

COMMUNICATION POLICIES OF BEEKEEPING FARMS IN BULGARIA WITHIN THE CONTEXT OF THE COMMON AGRICULTURAL POLICY OF THE EU

Assoc. Prof. Lyubomir Lyubenov, PhD¹

Abstract: The substantial export potential of Bulgarian beekeeping requires that any national programme on beekeeping include promotion measures about third countries and EU member-states. Those measures should primarily refer to high-quality bee products that are organic, with protected geographical indication (PGI), with protected designation of origin (PDO), etc. The share of promotional budgets for Bulgarian beekeeping in the national beekeeping programmes must be increased since promotional EU budgets have been rising steadily. The Common Agricultural Policy (CAP) of the EU has established the infrastructure and the environment, in which beekeeping farms should employ communication instruments more comprehensively and conduct more extensive communication policies. Although the CAP finances and subsidises the advertising of Bulgarian bee products at higher meso, macro and mega levels, it requires horizontal integration. PR and direct marketing have been identified as some of the most appropriate communication instruments for Bulgarian beekeeping farms. PR integrates into a single cause all marketing communications, while direct marketing may be employed as a strategic instrument for accomplishing long-term goals and improving the management of customer relations.

Key words: promotion budgets, PR, direct marketing, product advertising, brand advertising.

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¹Assoc. Prof. Lyubomir Lyubenov, PhD, Department of Economics, Angel Kanchev University of Ruse, e-mail: LLyubenov@uni-ruse.bg.

Introduction

Most of the beekeeping farms in Bulgaria focus on the quantity of their produce - mainly honey, and less frequently on other bee products, which are predominantly primary products and therefore have low value added. The production of organic and unique bee products with protected geographical indication and brands provides favourable opportunities for employing comprehensively a wide range of communication instruments – publicity, advertising, sales promotions, personal sales, etc. – which cannot be used as extensively for primary bee products. Hence, the difference between the communication instruments that are used for branded bee products with protected geographical indication, brands, etc., and those used for primary bee products.

Branding of bee products faces considerable difficulty since it is difficult to predict the quantities that will be produced; the quality of bee products varies and they are mainly primary products; there are limited opportunities for differentiation and little direct contact with end consumers, etc. A more extensive employment of different communication instruments on behalf of Bulgarian beekeeping farms largely depends on the implementation of product, innovation, distribution and price policies, as well as on the Common Agricultural Policy (CAP) of the EU and the agricultural policy of government. Branded bee products are advertised by retailers, while primary bee products are not advertised at all.

To resolve these issues, in addition to the measures for financing and subsidising agricultural production, the CAP of the EU provides market support through the Common Market Organisations (CMOs). These organisations determine quality policies, promotions of agricultural and food products, the import and export of agricultural products, etc. Rural development is an integral element of the CAP in terms of the regional policy it implements. Promoting rural development includes policies designed to raise the competitiveness of agricultural farms through integration, subsidising, etc., as well as preserving the natural resources, protecting the environment and raising farmers' incomes.

The aim of this research is to assess the opportunity for beekeeping farms in Bulgaria to implement a consistent communication policy within the

context of the EU promotion policy. While the issue has not been sufficiently studied so far, the findings of the research could contribute to improving the market performance of Bulgarian companies that produce and sell bee products.

1. The EU Promotion Policy

Countries with established traditions in exporting agricultural and food products implement active promotion policies to maintain and increase their market shares. In the USA alone, promotion programmes that are implemented to promote export received annual financial support from the Government of \$145 million even before 2007 (Lyubenov, L., 2013, p.114), and today the financial support they receive is four times as high. The EU has been allocating larger funds for promoting the agricultural products produced in the community, too, and the policy will become increasingly important due to the growing pressure from the World Trade Organisation (WTO) for gradually phasing out the export subsidies for agricultural produce, including bee and other products. In the period from 2007 to 2013, when Bulgaria joined the EU, European financing of promotion campaign for agricultural products rose from € 46 million to € 61 million per year at the end of the period. Financing was provided for promotion programmes on the internal market and in third countries. The latter focused on the export advantages and the opportunities for entering potential new markets and did not exclude products whose export was subsidised. During that period, most of the funds were allocated to promotions in EU member states. Over the period 2001-2011, only 30% of the budget earmarked for information provision and promotion measures was spent on measures targeting third-country markets (Regulation (EU) No. 1144/2014). Programmes proposed jointly from several member states and programmes targeted at the markets of several countries simultaneously were given priority.

The communication activities of programmes funded by the Community include Public Relations (PR), advertising, trainings, conferences attended by journalists and doctors, promotions in convenience stores and supermarkets, in-store tasting, competitions, materials published

in specialized journals and on the Internet, exhibitions, trade fairs and national and international fairs. They must present the quality of EU products and highlight their specific features, particularly in terms of food safety, nutritional value, labelling, animal welfare and respect for the environment. Information provision and promotion measures must not be brand-oriented or encourage the consumption of products, including bee products, which are produced in a single member state only.

Over the period 2007 – 2013, EU legislation provided that promotion programmes could be designed and proposed by trade or inter-trade organisations, which met the criterion of ‘representativeness’. State Fund Agriculture was the body authorised to make a preliminary assessment whether the requirements of EU Regulations were met and submit eligible programmes to the European Commission for final evaluation. Approved promotion programmes were implemented within a period of one to three years, and the Union’s financial contribution amounted to 50% of the eligible expenditure. The proposing trade organisation was obliged to cover at least 20% of the eligible costs, while the other 30% were financed by State Fund Agriculture.

Over the period 2014 – 2020, EU financing for promotion programmes increased substantially. It grew from about € 100 million at the beginning of the period to € 200.9 million per year at the end of the period (www.mzh.government.bg, 02.06.2020). In addition, the funds earmarked for promotion measures in third countries also increased and their share amounted to more than 50% of total financing at the end of the period. EU financing for promotion measures thus grew nearly 4.4 times in fourteen years. What is more, in order to increase the number of proposed measures and to improve their quality, the range of beneficiaries was widened to include producer organisations and their associations, groups and bodies of the agri-food sector. The Union’s financial contribution was 70% to 80% of the value of projects, and the remaining expenditure was borne by the beneficiaries. In addition to the changes introduced in the financing of promotion programmes, over the period 2014 – 2020, the national procedure for their approval was no longer applied. Proposals for promotion programmes are now evaluated by the European Commission and national co-financing is no longer provided. Promotion programmes are financed from

COMMUNICATION POLICIES OF BEEKEEPING FARMS IN BULGARIA ...

the contributions of the EU and the proposing organisations. Proposals for promotion programmes are submitted directly to the Consumers, Health, Agriculture and Food Executive Agency through the EC's portal (Regulation (EU) No. 1144/2014). Priority is given to programmes targeted at third countries with high growth potential and to programmes promoting products with protected designation or products in specific sectors within the EU, yet bee products are not among them.

The EU employs a wide range of measures to promote its agricultural and food products (Luybenov, L., 2013, p.110). At the beginning of 2017, a EU initiative started a national primary-school campaign 'European honey breakfast' which was supported by Bulgarian beekeepers. The logo of the campaign was "Eat honey, stay healthy!" Such campaigns were simultaneously run in Slovenia, Hungary, Romania, the Czech Republic and Austria. The campaign promotes the effort of the European Parliament to proclaim 20th May as the international day of bees and acknowledge their role for biodiversity, food security and the economy of the EU with an annual value added of € 22 billion (<https://news.bg>, 10.03.2017). The campaign aims at raising children's awareness about the role of bees and the benefits of consuming bee products.

Regulation (EU) No. 1308/2013 of the European Parliament and of the Council establishing a Common Organisation of the Markets in agricultural products provides Bulgaria with the opportunity to submit for approval to the European Commission (EC) annual national programmes for a specific sector and to apply for partial financing of the measures approved by the Commission. The Ministry of Agriculture, Food and Forestry has been implementing national programmes in two sectors – Beekeeping and Viticulture and Wine. The promotion programmes for the first sector are three-year National Apiculture Programmes for the periods 2008 – 2010, 2011 – 2013, 2014 – 2016, 2017 – 2019 and 2020 – 2022, while the National Support Programmes in the Viticulture and Wine Sector run for five years and cover the periods 2009 – 2013, 2014 – 2018, and 2019 – 2023.

Over the last decade, Bulgarian beneficiaries won nearly thirty EU Promotion Programmes Projects for more than BGN 100 million (www.mzh.government.bg, 02.06.2020), yet none of those projects was related to bee products. Only three out of five National Support Programmes

(NSP) from 2008 to 2022 are promotion ones – those for the periods 2011 – 2013, 2014 – 2016 and 2020 – 2022, but only on the domestic market. The financial limit for the promotion of organic products in NSP 2011 – 2013 and 2014 – 2016 is nearly BGN 100,000 and that for promoting bee products is about BGN 400,000, i.e. a total of BGN 0.9 million for both programmes. Until 2019, the funds for promoting bee products in the two NSP amounted to 1-2% of their total budgets. NSP 2020-2022 has earmarked BGN 1.3 million for the participation of beekeepers in bazaars, which is 6.77% of its total budget of BGN 19.2 million (MZHG, NPP 2020 – 2022). Furthermore, different National Support Programmes absorb about 70 to 80% of earmarked funds. The communication activities in those programmes inform consumers about the benefits and the characteristics of Bulgarian honey and bee products. Communication events were organised in several larger towns and cities in the country to raise consumer awareness about the benefits, advantages and the healing properties of Bulgarian bee products. They employed various approaches – running radio and online advertising campaigns and organising meetings between producers of bee products and potential consumers at open tasting stands. Information materials with messages about the benefits of bee products have been designed to reach all social groups and thus enhance their use in every family in Bulgaria.

Unlike the NSP, all programmes for the wine sector from 2009 until 2023 are targeted at promoting Bulgarian wines in third countries. In the first programme (2009 – 2013), the budget for promotion in third countries was € 11million, which accounted for more than 9.8% of the total budget of €112 million. The second programme for supporting the wine sector, 2014-2018, had a budget of € 7.5 million for promotion in third countries, which equaled 5.6% of the total budget of € 133.8 million. The budget earmarked for promotion in the third programme (2019 – 2023) is € 10 million, i.e. 7.5% of the total budget of € 133.81 million (MZHG, 2019 - 2023). Promotions are applicable for wines with protected designation of origin (PDO), with protected geographical indication (PGI) and for varietal wines with no protected designation of origin or protected geographical indication and for organic wines. In other words, they are targeted at enhancing the export of wines of guaranteed quality.

COMMUNICATION POLICIES OF BEEKEEPING FARMS IN BULGARIA ...

Promotion of Bulgarian wines in third countries aims at improving the image of wines produced in the EU, including Bulgarian ones, beyond the scope of the internal market. Promotion activities in third countries make it possible to raise the representativeness of Bulgarian wines and, at the same time, they enable wine producers and merchants to target new markets and to regain and widen their presence on existing ones. In addition, promotion activities improve their access to international exhibits and fairs, enhance the recognisability and competitiveness of high-quality Bulgarian wines on established international markets and hence, their access to new and prospective market segments.

It is worth noting that all successful Bulgarian promotion programmes which have been implemented so far have been backed by trade organisations (the National Vine and Wine Chamber, its regional units, etc.), predominantly those of the food processing industry and only a few trade organisations of agricultural producers (www.mzh.government.bg, 02.06.2020). The low integration of Bulgarian farms limits their access to European funds for financing promotion activities on EU internal markets and in third countries. This reduces significantly their opportunities for export on new or traditional markets of bee products in third countries or EU Member-states, which thus remain under the monopoly of major exporters.

The relative share of bee honey in the national produce that is exported is higher than that of wine, yet there are no promotion activities in third countries. In addition, the annual budgets allocated to the promotion of bee products are nearly twenty times as low as those for wine promotion are. This is due to the facts that Bulgarian beekeepers largely export bee honey as a primary product with low value added in contrast to bottled high-quality wines and that the national market is much smaller than the markets in third countries. In addition, the level of horizontal and vertical integration of the Vine and Wine sector is much higher than that of the Beekeeping sector where trade organisations are weaker and have no major leader to conduct a common communication policy.

Trade organisations in beekeeping are essential not only for their integration but also for gaining publicity and integrating with government institutions. They are the bodies that provide access to EU funding of promotion activities and enable beekeepers to implement an active

communication policy. While media budgets of agricultural farms, including beekeeping farms, are very low, at a meso level, i.e. at the level of trade organisations, media budgets are much higher, provide better financial and market opportunities. The lack of a national trade organisation of the beekeepers that would act as its leader prevents Bulgarian beekeeping farms from communicating successfully with the Government and consumers.

The CAP of the EU and national agricultural policies are essential for widening the scope of the communication policies of beekeeping farms from a micro and meso level to a macro and mega level. They enhance the recognisability of bee products and improve the opportunities for entering new markets and increasing their market share on old ones. Those policies encourage joint communication activities and create prerequisites for implementing large-scale communication policies. They also promote processes of horizontal and vertical integration of beekeeping farms, ensure better opportunities for accessing EU promotion financing and entering new markets. A major disadvantage of these policies, however, is the extremely complicated and cumbersome regulatory framework, which governs them and related procedures in general, and especially those in the sphere of communication activities.

2. Communication Policy of Beekeeping Farms

The communication policies of Bulgarian beekeeping farms must be in unison with the CAP of the EU and its promotion policy in terms of the ample opportunities it provides. The CAP of the EU subsidises and finances quality policies for agricultural products, thus enhancing the opportunities for their differentiation and, hence, the recognisability of Bulgarian bee products. It also encourages the processes of horizontal and vertical integration in the beekeeping sector and thus widens the range of communication instruments and activities, which beekeeping farms can employ and the communication policies they can implement.

Through its regulatory framework and policies, the CAP of the EU creates an environment, including in terms of media, which establishes

COMMUNICATION POLICIES OF BEEKEEPING FARMS IN BULGARIA ...

opportunities for public relations, advertising, personal sales, direct marketing, etc. It has a major impact upon the communication policies of beekeeping farms through its principles and aims such as animal welfare, environmental protection and protection of the bee population, preservation of the European heritage and rural development. The policy also helps build the appropriate infrastructure and provide the necessary services, including those in the sphere of digital communication, that enable beekeeping farms to employ wider and more complex communication instruments.

Beekeeping farms in Bulgaria can employ several marketing instruments to communicate with consumers, public groups and different organisations (e.g. those of processors, traders, etc.). A number of literary sources on marketing (Kotler, 1993, p.80; Pride, W., O. Ferrell, 1995, p. 243, etc.) identify four major communication instruments (public relations, advertising, sales promotions, and personal sales), while some authors add direct marketing (Velev, 2001, p.20; Lyubenov, 2013, p.102; Lyubenov, 2016, p. 123, etc.). The specifics of the agricultural sector and of beekeeping, in particular, render direct marketing a very appropriate communication instrument since consumers tend to prefer direct contact with producers and due to the global development of the Internet and online markets.

Publicity is identified as a priority activity of public relations (PR). In most cases, publicity is implemented as (non)personal and (un)sponsored activity that seeks to encourage demand for bee products from the district of Ruse through the dissemination of important information about them in print media, on radio stations, TV channels, the Internet, etc. Publicity may be employed to inform consumers about current activities and events in Bulgarian beekeeping and to maintain the reputation of the sector. It may also be used to mitigate the effects of a negative image as a result of certain diseases, pandemics, etc., and to promote public causes about environmental protection, etc.

The principles, the objectives, the policies and the regulatory framework of the CAP of the EU are also public relations since they aim at creating a favourable attitude towards European beekeeping and bee products. They relate to public issues such as the saving the population of bees due to their immense contribution to biodiversity, food security and sustainable European agriculture.

In line with those EU principles, policies and regulatory framework and under an initiative launched by the Slovenian Association of Beekeepers, the General Assembly of the United Nations proclaimed 20th May as the World Bee Day on 20th December 2017.

Public Relations are successfully implemented in the EU and beyond its territory; at a macro level (in the national economy by the Ministry of Agriculture, Food and Forestry, the Ministry of Environment and Water, the Ministry of Finance, etc.); and at a meso level by trade organisations and associations. PR faces certain difficulty at the level of beekeeping farms due to the geographic location of the production process and the fact that most of its produce is primary products; the lack of PR specialists; insufficient funds and lack of direct contact with end consumers. This is part of the explanation why the opportunities, which PR provide, have a more limited and mainly local use at that level.

Public Affairs (PA) are an element of PR that specializes in relations between beekeeping farms and government institutions, especially the Ministry of Agriculture, Food and Forestry, etc., in order to affect the legislative framework and the media environment by establishing contacts with agricultural commissions at a central and at a local level. PA may be implemented at several levels. The highest level includes exercising influence and gathering information; conducting analyses and designing programmes, which are oriented to the government, various institutions and stakeholder communities. Public Affairs therefore are not merely an element of Public Relations, but a component of strategic marketing as well.

At a lower level, PA are merely an element of PR as specific effort to establish and maintain relations with the Government and with communities. At the lowest level, PA cover activities related to the public policy implemented by Bulgarian beekeeping farms in terms of ensuring and maintaining biodiversity and food security. PA therefore refer to a wide range of activities, including relations with the Government. A major role for the implementation of PA in the Beekeeping sector at a regional, national and international level is that of trade organisations and associations which facilitate communication between beekeeping farms and the Government.

We should note that there are two very distinctive types of advertising for agricultural and bee products – brand advertising and product advertising

COMMUNICATION POLICIES OF BEEKEEPING FARMS IN BULGARIA ...

(Lyubenov, 2016, p. x). Brand advertising is related to a specific brand, but when several beekeeping farms and merchants advertise jointly the advantages of bee products in general, rather than those of a particular brand, this is product advertising. The latter is an expression of the joint effort of the producers of homogeneous bee products that advertise their qualities to encourage demand for them. In contrast, brand advertising does not refer to groups of products, since it aims at differentiating between competing bee products. In a broader sense, brand advertising refers to a trademark, geographical indication, a domain name, etc. The focus of product advertising is on the features of a whole group of products without distinguishing between individual producers.

The significance of product advertising and brand advertising depends on the features of advertised bee products. Which type of advertising will predominantly be used depends on product differentiation. There can be no product differentiation between mass produced homogeneous bee products. Advertising such products would result in growing total sales, but there will be no significant growth in the market share of a particular producer at the expense of the market shares of other producers, since their products are identical for consumers. Brand advertising, on the other hand, does not contribute to growing total sales. The higher the processing which primary bee products go through, the bigger the opportunities for product differentiation, which means that brand advertising will be used more frequently than product advertising. Thus, at a certain point, bee products will become so different that it would make no sense to focus on any features they might share.

Brand advertising is employed chiefly by food-processing companies and merchants that offer bee products with value added through processing, packaging and branding. They even run advertising campaigns under a single brand name to advertise substitutes of bee products. Product advertising is chiefly used by the producers of bee products and primary products, which cannot be differentiated. Employing both types of advertising requires substantial advertising budgets and competences, which are not available to beekeeping farms. Therefore, government agricultural policies, including the CAP of the EU, provide various financial instruments for conducting large-scale promotion campaigns at a macro and mega level.

In order to use both types of advertising, beekeeping farms in Bulgaria need to integrate horizontally and vertically, so that they could have access to European promotion programmes within the CAP of the EU and produce bee products with high value added. Branding of Bulgarian bee products through protected geographical indication, a domain name, or certification under a specific (biological, etc.) standard also render it possible to successfully advertise them. Bulgarian bee products should be branded based on their regional features as a differentiating factor. The geographical location, where bee products are produced, is a differentiating factor since it is unique and has its specific features.

Encouraging sales on behalf of Bulgarian beekeeping farms to the retail sector and to processing enterprises is difficult due to their weaker market position. It is, therefore, wholesalers and retailers who determine the conditions for making higher sales. Those usually include price reductions, certificates of origin, information about the technology used in the production process, details about varieties, etc. Any measures to promote sales are employed in the short-term, since implementing them for a longer period will have a negative effect as consumers get used to them and they will no longer act as an incentive. Bulgarian beekeeping farms, which offer primary bee products can mainly use price discounts to encourage sales.

Bulgarian beekeeping farms can sell their products directly and consumers have the right to make an informed choice about bee products, while relevant control is exercised and the quality of products is guaranteed through the Direct Sales Ordinance (Ordinance 26, 2015). The Ordinance entitles agricultural producers to sell milk, honey, poultry, rabbits, game, and different kinds of sausages they produce. Generally, direct sales can be made at the location of the farm or outside its territory. Nearly three-quarters of all beekeeping farms in Bulgaria are registered under this ordinance. At the same time, the Ordinance provides that each beekeeping farm can sell up to two tons of honey on the consumer market.

The experience of EU countries, the USA, etc. indicates that the most popular type of direct sales from agricultural farms are those allowing customers to buy different bee products and agricultural products and to use some tourist services, for example, apitourism, etc. on site. In community-supported agriculture, pre-arranged sales are popular. Consumers finance

COMMUNICATION POLICIES OF BEEKEEPING FARMS IN BULGARIA ...

beekeeping farms by subscribing to their produce and in exchange receive certain quantities of bee products over the entire year. Agricultural tourism and other varieties of tourism also provide opportunities for consuming products directly from the beekeeping farm. There is a steady upward trend in the direct sales of bee products since consumers tend to prefer direct contact with producers.

Direct sales outside farms can be made by opening market stands at different marketplaces – municipal, farmer, local, etc. Mobile farm stands are another solution – in Germany, Switzerland and other countries, minivans with refrigerator display cases deliver bee products to local markets and to specified addresses.

Over the past few years, direct sales from mobile vending machines have become popular as well. Raw milk vending machines, for example, must be owned by agricultural producers, whose milk quality fully meets the EU quality standards. Such machines provide excellent conditions for deliveries of bee products alongside certain non-bee products they are consumed with. The CAP of the EU supports personal sales through different measures for establishing short supply chains and creating local markets.

The Direct Sales Ordinance is somewhat restrictive since it requires that the retail units be located on the territory of a livestock farm or no further than an administrative district neighbouring the district, where the farm has been registered. The Ordinance does not allow producers to determine the quantities of produce they would sell through direct sales. It also requires substantial investment from Bulgarian beekeeping farms so that they could meet its criteria. The Ordinance became effective nearly a decade ago and has been amended several times; yet, it remains markedly protectionist in favour of wholesale exporters since bee products are predominantly sold on organisational markets and not on consumer ones.

Hence, the personal sales made by Bulgarian beekeeping farms are relatively limited in scope and more expensive than other promotion instruments. Their effect is questionable, since beekeeping farms cannot afford to hire highly qualified sales representatives. Owners of beekeeping farms, who nevertheless choose to sell directly to customers, spend a lot of time and money to attend to each individual consumer. Small batches of bee products often need to be transported over long distances. Making direct

sales also implies measuring and packaging smaller quantities of bee products that are suitable for final consumption, which is more expensive. Therefore, from a public point of view, this is an instance of ineffective use of resources.

In direct marketing, the contact between producers and consumers is established through some intermediary media – direct mail, fax, telephone, television, radio, SMS, MMS, e-mail, internet sites. It could be consumers, who are the more active party in establishing that contact through offers they send to different producers of bee products. The use of direct marketing has been growing substantially, mainly as a result of the advent of the Internet and the rapid development of online markets. Beekeeping farms in Bulgaria are not making the most of the benefits of direct marketing yet, due to the insufficient investment in online competences, infrastructure and software and hardware technologies.

The access, which Bulgarian rural and urban population has to the Internet differs dramatically, and investment in rural development is still not a priority of the Ministry of Agriculture, Forestry and Food. The CAP of the EU through Measure 7. Basic services and village renewal in rural areas of the Rural Development Programme 2014 – 2020 provides opportunities for investment under Sub-measure 7.3 Broadband infrastructure, including its creation, improvement and expansion. On the one hand, it enables municipalities in rural areas to digitalise part of their services, and, on the other hand, it provides such opportunities to agricultural farms as well, thus improving the ability of beekeeping farms to employ direct marketing.

A key moment in direct marketing is using databases that make it possible to offer bee products to specific, specially selected groups of both current and potential clients. It allows higher personalisation and measurability of results. Beekeeping farms need to have their own websites in order to retain customer attention and to ensure their effective online presence on social networks. They could employ a combination of several marketing channels, such as direct mail, e-mail, social networks, SMS, personalised web addresses, etc. Beekeepers in Bulgaria need to invest in their social networks presence so as to increase customer loyalty and to conduct relatively inexpensive and accelerated direct marketing.

COMMUNICATION POLICIES OF BEEKEEPING FARMS IN BULGARIA ...

Most of the Bulgarians, who are active on the Internet, visit social networks frequently. Therefore, they are essential for the direct marketing conducted by beekeeping farms. Social networks provide numerous new opportunities – they help create communities and establish interactive communication with solid market segments; they render it possible to make communication interactive and more personalised; and ensure better access to consumers and possibilities for recommending specific bee products. Furthermore, social networks provide information about new products and their prices and make it possible to analyse consumer behaviour. They also facilitate conducting faster and less expensive direct marketing with excellent measurability of results and management of reputation.

Beekeeping farms in Bulgaria need to establish an effective and targeted Internet presence, since it offers a wide range of opportunities for direct marketing to customers on consumer and organisational markets. Direct marketing is a comparatively inexpensive tool for establishing long-term relations with customers. The instrument makes it possible to run campaigns, which are unusual but measurable and allows higher personalisation and interactivity of communications at a lower cost. It also ensures access to online markets and thus connects local and global markets of bee products. Direct marketing requires investment in digital and marketing competences that bring along the regional integration of beekeeping farms in Bulgaria.

The Internet allows Bulgarian beekeepers to communicate rapidly and inexpensively with their existing and potential customers through direct marketing. Beekeeping farms can maintain a good online reputation by using direct marketing as a strategic instrument for accomplishing their long-term objectives and managing their customer relations more efficiently. At a national level, direct marketing is not employed by beekeeping farms themselves, mainly due to the lack of horizontal or vertical integration between the beekeeping farms in the country. It is used in the process of integration of beekeepers and other agricultural producers, though.

Globally, personal sales and direct marketing of bee products and other agricultural products have been growing steadily due to several factors (Lyubenov, 2016, p.125):

- The wide spread of modern technologies and equipment in everyday life, such as freezers, renders it cost-efficient to buy larger quantities of less expensive and fresh agricultural and bee products (pollen, royal jelly, propolis) straight from their producers;
- Growing interest in healthy living and the consumption of regionally produced fresh organic agricultural and bee products;
- The dynamic development of IT systems and technology and the Internet open up wide opportunities for interactive, cheap and fast connections between consumers and regional producers of bee products;
- Upward trends in rural tourism and other types of tourism enable consumers to make their purchases directly from regional producers of bee products and avoid traditional selling points like retail outlets, etc.;

The successful implementation of personal sales and direct marketing by beekeeping farms requires (Lyubenov, 2016, p.125):

- Diversification, i.e. integrating the processes of production, preparation, processing, offering tourism products, sales, etc.;
- Employing additional workforce, if necessary, to maintain a steady pace of routine activities; employees need to possess the skills required for the efficient delivery of the services and activities described above;
- Organising the production process in proximity to big towns, visited tourist sites and maintained main roads.

Direct marketing and personal sales enable beekeeping farms in Bulgaria to establish stronger and more effective relations with end consumers and to be in direct contact with them. They are the basis for building long-term sustainable relations with consumers within the context of market demassification. The Internet is a beneficial factor, since it allows even smaller regional beekeeping farms with lower revenue to conduct market research, to offer bee products, to enter online markets, and to use more personalised communication instruments at affordable prices.

Conclusion

The findings of the research lead to some conclusions in two major aspects:

Firstly, in terms of the EU promotion policy:

- There is a steady upward trend in the volume of funds earmarked for communication activities of European producers of agricultural products and food in the promotion policy of the EU. In line with the CAP objectives related to environmental protection, preserving biodiversity and guaranteeing food security, it is necessary to increase the sphere of application, the instruments and the budgets of the Beekeeping sector and its products;

- The CAP of the EU and national agricultural policies are essential for widening the scope of communication policies of beekeeping farms from micro and meso levels to macro and mega levels. They improve the recognisability of Bulgarian bee products and opportunities for entering new markets and expanding or retaining existing ones;

- Any national programme on beekeeping should involve promotion measures targeted at third countries and EU member-states. Such promotions should primarily include high-quality bee products – organic products, products with protected designation of origin, protected geographical indication, etc. According to the limits of those programmes, which exceed 5 million BGN per year, at least 10%, i.e. more than BGN 0.5 million per year, should be allocated to promotion.

Secondly, in terms of the communication policies of beekeeping farms:

- The CAP of the EU creates the infrastructure and the environment for employing increasingly comprehensively various communication instruments and, hence, for conducting larger-scale communication policies;

- The production of conventional primary bee products substantially reduces the ability of beekeeping farms to implement complex promotion policies. Processing companies and merchants are in a more advantageous position in terms of personal sales and sales promotions that are predominantly used;

- PR, as a combination of publicity and public affairs, has a wide scope of application and high potential to be employed in different economic and social spheres. It can be used to organise events and disseminate information, to attract attention and interest, to promote brands and to integrate into a single cause all marketing communications;

- The use of PR at the level of beekeeping farms is somewhat limited, therefore its effect is of a more limited and local nature, yet the Internet, mobile technologies, online media, etc. may be used to overcome some of those constraints;

- Direct marketing is becoming increasingly important, since it allows high personalisation and measurability of achieved results, and hence, effective interactive communication. It can be used as a strategic instrument for accomplishing long-term goals and improving the management of customer relations;

- Direct marketing can be successfully employed by beekeeping farms as a variety of interactive communication via the Internet and mobile technologies, yet investment in direct marketing from Bulgarian beekeeping farms, the Ministry of Agriculture, Forestry and Food and other government institutions is insignificant;

- The effect of brand advertising is narrower in scope when used at the level of beekeeping farms. Brand advertising requires product differentiation, meeting certain quality standards, conducting joint marketing activities, substantial available budgets, etc.;

- Advertising Bulgarian bee products can be successfully implemented at higher (meso, macro and mega) levels, since the national and the EU agricultural policies ensure substantial subsidies for that. Beekeeping farms in Bulgaria need to invest primarily in PR and direct marketing;

- Despite the possibility for direct contact they provide, advertising, sales promotions and personal sales, relate to major investment and some restrictions, which are primarily targeted at increasing sales. Customers are aware of this and frequently avoid them. When preceded by PR, those become more truthful and effective.

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CONTENTS

MANAGEMENT theory

MOTIVATION OF PEOPLE - THEORETICAL MODELS AND PRACTICES

Driton Sylqa 5

MANAGEMENT practice

PECULIARITIES OF THE UKRAINIAN MEDICAL DEVICE MARKET

Professor Viktor Chuzhykov
PhD student Areg Movsesyan 25

ANALYSIS OF M & A AGREEMENTS AND THEIR SECTORAL CHARACTERISTICS

Artem Ivanov 38

THE INTERNATIONAL INVESTMENT POSITION OF BULGARIAN ECONOMY IN THE PERIOD FROM 2010 TO 2019

Head Assist. Prof. Trayan Yosifov, PhD 54

MARKETING

COMMUNICATION POLICIES OF BEEKEEPING FARMS IN BULGARIA WITHIN THE CONTEXT OF THE COMMON AGRICULTURAL POLICY OF THE EU

Assoc. Prof. Lyubomir Lyubenov, PhD 67