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MARKETING COMMUNICATION OF ORGANIC FOOD

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Contribution provides a comprehensive overview of individual marketing communication tools actually used in practice by producers and sellers of organic food in the Slovak market and the results of the research aimed to identify the current level of consumer awareness in relation to the issue under examination. Organic food market in Slovakia has been for several years one of the fastest expanding markets. The main motives for examining the issue are the important contribution of organic food - not only to human health and the environment, but also with regard to economic benefits of organic food, lack of awareness of potential consumers about the positive aspects of organic food production and consumption, and consequently the marketing communication as one of the main ways to improve the current situation (in terms of public awareness). Neglecting the role of marketing communication of organic food at the early stages of market development organic food production appears to be an ultimate barrier for further development of the market.

Keywords: *Organic food; Bioproducts; Marketing communication; Marketing communication tools.*

JEL Classification: *Q13*

1. Introduction

Excess of food supply over demand on the Slovak market makes consumers to be more experienced, more demanding and more rational. [1] It is therefore necessary to formulate the most accurate global trends in consumer behavior to which businesses currently adapt their portfolio as well as marketing tools to communicate with customers. One of the global trends is a focus on healthy lifestyles [2]. In this context, highest growing market is the organic food market, where consumption is rising worldwide. There are several reasons of consumer interest in organic food, the most important are considered to be their beneficial effect on the health of consumers and the environment.

Organic food often referred to as ecological is a specific group of food products [3]. The particularity of this organic food is mainly due to strictly defined production conditions which respect for eliminating the negative impact of production on the environment, as well as the content of chemicals in the final product. In many cases, organic foods have higher nutritional value and also taste better and stronger than traditional conventional food. As a result of strict regulations they contain less water and more aromatics. Specific approach to livestock is reflected in their more natural living conditions, which includes feeding from organic production. Cultivating more species in small area under organic farming promotes biodiversity, biodiversity protection. The importance of organic food within the food products is apparent not only from the ecological but also economic benefits of their production. Organic agriculture does contribute to creating new jobs,

increasing the gross domestic product. Exports of large portion of produced organic food abroad helps improving the trade balance of the country. In terms of production and processing of organic food, producers are nowadays able to produce and offer almost all foods that are also available in its traditional "conventional form". As a principle, synthetic flavoring and coloring agents, preservatives, irradiation or genetically modified ingredients must not be used during the production and processing of organic food [4].

Organic foods currently represent the fastest growing segment of the food market. At the same time, intense globalization trends have resulted in penetration of organic products to the Slovak market. The basic condition of penetrating the market for organic products is quality marketing based on continuous communication with customers [5].

Marketing communication and the creation of the communication campaign for organic food is at a specific area, given the fact that these products are challenging in terms of providing relevant information to customers. Organic foods have an advantage over other products, as they have specific attributes that can be presented in an attractive way. However, the qualities of organic products cannot guarantee the success, unless sellers and manufacturers use the communication which is not only intense but also efficient and it will be implemented by integrated set of appropriate communication tools.

Marketing communication and its tools In recent years, companies around the world improve mass undifferentiated marketing and sale of highly standardized goods to large number of customers. Effective advertising techniques used in media which support the relevant marketing strategies were developed [6]. These companies regularly invest millions in advertising media and reaching millions of customers. At present, in the 21st century, marketing managers are facing the contact with the new

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reality. The reality of today's marketing communications environment is shaped by two factors. Markets are fragmented, small groups of customers with specific needs are formed which accelerates the need for segmentation [7].

The jump from mass undifferentiated marketing to segments had a dramatic impact on marketing communications. Mass undifferentiated marketing gave the possibility of rise a new generation of communication tools, the transformation of mass marketing to individualized marketing is creating a new generation of much more specialized and precisely focused communication activities.

Dramatic shift from mass marketing to segmented marketing and the corresponding changes leading to rich mix of communication channels and tools builds a new problem before the company. Companies often do not handle the interconnection of multiple communication paths resulting in a confusing communication. Currently, the company is asked to use integrated marketing communications, which requires knowledge of all the contact points at which the customer meets with the company, its products and brands. The company must strive to communicate clearly, consistently and convincingly at all contact points.

The concept of integrated marketing communications firm means that the company must carefully combine communication tools to create coordinated communication mix. The communication system can be characterized as a system composed of communication methods, their specific tools, techniques, activities and measures which fulfill specific functions in the implementation of company goals. The system consists of five marketing communication methods that create communication mix - advertising, sales promotion, public relations, personal selling and direct marketing.

Advertising is one of the oldest and most widely used tool to influence buyers. It represents the most visible and most discussed form of mass communication. [8] Its origins can be traced back in ancient history. An example may be different archaeological boards announcing the various actions or menu. Modern advertising in today's world is distant from historical practices and despite high frequency of use there is no a single definition of advertising. Advertising can be defined as any paid form of impersonal presentation and promotion of ideas, goods or services of identifiable sponsor through mass media such as newspapers, magazines, television or radio. Advertising must always have a defined objective, i. e. clearly defined idea of – what it should focus on where and why. Equal importance is the influence. Simple information is not enough, although in advertising it plays an important role. However, advertising is only effective if it has the ability to influence consumers. Although advertising is mainly used by businesses, it is also used by number of non-profit organizations and professional or

social organizations to communicate their issues to the target audience [9]. In the framework of setting advertising objectives, goals must be formulated on the basis of previous decisions on the target market positioning and marketing mix because it all is the basis for defining the advertising space in the overall marketing program [10]. In the last phase of the advertising process in the evaluation of advertising campaigns, company should periodically evaluate the communication effects and business results of advertising program. Measuring communication effectiveness of advertising provides company information on whether the advertising message is communicating properly.

Sales promotion is another communication tool that works well in conjunction with advertising and personal selling. While advertising and personal selling give consumers a reason to buy a product or service, sales promotion calls for immediate purchase. Sales promotion is another communication tool that works well in conjunction with advertising and personal selling. While advertising and personal selling by consumers reason to buy a product or service, sales promotion calls for immediate purchase. As with advertising, many foreign authors offer a wide range of definitions of this communication tool. We provide a definition from Schultz, based on the opinion of the American Marketing Association that says: "Sales promotion is the media and non-media pressure in predetermined period at the consumer, retailer or wholesaler level for the stimulation of the first purchase, increasing consumer demand or improve product availability. Sales promotion includes a wide range of communication tools intended to stimulate faster and stronger market response. These tools are used by many organizations - producers, distributors, retailers, trade associations and non-profit organizations [11].

Public relations are another important communication technique. It is about building good relations with different target groups by acquiring favorable publicity, building a good company image, averting unfavorable rumors, superstitions and events [12]. Public relations are used for communication products, people, places, activities, organizations, and even entire nations. Trade associations use them to restore the declining interest in commodities. Nations use PR to attract more tourists, foreign investment and international support. Public relations have a significant impact on building public awareness based on substantially lower cost than advertising. The company does not buy media space or time, it only pays to people who are responsible for information message creation and dissemination of and who manage corporate events for the public.

Sponsorship is another means by which companies gain public attention [13]. Sponsorship has become an important communication tool for companies that want to elevate their brand image or to introduce new product lines or services.

Many businesses use personal communications, and personal selling as the marketing communication method. Historically, this method is considered initially oldest form of communication with the market. Personal selling is an personal form of market communication, where personal contact creates a direct response and flexibility in obtaining information. Kotler [9] understood personal selling as "the process of promotion and persuasion prospective customers through the oral presentation of goods for sale. It occurs in several forms. Most often, the business customer visits, advice on sale of business, tele-sale, sale on organized events and business meetings of the management".

Many marketing and advertising tools have been developed in the context of mass marketing that was addressed to the broad markets and often used middlemen to distribute. The current trend, however, leads towards a targeted and a personal marketing. Companies often use direct marketing either as a primary marketing approach or as a supplement to other approaches. Direct marketing represents a direct communications with carefully selected individual clients to get immediate feedback and to build long-term relationships with customers. Thanks to the direct marketing managers communicate directly with customers by means of interactions. Using detailed database they adjust their marketing offer to the needs of narrowly defined segment.

Marketing communication tools of organic food Promotion of organic farming focuses mainly on the communication of the whole system and all organic food, while traditional marketing focuses on the promotion of particular products or companies. Neglecting the role of marketing communication of eco products in the early stages of market development appears to be an insurmountable barrier for further development of this market [14].

The aim of communication in entities producing organic food is, as already mentioned, in particular removing barriers in the purchase decision. Following this objective the task of communication is primarily to explain to the customer what exactly an organic product is, what benefits it provides, and what is the main difference compared to conventional products. [15] The consumer must also understand, that organic products are not more expensive than conventional they just have a higher price relative to higher quality.

Organic products represent an area which currently requires direct contact with the public. The bad information is a reflection of poor communication of "organic". For this reason, the advertising is an important communication tool in the field of bio-products. Frequent sources of communication with customers in organic products can also include various exhibitions, fairs, open days, internet or specialized magazines. Crucial instruments of communication mix within the organic food are advertising and

public relations, additional tools appear to be sales promotion and personal selling.

In markets characterized by low consumer awareness of organic products a nationwide promotional campaign appears to be the most effective form [16]. The sponsor of such a campaign can be considered an association of organic food producers or a state which this way contributes to the need for greening of society and the development of health education. In relation to the interest in organic food the advertising is the most important communication tool in reaching consumers in the marketplace. This means of communication is primarily to draw attention to the health and environmental benefits of organic food products and thus activate purchase. When using **advertising** it is a fundamental to choose such advertising arguments that will produce the right incentives in demand for organic products. These facts should enhance the credibility of the origin of organic products, their quality and their manufacturing processes. In advertising it is also important to determine the method of communication that can be either rational (it relies on rational and factual arguments) or emotional (it uses emotional arguments and action) [17]. In marketing communications of organic food products both mentioned methods are used. In thematic area where ecological marketing concerns ecological credit worthiness of environment rational arguments are used in communication, particularly in response to customers motives, which are the protection of environment and health. When communicating organic products, for which enjoyment and lifestyle is the consumer motive dominate emotional elements of communication [18]. Advertising the organic products over conventional products is modest. The advertising of organic products is usually encountered in various journals, monthlies or on the website. In the media, such as television or radio it has been a notable lack of communication of organic products. Important role plays organic food labeling. Advertising for these products should provide information, support and inspire consumers to gain confidence in products labeled as organic. Advertising of these products pursues wider objectives such as changing lifestyle or environmental protection. The most effective and the cheapest way of advertising is orally "organic" dissemination of advertising by word of mouth from satisfied customers [19].

Public relations contributes greatly to the positive awareness of organic food producers in the relevant levels of society, who are involved in issues of sustainable development, preservation of a healthy environment, on meeting societal interests and needs of the state or region. Positive outlook on organic food manufacturer creates response to the public which indirectly activates the interest in his/her products. Public relations help to build trust among consumers and organic food producers. Consumers are in fact often in doubt whether the product

being offered is actually produced under organic farming. The most commonly used tool in the field of PR of eco-products includes organizing Open Day in organic food production plant, different organic food festivities and markets where the public can get more information about of organic manufacturer work and attitudes and ultimately the wide range of trade fairs and exhibitions. The largest food fair in the world where organic food is presented at is Bio-Fach in Nuremberg, Germany. Slovak Republic is in this area known for its exhibition Agrokomplex in Nitra [19]. In the field of promotion and building awareness of organic farming operate in addition to state authorities also many non-profit organizations. A considerable part of thier activities are provided by the Slovak Association of Organic Farming - Ekotrend Slovakia. It is a non-governmental, non-profit organization with nationwide scope, which brings together 84 members - producers, processors, manufacturers, professionals and those interested in organic farming and sustainable living. Ekotrend Slovakia increasing awareness of eco-products carries out activities such as: the trip to the international exhibition and tour to organic farm in Austria, various seminars and workshops, "Bioacademy" project, eco-camps on farms, Days of organic farming and national competition "Biofarm" of the year. One of the most interesting and communicated events is professional competition "Organic Food of the Year", whose main objective is to promote the best Slovak producers of organic food. The winner is given publicity and his/her products are represented in periodicals aimed at a healthy lifestyle. Ďalšou aktivitou práce s verejnosťou je akcia „Mesiac biopotravín“. Koordinátorom celej akcie je spoločnosť Green Marketing. Another activity is a public relations event "Month of organic food". The coordinator of the event is the company Green Marketing. It is one of the largest events which aim to promote organic farming and organic food sales. "Month of organic food" follows the "Days of organic farming" organized by the Association of Organic Farming Ekotrend Slovakia, mainly in the form of workshops and conferences.

Sales promotion is another important tool of communication policy. It has two general objectives, to support the "push-effect" and "pull-effect". The basic objective of eco producer in promoting business is to build a positive image of organic food producer in target group of traders, to improve knowledge about organic food, production processes and certification in sales personnel. Important role in bridging the information barrier have trained sales staff that should be able to provide adequate answers to questions of consumers buying organic products. Sales promotion of organic products is not only about company profitability, but it also contributes to environmental protection. Measures to promote the sale to consumer are free tasting of organic food, price advantages of larger packages, testing samples

and the like. Their action to overcome the problems of the sale of organic products is not large. None of sales promotion tools can completely convince customers about the origin authenticity of organic product or eliminate the information asymmetry. However, these instruments can at least help to reduce barriers to purchase organic products even if only in a limited space. Organic products sales promotion uses several different tools, which are aimed at encouraging consumers to buy. Here we can include activities related to changes in prices in the form of discounts to the customer.

The aim of **personal selling** is to influence the customer's buying decision by form of personal meetings. This communication process is also a flexible tool for obtaining information. The intensity and specific role of personal sales is affected by the product and its characteristics, distribution channels and market situation. The role of personal selling for organic products is based mainly in mediating information, catching the attention of the customer to the product, assuring the credibility, customer acquisition and retention as well as conducting experience for the consumer. In practice, the direct, personal form of organic products communication is encountered most frequently in the specialized stores. Non-specialized stores use mainly impersonal form of communication. Despite this fact, sales staff in non-specialized stores should have at least a basic knowledge about offered organic food. If they were able to adequately convey the information to potential customers, they would motivate them to purchase.

Forms of personal sales which can be used in the area of organic food are:

- **Sale on the farm or roadside stalls:** this sale represents most frequently used form of sales. Customers will stop to buy fresh goods at a reasonable price. Distance to the farm or variable quality can be seen as a drawback.

- **Own collection by customers:** this is the type of sale where customers collect the fruit and pick up vegetables themselves on the farm. This method of sales is primarily for customers who prefer fresh fruit at lower prices.

- **Organic food markets:** recently popular form of sale. In this case, farmers come to the market regularly to offer their crops directly to consumers. Organic markets are an important source of income for small farmers.

- **System "organic box":** it is a system in which organic farmers mostly vegetable vendors choose to regularly distribute their products in crates directly to customer homes. Besides their own products may vendors can add even more products from local farmers into the organic box.

Direct marketing of organic products is executed primarily through the Internet. In the Internet environment it is mainly about the opportunities and benefits of the Internet mails. The implementation of

these activities, however, requires the existence of a customer database. Current offer of organic produce can be addressed directly to the particular customer. This form of communication is beneficial not only for organic food retailers. The customers are able to get the products for their needs from the comfort of their home. Direct marketing allows you to easily evaluate the success of its implementation. Transfer of current organic products offer to specific customers can help the seller to realize their sale. Customers, on the other hand are informed in advance about the current offer of organic products.

The great challenge faced by economies today is to integrate environmental sustainability with economic welfare by decoupling environmental degradation from economic growth and doing more with less. It is now time to move towards an energy and resource efficient economy [20]. Organic products can heavily support this initiative if their sustainable production and consumption is communicated properly. The aim of European policies on sustainable consumption and production is to move towards more energy-efficient economy. Sustainable consumption and production can transform environmental challenges into economic opportunities and provides a better deal for the consumer [21].

2. Purpose

Explore the perception of marketing communication tools on organic food market by consumers, analyze consumer opinions and attitudes on this issue and propose solutions for improving and streamlining communication activities on organic food.

3. Methodology

Information and knowledge were acquired through consumer research, which was conducted on a sample of 320 respondents, while the sample was selected at random. The survey served as a primary source of information and was conducted using a standardized questionnaire containing 22 questions, with closed and open character. Four questions were focused on the demographic characteristics of respondents, namely gender, age, region, from which the respondent comes and highest level of education. The remaining 18 questions were adequately targeted to the very goals of the survey, the marketing communications, its tools and consumer perceptions. The questionnaire was distributed to respondents in both paper and electronic form. The printed form was designed more for consumers belonging to the older age category, while the electronic version was set at the lower ages. In electronic form questionnaire was sent to respondents through the email and also through the social network Facebook. Results obtained from the survey were evaluated via Survio.com. In the processing of graphical and table service except of Survio.com also Microsoft Excel program was used. In total, the survey polled 350 respondents. The return for the evaluation was 80%, representing 320 pieces of questionnaires.

4. Results

In today's global society, it is interesting to watch people's knowledge in the field of bio-products, especially organic food. Evaluation of these findings, the behavior of consumers when buying but mainly attitudes and opinions of respondents to marketing communications of organic food is provided by analysis that was conducted through a survey.

It is well known that health is for most people the highest value and thus they take into account a question of product harmfulness and safety to human health when buying. Among consumers often predominate the opinion that products beneficial to the health and will be available to the wide population with affordable prices. Proper communication activity can positively affect this opinion and behavior of organic food buyers in the shopping process. The results of a survey conducted on a random sample of respondents should demonstrate the impact of marketing communication in the field of organic food. The survey should confirm or reject the expectations that we set out by form of hypotheses and point out what is the perception of marketing communication in the field of organic food among surveyed consumers.

The basic motive of the survey was to determine whether organic food is known among the population, what is the motive or barrier for consumers to buy organic products, if the promotion of organic products is perceived as sufficiently intense, what communication tools are perceived most frequently by consumers, which communication tools are perceived positively and also what communication would they welcome in this area.

Proposing effective measures for marketing communication of organic food and increase awareness of organic food among the population require reflecting the facts which lead consumers to buy organic food, and on the other side, preventing them from buying organic products. The survey showed that most consumers recognize products marked as organic, but not all of them buy organic food products. This phenomenon is closely related to barriers in purchase of organic food in Slovakia that consumers identified in the survey. It was necessary to focus on the proposals to remove these barriers. Despite the majority of consumers who have knowledge on organic food, there are respondents who do not understand the concept of organic food. Marketing communications should be directed also to those consumers and organic food and organic produce should be communicated more in general to increase broader awareness in the population.

The survey showed further findings regarding the level of knowledge and purchase of organic food. The aim was to ascertain whether respondents know organic food and to what extent their buy organic food. We wanted to know, if those who have the knowledge of organic food also widely purchase

organic food and whether those who do not have the knowledge on organic food at all, buy them just out of curiosity or based on advertising.

The survey showed that the most common motives for buying organic food for consumers are higher quality and declared safety and positive impact on human health. Conversely, respondents do not consider the consumption of organic food for new life trend and even more pronounced flavor does not convince them. But there is a group of consumers who do not buy organic food at all nor do they have any motives for their purchase.

According to experts from modern science but also on the basis of long-standing experience in real life important factor or purchase incentive is a motive and a benefit. Both factors can be obtained through information or personal experience. The information must therefore be accurate and sufficient experience must be positive and should leave high emotional value to customer.

Another reason for reflection arising from the survey was lack of trust of consumers in addition to high prices. Marketing communication should therefore be aimed at increasing consumer confidence as regards the origin and production of food. Many customers in fact are familiar with the concept of organic food, they have knowledge about quality and about the production processes of organic foods, but they do not have confidence that the food "branded organic" are really grown, respectively treated with no chemical additives. This mistrust may also be one of the barriers to buying organic food.

A national advertising campaign is considered to be the most effective form of promotion especially in markets with low consumer knowledge that is the case also in the organic food market. Advertising is seen as the most important tool in reaching consumers in the marketplace. The survey shows that the most effective advertising media are considered to be the Internet but also in print advertising and various promotional leaflets. Respondents specify the internet as a means of pleasant advertising and the source of information on organic food. Is generally accepted as confirmed by the results of the survey, people of younger age groups prefer the Internet. Middle ages are oriented more press and leaflets. Public spaces and radio have very little effect to consumers as evident from survey results. It was expected that the TV as the most widely used means of mass media communication will play an important role in the impact on consumers. However, the survey confirms just the opposite respondents do not consider advertising on television as an important communication tool in terms of organic food segment.

In the case of sales promotion results showed that for the majority of surveyed respondents important factors when purchasing organic food are discounts and discount packages, contests, or loyalty

programs. We directed our recommendations to these areas and we focused mainly on organizing contests at points of sale, and creation of loyalty programs which were highly demanded. Tastings were considered uniquely effective. In the case of organic food were proposed so "organized tastings" where people have limited number of samples available for tasting with a fixed time and place of the event. In case of the specific focus on emotional side in organic food it is also suitable to influence a rational side in a balanced combination. It is recommended to organize Open day, which appears to be an effective means for gaining experience and gradually building consumer confidence.

From the survey we also found consumers perceive public relations as the least efficient marketing communication tool. In this area, mainly various projects, exhibitions and fairs are implemented, about which consumers are not informed and consequently, do not perceive their influence. However, it is necessary to pay sufficient attention to public relations activities, since they are often the primary source of information for consumers about what is new on the market and they can positively influence consumer purchasing behavior. It is important that retailers and producers of organic food take part in the actions, but also inform consumers that are the fairs and exhibitions are organized so the consumers have the opportunity to visit retailers and producers in their exhibition stands. At present, there is a wide range of similar events on a high professional level such as BioFach in Germany or Biostyl in the Czech Republic. It is important to introduce these possibilities to consumers and make them available. Projects in the field of organic food in Slovakia have not established a strong tradition yet as is the case in Austria. For Slovak organic manufacturers and dealers this may be a strong motivation and inspiration.

The survey also confirmed that the consumer shall not prevent any form of marketing communication and are receptive to the alternative forms such as a walking advertisement, although they do not know precisely to identify its contribution to the marketability of organic food, they take it very positively, they find it interesting and motivating.

5. Conclusion

We consider the market for organic food to be a perspective area with many opportunities for further development. Its progress can be greatly influenced by appropriate marketing communication. Therefore, it should be stressed that market players in the organic food market should not forget consumers and perceive their views not only on the products themselves, but also about preferred marketing communication tools. This means that these requirements and needs of the real and potential customers should not only to be recognized but also implemented in practice.

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