, 2010) and of demographic growth (Cotillon et al., 2013).

Nevertheless, alternative methods and solutions have appeared to counter these tendencies. Such solutions are backed by various producers and a part of mass-media, which advocate for the development of healthy dietary habits. In this manner, producers of indigenous and traditional products find themselves obliged to face these trends and get involved in marketing activities (Adams, Tyrell & White, 2011), from the simplest to the most complex. Similarly, they endeavor to start with creating their brand to promoting it through new technologies pertaining to the digital era (Chaffey & Jones, 2017). Meanwhile, marketing experts representing well-known food brands have understood the power that 'healthy nutrition' has on establishing emotional links to the targeted consumers (Pettersson & Fjellstrom, 2006) and they use 'healthy eating' as insight for positioning their brands within advertising campaigns. In order to do so, they use digital marketing instruments like blogging, vlogging, Facebook ads and groups and affiliated marketing campaigns (see Jamie's Oliver campaigns, Selgros cash & carry, Edenia – a refrigerated fruits and vegetables company).

This situation is confusing for the consumers: both industrially-processed products and traditional foods position themselves as 'healthy products', although there is a big difference between them due to the ingredients used and their manner of preparation. Also, is noticeably the difference between the budgets a big food company affords to invest in marketing campaigns compared to traditional food producers. The later are oftentimes self-employed traders, owner - manager, or small & medium enterprises (SMEs), which have limited capacity and funds for investing in marketing activities. That's one of the main reasons we considered necessary to find out the ways small producers face this fierce competition and adapt to the new digital marketing trends.

TRADITIONAL FOOD PRODUCTS AND PRODUCERS

It needs to be stated that indigenous and traditional products have been defined and analyzed in various ways in the past decades, but maintain their essence: "products obtained through olden methods, deeply rooted in a region, with peculiar qualities" (UNIDO, 2010), and which are "linked to a territory and it must also be part of a set of traditions, which will necessarily ensure its continuity over time" (Jordana, 2000). According to Romanian legislations, these products use "indigenous, traditional raw materials", are obtained through "a traditional recipe, peculiar to the place of processing", and reflect "a traditional production/processing type," and can "demonstrate a traditional modus operandi" (Order no. 724/2013). Another approach worth mentioning is that a traditional product contributes to creating perceptions among foreigners, which they will hold regarding a certain country or region (Billiard, 2006). More conceptual clarifications regarding the defining of TFP at a national and European level are presented in one of our previous researches (Botezat & Tarcza, 2012).

Due to these peculiarities of traditional products (indigenous/traditional raw materials, traditional recipes, traditional methods), traditional products can be obtained in small quantities at elevated price compared to large-scale industrially-made products. Consequently, producers of TFP are generally

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