

Carpathian regional and local products as an element of heritage: the analysis of producers' selected promotional activities

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Abstract

Purpose – The purpose is the analysis of promotional activities undertaken by Carpathian producers from Poland, Slovakia, the Czech Republic and Ukraine. The main emphasis was placed on the marketing communication used by Carpathian producers and the use of the components of the definition of a regional and local product in the contents of marketing messages. It was important to evaluate the promotional channels (traditional and online), as well as the content analysis of media vehicles (mainly websites) used for promotional activities.

Design/methodology/approach – The analysis evaluated promotion as well as the content of media vehicles (mainly websites). Identifying the main characteristics of local products (traditionality and locality) which producers use in marketing messages was crucial. The subject of the study concerned marketing communication (content, channels, the sender's intentions) undertaken by Carpathian producers of both food and non-food products. The study included five leaders from each country selected for analysis due to their recognition and importance in the local and regional economic system.

Findings – The study of Carpathian producers indicated that in the promotion of their products they are more likely to reach for customs, history, locality of the production and resources as well as traditional recipes and nomenclature. They tend to demonstrate concern about the local environment or non-massiveness of the production much less often. Both aspects of a local and regional product: tradition and locality are present almost equally in the messages; however none of the subjects of study used the theme of Carpathianness as a unique argument in favor of the localness they represent.

Originality/value – Until now, the producers of Carpathian local and regional products from the Czech Republic, Slovakia, Poland and Ukraine have not been studied in regard to marketing communication. Qualitative analysis made it possible to investigate not so much the intentions and goals of producers in communicating with customers, but to capture what ultimately reaches the potential customer and how the various components of product definition are used in marketing messages.

Keywords Marketing communication, Promotion, Local producers, Carpathian products

Paper type Research article



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Introduction

The question of regional and local products in the literature has been the subject of various analyses (Du Rand, Heath, & Alberts, 2013; Yildiz, Heitz-Spahn, & Belaud, 2018; Garner & Ayala, 2019; Gonda, Angler, & Csóka, 2021; Noguer-Junca, Crespi-Vallbona, & Fusté-Forné, 2021; Pamukçu, Saraç, Aytuğar, & Sandıkçı, 2021; Puntien, Ritthichairoek, Pantana, & Luangsa-art, 2022). Most frequently, the literature identifies these products as food products, rural tourism, including agritourism. It also presents these issues from the perspective of producers and consumers, as the subject of marketing activities or an element of sustainable development.

Regional and local products were also the subject of our research in 2021. The purpose of that research was to identify the so-called most important Carpathian products, i.e. regional products, local products, products produced using the traditional techniques, their producers as well as places and ways of distribution, support instruments and classification; to identify the most important problems; and to provide recommendations for producer support systems. That research was the inspiration for writing this article. We were particularly interested in discovering the method of producers reaching their target recipients with information about products, influencing the clients' shopping behaviors, i.e. marketing communication activities.

The study encompassed the Polish part of the Carpathians (Silesian, Lesser Poland, Subcarpathian Voivodeships) as well as Slovak (Žilina Region, Prešov Region, Košice Region), Ukrainian (Lviv Oblast, Zakarpattia Oblast, Ivano-Frankivsk Oblast) and Czech (moravskoslezsky kraj, zlínský kraj, jihomoravský kraj) regions.

The Carpathian Mountains are among the largest mountain ranges in Europe, covering an area of approximately 209,000 km². They are located in the territory of seven European countries. More than half (55.5%) of the area of these mountains is in Romania, 17.1% in Slovakia, 10.3% in Ukraine, 9.3% in Poland, around 3% both in Hungary and Czech Republic and less than 1% in Austria and Serbia. Nearly, 41% of the Carpathians are located in the studied area (Zemanek, 2009). The determinant behind its socio-cultural specificity was, among other things, the peoples, nowadays referred to collectively as the Wallachians, who made (...) *a significant contribution to the formation of cultural community of the highland groups (Ruthenian, Polish and Slovak) by passing on to them the mountain system of pastoral economy, vocabulary and cultural patterns* (Kłapyta, 2014). Nowadays, these are peripheral areas with a lower population density indicator characterized by, among other things, a large percentage of people living in rural areas, underdeveloped communication network, lower industrialization rates, weaker labor market, lower income of the population and higher than national averages indicators of labor migration.

As mentioned, we were particularly interested in the activities of Carpathian producers in the field of marketing communication. Throughout the years, marketing communication has undergone a fundamental transformation. It has evolved from a unidirectional model, primarily associated with promotion (i.e. one element of the 4Ps marketing mix), to *integrated marketing communications* (IMC). IMC is defined by its multidimensional and multichannel approach, which focuses on the strategic coordination of various channels and tools to deliver consistent and impactful messages to target audiences. Since the end of the twentieth century, when the IMC concept was introduced, its importance has steadily increased (Grove, Carlson, & Dorsch, 2002). In parallel with the development of information technology, marketing has also evolved from a process-, product- and sales-oriented approach to a consumer-oriented and value-based relationship marketing model (Nowacki, 2014). These changes have facilitated the creation of more effective communication strategies that integrate various channels and tools to reach diverse audiences more effectively.

Ultimately, the aforementioned factors have profoundly shaped the contemporary approach to marketing communication, requiring not only strategic planning but also the continuous adaptation of activities to the dynamically changing expectations of markets and consumers (Kitchen, Brignell, Lit, & Jones, 2004).

Today's companies have access to a broad spectrum of marketing instruments that enable them to reach their customers effectively. The evolution of marketing has progressed through various stages: Marketing 1.0 (transactional marketing), Marketing 2.0 (development of the internet), Marketing 3.0 (development of social media), Marketing 4.0 (development of mobile technologies and personalization) (Szafranowicz, 2019), to the current Marketing 5.0, which emphasizes digital reality, the use of artificial intelligence and the integration of diverse communication channels (Kotler, Hermawan, & Setiawan, 2021). In the face of rapid technological advancements and the increasing demographic diversity of audiences – from baby boomers to generations X, Y, Z, and the alpha generation – contemporary marketing communication has reached a new level of complexity. Today, producers and marketers face the complex challenge of adapting tools, channels and communications strategies to address the unique needs, preferences and behavioral patterns of five distinct generations. Such multidimensionality necessitates marketing personalization and the seamless integration of innovative technologies into comprehensive communication strategies (Kotler *et al.*, 2021).

People seeking Carpathian products that constitute an element of cultural heritage are mainly tourists visiting the Carpathians. Although products are produced in such a unique area, which often affects the quality of non-food products or the taste of food products, their producers operate in a modern market economy where competition is present. For this reason, they are forced into strategic planning, and management not only in the area of management actions but also in the area of marketing management which involves an appropriate marketing strategy (Macalik, 2020).

Bearing in mind the "locality" of producers of Carpathian products, who are small, family-run businesses and often sole traders, they are unlikely to run sophisticated promotional campaigns or create well-thought-out communication strategies. Still, they undertake certain communication activities, and it is these that are the subject of the analysis within the framework of the article: the communication (content, channels, the intentions of the sender) and the product characteristics (traditionality, locality), which producers use in their marketing messages.

In conclusion, we aimed to analyze promotional activities undertaken by Carpathian producers from Poland, Slovakia, the Czech Republic and Ukraine. We emphasized the marketing communication used by Carpathian producers and the use of the components of the definition of a regional and local product in the content of marketing messages. It was important to evaluate the promotional channels (both traditional and online), as well as the content of analysis of media vehicles (mainly websites) used for promotional activities. This is an original approach to this topic, which no scholar has yet discussed in the literature.

Literature review

The issue of marketing communication is widely discussed in the literature, e.g. in the context of integrated marketing communication to improve the message to consumers and potential buyers, which is crucial to an organization's overall success (Vernuccio & Ceccotti, 2015; Szromnik, 2016; Finne & Grönroos, 2017; Wagner, Baccarella, & Voigt, 2017; Mulder, 2022; Chaniago & Ariyani, 2023). Small- and medium-sized entrepreneurs need to conduct such activities due to the costs and lack of experience in this field. A significant problem is the exposure of their products using a wide range of marketing communication instruments (Illiashenko & Ivanova, 2015; Kriuchko, Khalatur, Karamushka, & Kaluhina, 2020). Here, the authors emphasize their integrated use, which depends on the planned task, but also on the nature of the product, the stage of the life cycle, the characteristics of the target group, the company's position in the market and other parameters (Gladii, 2015), and it all translates into customer relations, thereby increasing customer loyalty (Bereziuk, 2021).

Moreover, the literature review shows considerable scientific interest in the issue of marketing communication, especially in the agri-food sector. According to Sliusarieva and Kostina, marketing communication is a process of effective information exchange between a

company and its recipients to promote products, provide consumers with awareness of the company's activities, create a positive image of the company and, on this basis, ensure a high competitiveness level (Sliusarieva & Kostina, 2018).

Noteworthy, the changing behavior of consumers, that is, the totality of activities involved in obtaining the product and its use plays here a significant role (Engel, Blackwell, & Miliard, 1993). There are also changes in consumer preferences for products and brands, as well as communication. For producers, this means the need not only to diversify the products they produce but also ways to reach the customers (Szymoniuk, 2006).

A product with the logo of a locality or producer from a particular region in the form of a branded souvenir is becoming an interesting marketing communication instrument, which also helps stimulate sales of local and regional products (Karpil & Struk, 2020).

The issue of regional and local products is widely discussed in the literature. In economic terms, scholars particularly often consider consumers' point of view. They are the ones who seek and reach for regional products more often (Feldmann & Hamm, 2015; Sheng, Xie, Gong, & Pan, 2019; Waehning & Filieri, 2022) and believe that purchasing products produced in their local area is important or fairly important (Statista, 2019).

The main motives for choosing regional and local products are their health-promoting properties and high taste qualities (Guerrero *et al.*, 2012; Goryńska-Goldmann & Gazdecki, 2016). They are valued and often purchased by clients (Fernández-Ferrín Calvo-Turrientes, Bande, Artaraz-Miñón, & Galán-Ladero, 2018). In Europe, people generally view traditional food very positively. Moreover, consumers can accept a slightly higher price and longer preparation time for traditional foods, in exchange for unique taste, better quality and appearance, but most importantly for great nutritional and health values as well as safety (Almli, Verbeke, Vanhonacker, Naes, & Hersleth, 2011).

The literature also addresses the topics of regional, local and traditional products in the context of local culture or heritage. Using local food, arts and crafts as tourist attractions is indeed an important tourism resource (Giampiccoli & Kalis, 2012). Regional products positively impact the regional economy, environment and preservation of cultural heritage. They can become a factor that increases the appeal of the region to visitors. Therefore, it is necessary to improve the availability of products and promote them accordingly. Regional branding is a good way to do this. The brand can guarantee that the product is produced in that region by local producers from local materials, according to traditional production processes. The Slovak experience shows that tourists would purchase more regional products if they were easier to recognize (Hrubalová, 2016). Moreover, studies conducted in Poland confirm the positive and emotional attitude of consumers toward traditional products, which is very important in building loyalty among consumers. They are satisfied with the taste of traditional products. Moreover, they perceive the products as fresh and natural and see their positive influence on consumers' health. However, on the other hand, they pay little attention to geographic and quality labels which aim to build a trustworthy product image. People perceive traditional products as expensive which impedes building loyalty and negatively influences the purchasing frequency (Rudawska, 2014).

A literature review and the analysis of existing research indicate that consumers are interested in regional and local products, appreciate their value and look for information about them (Gutkowska & Ozimek, 2005; Guerrero *et al.*, 2009; Pieniak, Verbeke, Vanhonacker, Guerrero, & Hersleth, 2009; Jefferson-Moore, Robbins, Johnson, & Bradford, 2014; Aprile, Caputo, & Nayga, 2016; Hunus, 2018; Ho Shin & Hancer, 2016; Kuźniar & Witek, 2016; Remar, Campbell, & DiPietro, 2016; Kumar & Smith, 2018; Grzybek & Szopiński, 2017; Łukasiński & Pastuła, 2018). It is important to effectively inform customers about products and their producers, which means conducting effective marketing communication.

Thus far, scholars have not studied Carpathian producers of regional and local products from the areas of four countries, i.e. the Czech Republic, Slovakia, Poland and Ukraine, in terms of marketing communication, so, we needed to determine how exactly Carpathian producers communicate about their products and whether they use the components of the

Research problem

We focused on local and regional products' manufacturers who share a common historical and cultural denominator related to the Carpathian region and present their products as anchored in this tradition. The main subjects of the analysis were promotional activities for local and regional products undertaken by their manufacturers, and the main characteristics of local products (in terms of traditionality and locality) which the manufacturers use in the content of their marketing communication. Therefore, the analysis evaluated promotional channels (traditional and online), as well as the content analysis of media vehicles (mainly websites) used for promotional activities.

Research methodology

The study was qualitative. The subject of the study was the evaluation of promotional channels (traditional and online), as well as the content of analysis of media vehicles (mainly websites) used for promotional activities by selected local Carpathian producers from the countries covered by the study, i.e. Poland, Slovakia, the Czech Republic and Ukraine. Traditional promotion channels include participation in events, printed materials, outdoor advertising, advertising in the press, advertising on the radio, advertising on television and promotional materials of supporting institutions. On the other hand, online promotion includes advertising on websites – from courtesy affiliate links up to paid content within, e.g. Google Ads, materials on websites of supporting institutions, promotion in social media – from own ranges to generate within Facebook Ads, own website/blog, own profile in social media and newsletter. However, we did not use any professional vocabulary on online marketing due to the family nature of small enterprises of local producers and the potential lack of knowledge in this area (the main goal of the study was not to verify the state of the knowledge). Moreover, we considered formal-legal, cultural and technical differences, as well as whether the activities involve food or non-food products. To compare and formulate generalized conclusions, we applied the content analysis method and the categorization key technique, a standardized tool that took into account the relevant dimensions and components of communication. The developed instructions unified how we aggregated and coded individual information. We collected data in four languages.

Originally, we developed the categorization key in Polish. The research team analyzed the tool, considering the basic components of the definition of local/regional product and other characteristics that the study should include. Subsequently, we piloted the categorization key and translated the revised tool into Czech, Slovak and Ukrainian and presented it to those who were responsible for its completion in these languages, with a full discussion of the research intentions, the conceptual and relational content analyses assumed, as well as with the presentation of a pilot example.

We selected companies for analysis (five leaders from each country) based on the producers' recognition and importance in the local and regional economic system: the scale of recognition by the team's researchers from each country, number of official awards and certificates and participation in official promotional events. All the leaders selected for the study had valid international and national certifications to prove their activity in the area of regional and local products. They were also frequently invited to cooperation by institutions supporting the development of regional and local products, often serving as extremely important guests and participants in various events and fairs devoted to regional and local products.

The study posed the following problem questions:

- (1) How do producers producing local and regional products in each country promote their products?

- (2) Are traditional forms of promotion dominant, or is it more of an online promotion?
- (3) Which features of their local/regional products do producers place special emphasis on (what do they highlight)? Are these more characteristics related to tradition and culture? Are these more characteristics related to the place of production?
- (4) Are there any noticeable differences between the countries surveyed? What do they consist of?

Findings/results

We conducted the analysis from the perspective of an average consumer-seeking information about local and regional products. Noteworthy, in 2020 in Europe, almost three-fourth of consumers bought online, feeling safer and more confident about the course of transactions and the quality of purchased goods and services (European Union, 2021). This trend strengthened as a result of the lockdown related to the COVID-19 pandemic. Today, the Internet is the first and often the primary source of information for consumers (Grant, Clarke, & Kyriazis, 2007; Akalamkam & Mitra, 2017; Ratchford, Talukdar, & Lee, 2021). Considering the above, we aimed to capture the spectrum of promotional information that an average consumer using online sources of local and regional producers could potentially encounter.

Answering the first and second problem questions, the selected leaders among Carpathian local manufacturers (20 – five from each of the four countries covered by the study) stated that the Internet was an attractive channel of promotion in comparison with more traditional ones (except Slovakian respondents). Traditional promotion channels include participation in events, printed materials, outdoor advertising, advertising in the press, advertising on the radio, advertising on television and promotional materials of supporting institutions. On the other hand, online promotion includes advertising on websites, materials on websites of supporting institutions, promotion in social media, own website/blog, own profile in social media and newsletter (see Table 1).

First of all, the above summary proves that the manufacturers selected for the study were active in the area of promotion of their local and regional products. They used both traditional and online promotion channels, going beyond the scheme of a local or regional manufacturer as a small family craft enterprise, focused on limited local distribution, fulfilling only a complementary role in the overall scale of various sources of income. In turn, this allows us to assume that the communication practices and solutions observed in the case of these 20 manufacturers are among the best currently used by local and regional Carpathian producers in the Czech Republic, Slovakia, Poland and Ukraine.

Considering the European trends in contemporary consumer behavior and the popularity of their websites as a promotion channel among the selected Carpathian local and regional producers, we focused on how they constructed the online promotion of Carpathian local and regional products. The key in the study was to verify, what the local producers ultimately emphasize, i.e. whether and possibly which of the main characteristics of the local product dominated in the descriptions of the surveyed producers.

For this purpose, we distinguished two basic components of the definition of the Carpathian local or regional product: “tradition” and “locality.” Therefore, the area of “tradition” included: “formula” (i.e. referring to traditional recipes and recipes for the production of a given product), “traditional name” (i.e. emphasizing in the communication about the product that its name is a traditional or historical name), “reference to customs” (if in the description of the product the local manufacturer directly refers to the customs and customs with which the product was traditionally associated), “reference to history” (when in communicating about the product, the history of the product is emphasized). The second key category, i.e. “localities,” included: “local production” (if the manufacturer emphasizes in communicating

Table 1. Number of researched leading manufacturers using given promotional channels divided into traditional and online (five by country)

Country	Traditional promotional channels	Online promotional channels
Czech Republic	3 – events 5 – printed materials 0 – outdoor 0 – advertisement in the press 0 – radio advertisement 0 – TV advertisement 2 – promotional materials of supporting institutions	2 – advertisement on Internet portals 2 – mentions on websites of supporting institutions 2 – advertisement on social media 5 – own website/blog 4 – own social media 0 – newsletter
Slovakia	5 – events 5 – printed materials 3 – outdoor 4 – advertisement in the press 2 – radio advertisement 2 – TV advertisement 5 – promotional materials of supporting institutions	2 – advertisement on Internet portals 5 – mentions on websites of supporting institutions 2 – advertisement on social media 5 – own website/blog 5 – own social media 0 – newsletter
Poland	4 – events 3 – printed materials 3 – outdoor 0 – advertisement in the press 0 – radio advertisement 0 – TV advertisement 3 – promotional materials of supporting institutions	3 – advertisement on Internet portals 3 – mentions on websites of supporting institutions 4 – advertisement on social media 5 – own website/blog 4 – own social media 2 – newsletter
Ukraine	3 – events 3 – printed materials 1 – outdoor 2 – advertisement the press 1 – radio advertisement 2 – TV advertisement 2 – promotional materials of supporting institutions	3 – advertisement on Internet portals 5 – mentions on websites of supporting institutions 4 – advertisement on social media 2 – own website/blog 2 – own social media 0 – newsletter

Source(s): Own elaboration

about this product that it is produced locally, by the local community), “local name” (as opposed to “traditional name,” in this case, the name refers directly to a specific locality or region), “raw materials” (i.e. when the manufacturer emphasizes in communication that the product is produced from raw materials or semi-finished products of local origin), “non-mass production” (when the communication also takes into account the fact that the product is not produced on an industrial scale), “production safe for the local environment” (i.e. when the manufacturer emphasizes that production is safe for the local environment, expressing concern for the well-being of the local nature and community).

In this way, we created a categorization key, grouping the above-mentioned categories into two main groups. We then translated the key into Czech, Slovak and Ukrainian and distributed it to researchers from the individual countries covered by the study. Thanks to this, experts in a given national language analyzed the content. If only any of these categories were identified in the content contained on the website of the entity selected for the study, this was properly highlighted in the tool (on the principle “does not occur – occurs”). This very simple procedure made it possible to compare the websites’ content (see Table 2). In other words, the content analysis abstracted from the linguistic specificity of a given country and the level of advancement of the content presentation, focusing only on the messages’ key components.

Table 2. References to “tradition” and “locality” appearing in 20 leading manufacturers’ communication on local and regional products (5 by country)

Country	Tradition	Locality
Czech Republic	1 – formula	3 – local production
	2 – traditional name	3 – local name
	5 – reference to customs	4 – raw materials
	5 – reference to history	3 – non-mass production
		3 – production safe for the local environment
Slovakia	5 – formula	5 – local production
	5 – traditional name	5 – local name
	5 – reference to customs	5 – raw materials
	5 – reference to history	3 – non-mass production
		3 – production safe for the local environment
Poland	4 – formula	4 – local production
	2 – traditional name	1 – local name
	5 – reference to customs	3 – raw materials
	5 – reference to history	1 – non-mass production
		3 – production safe for the local environment
Ukraine	3 – formula	4 – local production
	4 – traditional name	3 – local name
	4 – reference to customs	3 – raw materials
	4 – reference to history	2 – non-mass production
		2 – production safe for the local environment

Source(s): Own elaboration

If we were to rank the popularity of individual threads according to how many local and regional producers’ leaders referred to each of them in the study, it would look like this:

- (1) “reference to customs” and “reference to history” (category “tradition:” 17 out of 20),
- (2) “local production” and “raw materials” (category “locality:” 15 out of 20),
- (3) “traditional name” (category “tradition:” 14 out of 20),
- (4) “formula” (category “tradition:” 13 out of 20),
- (5) “local name” (category “locality:” 12 out of 20),
- (6) “production safe for the local environment” (category “locality:” 10 out of 20),
- (7) “non-mass production” (category “locality:” 9 out of 20).

Answering the third and fourth problem questions, the leaders surveyed among the Carpathian producers in the Czech Republic, Slovakia, Poland and Ukraine cited “tradition” and “locality” to a similar extent in their communication on the locality and regionality of their products. Of course, each of the surveyed producers tried to find a way of telling a story about their products, using selected elements of the definition of local products.

To obtain a more accurate picture of how the Carpathian heritage was displayed in the analyzed promotional communication on the websites of selected local and regional producers in the Czech Republic, Slovakia, Poland and Ukraine, we analyzed the content of these websites. We found most of the quotations in the “About Us” tabs on the websites selected for the manufacturers’ research. Sometimes, they were more complex solutions, containing dynamic elements or several sub-tabs, other times just a story placed on one page. Nevertheless, in no case was it properly recorded that the product descriptions included references to the locality or tradition, creating a story about the Carpathian product itself. Manufacturers were therefore very keen to describe their history and understanding of the

offered product, rounding off this description with epithets referring to tradition and locality but on a very general level. The order of the discussed threads results from the above-mentioned ranking of the frequency of occurrence of individual types of appeals.

The most commonly occurring in promotional communication “references to tradition” or “references to history” were rather vague, indicating “history” or “customs” but without specifying or referring more precisely to the Carpathian character of the products:

Our Ambrosius honey liqueurs are close to the traditional honey, which our ancestors have been preparing for important moments since time immemorial. The homemade preparation of these liqueurs guarantees the preservation of the medicinal properties of honey. [Czech producer]

In our family, the art of tanning is passed from generation to generation, thanks to which we know almost everything about our profession. When working with leather, we try to do it with respect for tradition because it is the carrier of principles of proper handling of leather. [Polish manufacturer]

In the description of “traditional module,” “ancestors” and “important moments” appear but we do not learn whether this recipe circulated in one family or one town, or perhaps more broadly, or in which specific events important for these communities it was used. Moreover, the provision itself may be a producer’s secret, but it is difficult to deny that more details about the sources of origin and the associated details as to the use and importance attributed in the past would shed more light on the specific (resulting from the local cultural heritage) nature of the product. The description of a completely different product, such as sheepskins, looked similar. “Respect for tradition” is a wording so general that we can apply it anywhere and at any time. The potential recipient will not learn what are exactly the traditions that the producer relies on or what is so special about them that it is difficult to find similar ones in other places in the world. In other words, the producer used “skeleton key” words without giving them a Carpathian meaning and sense. The customer finds information about the specific context of the product but may not know what this uniqueness is about. After all, every region has some traditions and history, in every local or regional product you can find exactly the same features that the surveyed producers are talking about.

On the other hand, in the case of “history,” descriptions either referred to significant events of national or even pan-European scope or focused solely on the history of the company itself:

Our network of corridors and basements is dug directly under the Tokaj House, at a depth of 13 m. Her guardian is a statue of the king of Bela IV, the father of vine growing in Tokaj. After the Tartar invasions (1241), which depopulated the whole south of Slovakia, he also brought Italian winemakers here. They immediately recognized the richness of the sun-drenched slopes and established a tradition that lasted for centuries. Bela IV made Tokaj famous all over the world, and we entrusted him with our underground.

The enterprise-Museum of Drohobycze Saltworks, which has been operating continuously since the 13th century to this day and is rightly considered to be one of the oldest permanent industrial enterprises in the world and the oldest in Ukraine. [Ukrainian producer]

There is a lack of locating both the producer and the product itself in a specific historical context but a local or possibly regional one. In fact, only a visit to a local museum would allow the consumer to place a given product in the local context of the former everyday life. Again, we may find such stories in every corner of the world, and until specificity is indicated, they are too general a background to emphasize the uniqueness of a given local or regional product.

We found another set of locksmith words in the context of “local production” and “local raw materials.”

Only honey produced exclusively by local beekeepers is sold under this brand. These bees are not cultivated commercially to maximize their use but in a manner typical of small and hobby beekeeping. These beekeepers from this region are gradually registered with the civic association “Poloninskýmed,” which ensures that honey from another area cannot be sold under this brand, and then provides professional packaging, marketing, and distribution of this rare honey. [Slovak producer]

Again, the recipient of such a message cannot learn more about beekeeping and beekeepers from the Carpathians. The producer does not argue the indicated care of the product in any specific way, without details allowing a better understanding of the specificity of this product and the resulting value. There are local producers and specific people but only in the general description. The customer does not have the opportunity to “get to know” these people more or learn more about them. If a local product is a product assigned directly to its manufacturer, in a sense constituting the expression of everyday or artistic activities of a particular person, then this is only mentioned here. The customer will also find local fruits, flour, milk or honey in other parts of Europe or the world. There is no indication at all why these particular raw materials are so special – the carpality (and everything that is associated with it) as such is practically absent in the description of the analyzed communications on local and regional products.

The “traditional name” and, in fact, the “local name” were, in terms of frequency, the next category of references in promotional communication. The producers covered by the analysis are right in believing that the traditional name is an attractive element of the product and can attract with its original sound. However, there were no more detailed explanations as to the etymology of the name and the meanings assigned to it. Of course, from the point of view of the manufacturers themselves, the whole thing is fully understandable as they function daily in a context in which the name and everything related to it are fully understandable. However, it is difficult to deny that the name of the product is an excellent pretext for presenting and bringing closer the “living” cultural heritage, with a whole range of attractive local or regional anecdotes and stories. Supplementing the “traditional/local name” with further explanations, indicating anecdotal explanations, and using humor, especially with a local color – these are factors that may influence the fact that the “miodule” will be more attractive for a potential consumer than, for example, “uzo.”

In the case of the recipe, once again, the generalities dominated in the form of “traditional,” “passed on from generation to generation,” and in this case, extremely interesting content can be presented. Recipients of promotional communication can often get acquainted with the regulations (they are presented on the pages, often in great detail). However, the problem is that it is not possible to infer from these general descriptions or even precise regulations what actually shaped these recipes – what environmental, social, economic and historical factors influenced such and no other Carpathian dishes, for example. It is also difficult to guess the specific meaning of the products produced according to these recipes, especially since nowadays one can notice the phenomenon of commemoration of local and regional traditional festive dishes and the unification of objects of formerly completely everyday use.

An example of a rather interesting presentation of a “recipe” is the following description:

The wine production process takes place at home, using the wealth and experience of several generations, using traditional technologies of aging in oak barrels and according to old and own recipes, with the prohibition of the use of water and sugar. In some wines, we use the oldest method of obtaining wort – making berries with the feet in oak vats, which gives them kosher properties. [Ukrainian producer]

There are interesting details, a clear reference to tradition but also in this case there are no local accents (apart from the mentioned domestic production). Grape treading is not unique to the Ukrainian part of the Carpathians. This technique was common in every corner where vines were grown. However, perhaps for hundreds of years, this fairly common activity has been overgrown with local modifications, customs or superstitions that add color to this particular wine.

The less frequently run threads of “production with respect to the local environment” and “non-mass production” displayed the vagueness of the locksmith words used. The natural environment appeared in the communication, more as a particularly valuable and demanding resource (enabling the production of the described products). Nevertheless, we have not identified descriptions emphasizing the uniqueness of the Carpathian natural environment,

indicating directly the specific values impossible to find anywhere else. At the same time, this environment shaped the pastoral economy, within which local traditions emerged, to which the analyzed producers so willingly (albeit generally) referred. In turn, the artisanal nature of production argued the production masslessness, without connection to environmental conditions and seasonal availability of raw materials, or without pointing to the care to preserve traditional or historical production procedures, not to mention concern for the environment.

Limitations and future research

The results provide interesting information in the field of promotional activities undertaken by Carpathian producers from Poland, Slovakia, the Czech Republic and Ukraine. We focused on the study of marketing communication undertaken by Carpathian producers of regional and local products in four different countries, paying attention to the use of individual components of the definition of local regional products in the content of marketing messages.

Research on marketing communication of the most active Carpathian producers indicates that they willingly use customs, history, production location and raw materials as well as traditional nomenclature to promote their products. Recipes and local nomenclature are also important. Less often, they indicate concern for the local environment or the masslessness of production. Noteworthy, both aspects of the local product: tradition and locality are present in the messages almost equally. However, none of the surveyed leaders uses the thread of Carpathianness as a unique argument for the locality they represent.

An important part of the study was a qualitative analysis, which also provided answers as to how specific components of the definition of a local product are used in the content of marketing messages.

Thus far, Carpathian producers of regional and local products have not been studied and compared in terms of marketing communication. The adopted perspective made it possible not so much to examine the intentions and conscious goals that selected producers set themselves in communication with customers, but to capture what ultimately reaches the potential consumer.

During the study of Carpathian regional and local products, we paid attention primarily to the need to support producers in building promotional and marketing messages – from building awareness of the uniqueness of the region, through education in the field of effective marketing tools, to the implementation of specific solutions in practice. We noticed the need to promote and popularize the importance of certification among manufacturers and producers of food and non-food products as well as the public (thus potential recipients – customers). It also seems necessary to increase the level of awareness and knowledge of the institutional environment, as well as of the producers themselves in terms of the resources possessed in a given area, the importance and role of local and regional brands.

In other words, the state of marketing communication of selected leaders among Carpathian producers of regional and local products indicates that while they are excellent craftsmen and experts of local traditions and authentically draw on them, they do not fully present their products to potential customers. Of course, this is because, first, they are usually small family businesses, in which there is simply no time for thoughtful and advanced marketing activities. Moreover, Carpathianism is a daily occurrence for these people, so it is naturally more difficult for them to discover and expose its most interesting aspects – phenomena delighting visitors are obvious for Carpathian producers. Finally, while a lot of space is devoted to recreating local traditions and production methods, there are virtually no tools to teach Carpathian producers of regional and local contemporary promotion and marketing communication techniques. While we did not use tools such as Facebook Ad Library or Google Ads Transparency Center, their potential application represents a valuable and promising direction for further research on paid advertising strategies in the digital space. Due to the exploratory nature of the study and the limited scale and resources of the analyzed producers, we did not include these tools at this stage.

The results contrast with existing knowledge and possible solutions for marketing communication. This applies particularly to digital marketing communication. A review of the research in this area was conducted by [Shankar et al. \(2022\)](#) reviewed research in this area. They showed the research objectives, the methods used, and the main conclusions useful for companies, managers and researchers.

The modern approach to marketing communication requires businesses to build interactions with customers through social media platforms and to better align their social media content with their communication objectives. This significantly strengthens and extends the strategies of integrated marketing communication activities and influences product sales ([Rehman, Gulzar, & Aslam, 2022](#); [Liadeli, Sotgiu, & Verleghe, 2023](#)).

The way customers use social media is evolving, forcing changes in the marketing communication strategies adopted by companies. As the research confirms ([Sprout Social, 2021](#)), a strategy based on social media will be key to a company's survival in the future as it will become the main communication channel for companies. Unfortunately, the results show that Carpathian producers are not using it properly.

We conducted the research during the pandemic and studied only four Carpathian countries. Therefore, the view of the problem was point-based. It did not provide an exhaustive knowledge of the promotional activities undertaken by local producers in each of the seven Carpathian countries. Therefore, further in-depth research on this subject would be strongly justified for at least three reasons:

- (1) the importance of regional and local products in the development of local socio-economic systems is growing;
- (2) content marketing is becoming a dominant trend in promotion and marketing, and subsequent generations of customers are increasingly accustomed to original and unconventional "stories" emphasizing the uniqueness of a given product or service; and
- (3) the Carpathians remain an undiscovered tourist destination for many Europeans, yet, they display the touristic potential of the Alps.

The findings of the study provide a solid foundation for both practical applications and future research. For producers, the results underscore the potential to develop marketing narratives that emphasize authenticity and cultural heritage, effectively differentiating their products and increasing their appeal in competitive markets. Institutions supporting regional and local product promotion can use these insights to design targeted training programs that combine storytelling with modern digital strategies, helping producers strengthen their positioning in both domestic and international markets. From a research perspective, the results open up new avenues, including: evaluating the effectiveness of marketing narratives based on local cultural heritage, investigating the potential of immersive technologies (e.g. virtual and augmented reality) in promoting regional and local products, and comparing marketing strategies across regions to identify universal and context-specific elements of effective marketing communication.

Moreover, the findings of this study contrast not only with current digital trends but also with earlier marketing literature on regional and local products. Scholars such as [Feldmann and Hamm \(2015\)](#), [Rudawska \(2014\)](#) and [Guerrero et al. \(2012\)](#) emphasize the importance of certification, geographical indications, brand positioning and storytelling rooted in territorial identity as strategic marketing tools. In contrast, the analyzed Carpathian producers rarely incorporate these elements into their promotional activities. Their messaging remains general and intuitive, often lacking a cohesive marketing strategy. Before finalizing the study, we also searched extensively for other comparable research. However, we did not identify any prior studies analyzing Carpathian regional producers' promotional practices across multiple countries. This supports the work's exploratory and pioneering nature.

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