

THE IMPACT OF COMMUNICATION ON THE COMPETITIVENESS OF ROMANIAN AGRI-FOOD PRODUCTS

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RESEARCH ARTICLE

Abstract

The agri-food sector plays a crucial role in Romania's economic and rural development, yet the competitiveness of Romanian products remains strongly influenced by how effectively they are communicated to consumers. This paper examines the impact of communication strategies on the market positioning, visibility, and perceived value of Romanian agri-food products. By analyzing theoretical perspectives from marketing and communication, alongside practical examples from the Romanian market, the study highlights the importance of branding, storytelling, transparency, and digital communication channels in creating consumer trust and competitive advantage. The findings emphasize that, although Romanian agri-food products are often competitive in quality, their market success depends largely on strategic communication that can differentiate them in an increasingly crowded and globalized marketplace.

Keywords: communication, agri-food products, market positioning, digital communication

INTRODUCTION

In the last decade, the Romanian agri-food sector has changed quite a lot. New technologies, new market expectations and a stronger interest in healthy and local food have pushed producers to adapt quickly [3]. Today, communication has become one of the main tools that helps companies and farmers promote their products, explain what makes them different, and gain the trust of consumers. In a market where people want to know where food comes from, how it is produced, and whether it is safe, the way producers communicate these things can strongly influence their competitiveness.

Competitiveness is no longer based only on price, productivity, or how much a company can produce [8]. More and more, it depends on how well a product is presented, how visible it is, and how clearly its qualities are communicated. Romanian producers, whether small family farms or larger companies, often have good products, but many of them struggle to promote themselves effectively. This means they sometimes lose ground to foreign brands that invest heavily in marketing and communication. Because of this, communication has become essential. A clear message, a strong brand, attractive packaging, a transparent label, or even a simple online post can shape the way

consumers perceive a product. Good communication can turn a local product into a nationally recognized one, and sometimes even a successful export. It also helps build consumer trust something extremely important in a sector like food, where quality and safety matter a lot. At the same time, public institutions also play a role in strengthening the image of Romanian agri-food products. Campaigns that promote local food, participation in fairs, certification schemes and national programs for farmers contribute to shaping a stronger perception of Romanian products. When private efforts and public communication work together, the impact becomes even stronger.

Romania has great agricultural potential fertile land, traditions, and many natural products that stand out through their authenticity [1]. However, the sector still faces challenges related to fragmented promotion, weak branding, and limited visibility on international markets. Often, the barrier is not product quality, but the lack of consistent communication. This study explores exactly this issue: how communication affects the competitiveness of Romanian agri-food products, what strategies are used, and what changes are necessary to strengthen Romania's position in both local and international markets. The purpose of this paper is to analyse the connection between communication and competitiveness. By looking at studies, recent

trends, and concrete examples from the Romanian market, the paper highlights why communication is no longer optional, it is a key factor that influences consumer choice, market visibility, and the long-term success of agri-food producers. [1].

MATERIAL AND METHOD

The methodology used in this paper is based mainly on a qualitative research approach. Because the topic focuses on communication practices and their influence on the competitiveness of Romanian agri-food products, it is more useful to analyse ideas, trends, and patterns rather than numerical data. The aim is to understand how communication works in this sector and why it matters for market performance.

First, the study relies on a review of academic literature, recent research papers, and sectoral reports that examine communication strategies, consumer behaviour, and agri-food competitiveness. These sources help identify the main concepts, theories, and trends used internationally and in Romania. In addition, the paper includes information from studies that analyse digital communication, branding, certification, and the role of origin and storytelling in promoting food products.

The paper uses case based insights. Several Romanian agri-food examples such as honey producers, dairy companies, and fruit and vegetable producers are examined informally to illustrate how communication strategies work in practice. These cases are not presented as statistical samples but as real examples that help interpret the broader trends identified in the literature.

Overall, the methodology is descriptive, analytical, and interpretative. Its purpose is to connect existing knowledge with concrete practices in the Romanian agri-food sector, showing how communication affects competitiveness both in theory and in reality. By combining literature, comparative insights, and practical examples, the study aims to offer a clear and meaningful understanding of the topic.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

In recent decades, communication has evolved from a support tool in marketing to a central component of how agri-food products reach and persuade consumers. In the agri-food sector, communication goes beyond simply informing; it builds relationships, trust, and perceived

value. [11]. Digital communication has introduced new dynamics [9]. For instance, research on Web/online marketing in the agri-food industry shows that firms which invest in digital channels web analytics, websites, social media can enhance cost efficiency and consumer interaction [10]. Communication in the agri-food domain also must consider the specific characteristics of the sector: perishability, seasonal production, dependence on natural conditions, and strong link to place/origin [13]. These factors require that messages emphasise authenticity, origin, freshness and safety [4]. This means that labels, certification, origin claims, storytelling about heritage or tradition have a special weight in this sector.

Moreover, the shift to more sustainable consumer behaviour has made transparency an asset [9]. Consumers increasingly expect producers to explain how the product was made, where it comes from, and what its environmental or social implications are. In such a context, communication becomes part of the product's value proposition: not just "what it tastes like" but "who made it, how, under what conditions".

Communication directly influences how visible Romanian agri-food products are on the market [5, 9]. Producers who invest in communication whether through social media, improved packaging, clear labeling, or participation in fairs tend to be more easily recognised by consumers. This visibility is crucial in a sector where many companies offer similar products and compete for limited shelf space.

For example, producers of Romanian honey have gained attention by communicating authenticity and origin. Many small beekeepers now use Facebook and Instagram not only to sell honey but to show the beekeeping process, the natural environment, and the traditional methods they use. This transparency makes their products more appealing, helping them differentiate from imported or industrial honey. The analysis of the five honey producers included in the Table 1. shows that Romanian small and medium-sized beekeepers are increasingly aware of the importance of visual communication and brand identity in promoting their products. Each logo reflects a different communication strategy: Miere pe Bune focuses on authenticity and tradition

through warm, natural colors; Runky Bees adopts a modern and minimalist design that appeals to younger consumers; Apivest uses geometric elements and a clean layout to convey professionalism and stability; Miere și Delicii relies on a friendly and vibrant design that fits well with social media engagement; while Honeys Den chooses a premium, elegant visual style that strengthens its competitive positioning. These branding choices are not accidental they help producers stand out in an increasingly crowded market, improve recognition on Facebook and Instagram, and create an emotional connection with consumers. Strong visual communication therefore plays a vital role in enhancing competitiveness, especially for producers who rely heavily on digital channels to reach their audience.

Table 1. Visual Branding Elements of Romanian Honey Brands

Brand	Logo	Description
Miere pe Bune	 [20]	The logo of <i>Miere pe Bune</i> uses warm yellow and black tones, which are traditionally associated with honey and bees. The combination of a stylized honeycomb and a clean typeface communicates authenticity, simplicity, and natural production. Its visual identity suggests transparency and trust, qualities that are essential in the food sector. Because it is clear and easily recognizable, the logo works very well on social media platforms where visual clarity is crucial.
Runky Bees	 [22]	The <i>Runky Bees</i> logo adopts a minimalist and modern approach. The large, elegant letter "R" is combined with subtle bee-wing elements, creating a premium and contemporary aesthetic. This design style appeals especially to younger consumers and positions the brand as stylish and innovative. Such a refined logo performs strongly on

Apivest	 [14]	Instagram and Facebook, where clean, high-quality visuals tend to have higher engagement. The <i>Apivest</i> logo is based on geometric shapes and a dark, professional color palette. The hexagonal honeycomb shape, combined with modern lines, conveys a sense of structure, reliability, and organization. This type of branding is particularly effective for companies aiming to present themselves as established and trustworthy. The simplicity of the logo ensures that it remains visible and clear even when scaled down on digital platforms.
Miere și delicii	 [21]	The logo of <i>Miere și Delicii</i> is bright and friendly, using a golden background and a clearly defined bee illustration. The playful yet balanced design creates an approachable and warm identity, making the brand attractive for family-oriented consumers or those who appreciate artisanal products. Its strong color contrast allows the logo to stand out easily in social media feeds and contributes to positive, engaging communication with customers.
Honeys Den	 [19]	The <i>Honeys Den</i> logo has a sleek and premium look, featuring bold lines and a modern, abstract bee symbol. The refined design suggests quality and exclusivity, positioning the brand toward a higher-end consumer segment. The strong visual impact and minimalistic style make it especially suitable for

		digital branding, where simple and elegant logos attract attention quickly and create a memorable impression.
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Another important finding is that trust is strongly influenced by communication. Consumers often want to know that the food they buy is safe, authentic, and produced responsibly. Communication helps build this trust by offering information about origin, ingredients, production methods, certifications, and quality control.

For instance, Romanian dairy producers who openly explain how their products are made by showing farms, cows, or traditional preparation methods tend to enjoy higher loyalty [2]. Brands like Lactate Brădet or Napolact use storytelling about tradition, local farms, and clean raw materials. This approach makes consumers feel more confident and emotionally connected to the product, turning trust into a competitive advantage.

The logos from Table 2. show how dairy and farm producers in Romania use visual identity to express authenticity, tradition, and trust. Each brand adopts a different communication style, traditional, playful, vibrant, or ethical, but all aim to strengthen consumer confidence and differentiate their products in a competitive agri-food market.

Table 2. Visual Branding Elements of Romanian Dairy Brands

Brand	Logo
Făbricața de lactate	 [15]
Ferma Wagner	 [18]
Ferma măgărițelor	 [17]
Ferma cu omenie	 [16]

The logo of Făbricața de Lactate has a traditional and artisanal aesthetic, using warm beige and green tones. The ribbon style framing suggests craftsmanship and a family owned approach, while the soft colors communicate freshness and natural ingredients. This visual identity appeals to consumers who value local,

handmade dairy products and conveys a sense of reliability and authenticity.

Ferma Wagner uses a playful and modern logo, with rounded letters and a friendly color palette. The warm red tones evoke energy and familiarity, while the simple farm inspired graphic reinforces the idea of a trustworthy local producer. Its approachable style works very well on social media, especially when targeting families or consumers who prefer fresh products sourced directly from farms.

The logo for *Lapte de Măgăriță – Ferma Măgărițelor* is colorful and distinctive. The bright blue background creates a strong contrast with the yellow ribbon, making the logo easily noticeable. The use of cheerful colors gives the product a fresh and unique character, reflecting the niche nature of donkey milk. This type of branding stands out online, helping the product differentiate itself in a competitive dairy market.

Ferma cu Omenie adopts a darker, emotional, and storytelling-driven visual identity. The deep burgundy tones and rustic background evoke tradition, sincerity, and ethical farming practices. The design communicates more than just a product it conveys values such as fairness, community, and care. This makes the brand powerful on social media, where emotional storytelling significantly increases engagement. [9, 15]

When comparing Romanian agri-food producers with well-established European brands, several differences in communication strategies become apparent [7]. Many European companies, such as Miel de Lavande from France, Langnese from Germany, Parmalat from Italy, or Arla Foods from Denmark, have long invested in strong, consistent branding and highly professional communication campaigns. Their visual identity is polished, uniform across all platforms, and supported by storytelling that reinforces national heritage, quality guarantees, and production standards.

For example, Langnese, one of Germany's most recognized honey brands, uses a clean golden color palette, a distinctive shield-shaped logo, and the slogan "Premium Qualität." Their packaging and communication emphasize purity, German tradition, and strict quality control. This creates immediate trust and makes the product easily recognizable in supermarkets across Europe. In comparison, many Romanian honey brands rely on more artisanal or rustic visuals, which communicate authenticity but

may not achieve the same level of international visibility.

Similarly, in the dairy sector, Arla Foods from Denmark and Parmalat from Italy use unified branding that combines modern design with large-scale communication campaigns. They communicate their values such as sustainability (Arla) or Mediterranean lifestyle (Parmalat) through professional videos, influencer partnerships, farm-to-table transparency programs, and educational content. Romanian dairy producers, such as Făbrica de Lactate or Ferma Wagner, typically emphasize tradition, local sourcing, and natural ingredients, but their communication resources are much more limited. Their presence is strong locally and on social media but lacks the cross-country branding that European competitors have.

Another important difference lies in the use of certifications and origin branding. European brands often highlight EU certifications such as PDO (Protected Designation of Origin) or PGI (Protected Geographical Indication) [4, 6]. For example, French Comté cheese or Greek Feta PDO rely heavily on these labels in both packaging and advertising. In Romania, although some producers have obtained similar certifications (like "Produs Montan"), the communication around these labels is still less developed or less visible online.

Despite these differences, Romanian producers often shine in areas where European brands sometimes struggle: authenticity, storytelling, and emotional connection. Brands like Ferma cu Omenie or Miere pe Bune create a feeling of closeness by showing real farms, real people, and daily production processes on social media. While European brands use more polished visuals, Romanian producers often feel more personal, warm, and relatable which appeals strongly to consumers who value transparency and tradition.

European brands generally excel in consistency, scale, and professional level communication, while Romanian brands stand out through authenticity, local identity, and strong emotional storytelling. Both approaches have advantages, but for Romanian products to become more competitive internationally, producers may need to combine their authentic, tradition based messaging with more structured branding and stronger digital communication strategies.

The rise of digital platforms has changed the way Romanian agri-food producers communicate. Social media, websites, online shops, and influencer collaborations offer opportunities for small producers to reach consumers without high marketing costs. During the analysis, it became clear that producers who use digital communication effectively are better positioned compared to those who rely only on traditional methods. Consumers respond positively to messages about local traditions, unique recipes, regional identity, and natural ingredients. Storytelling adds emotional value, making the product feel more special and authentic.

For example, products certified as "Produs Montan" or those coming from specific regions (like Sibiu cheese, Argeş honey, or Transylvanian cold cuts) benefit greatly from communication centred on region, tradition, and lifestyle. When these stories are clearly communicated, consumers are willing to pay higher prices, which directly improves competitiveness [12].

Despite the potential, many Romanian agri-food producers still struggle with communication. Some rely only on basic labels, rarely engage with online platforms, and do not invest in brand building. This lack of communication makes their products harder to distinguish from competitors, even when the quality is high [6].

Some producers focus exclusively on price competition, which limits long-term competitiveness.

Without strong communication, producers remain vulnerable to imported products with better branding, even if the Romanian product is fresher or more natural. The sector therefore continues to face a communication gap that reduces the overall competitiveness of Romanian agri-food products on the European market. Campaigns promoting Romanian products, participation in international fairs, and national certification schemes help strengthen the image of the country as a source of quality and authenticity. However, these initiatives need to be more consistent and better coordinated to reach their full potential.

Many European countries successfully use strong national branding ("Made in Italy", "Taste of Spain", "France Terroir and Tradition"). Romania has started similar efforts, but they need deeper communication, clearer

messaging, and better collaboration between producers and institutions [12].

To better understand how communication shapes the competitiveness of Romanian agri-food products, it is useful to analyse the sector through a strategic perspective. A SWOT analysis provides a clear overview of the internal strengths and weaknesses related to current communication practices, as well as the external opportunities and threats that influence producers on the national and European markets. By examining these four dimensions, we can identify the main factors that help Romanian products stand out, the challenges producers continue to face, and the areas where communication strategies can be improved. This SWOT analysis therefore offers a concise and structured framework that supports the broader findings of this study and highlights the strategic importance of communication for the future growth of the Romanian agri-food sector.

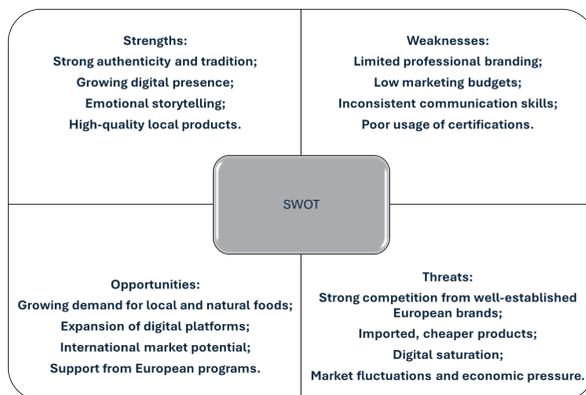


Figure 1. SWOT Analysis

The SWOT analysis highlights several important aspects that influence how communication contributes to the competitiveness of Romanian agri-food products. One of the main strengths of the sector is the strong sense of authenticity and tradition that producers communicate through their products. Many Romanian farmers emphasize natural ingredients, local origins, and traditional methods, which appeal to consumers who value trustworthy and artisanal food. Another strength is the growing digital presence of small producers. Platforms such as Facebook and Instagram allow them to share moments from daily farm life, show transparent production processes, and build direct trust with their audience. Emotional storytelling also plays a significant role, as many Romanian brands tell personal stories about family farms,

local heritage, and community values, which helps create a more loyal and emotionally connected consumer base. Additionally, the high quality of many Romanian honey, dairy, and farm products makes communication more credible, since producers can confidently highlight real strengths.

Despite these advantages, there are also clear weaknesses that limit competitiveness. Compared to large European brands, many Romanian producers still lack professional branding, consistent visual identity, modern packaging, or a well-developed online presence. Their marketing budgets are often very limited, making it difficult to invest in large advertising campaigns, collaborations, or promotional events that would increase visibility. Communication skills are sometimes inconsistent as well, with irregular posting, low-quality visuals, or unclear messages that weaken the competitive image of otherwise strong products. Another weakness is the insufficient use of certifications such as PDO, PGI. Although these labels could significantly strengthen credibility, they are often poorly promoted or not clearly explained to consumers. The external environment also creates significant opportunities for Romanian agri-food producers. Demand for natural, local, and transparent food is growing rapidly across Europe, offering Romanian producers a chance to position themselves as suppliers of authentic, clean-label products. Digital platforms continue to expand, giving producers low-cost tools such as online shops, influencers, TikTok marketing, and farm-to-door delivery systems that help increase visibility even without large budgets. There is also considerable potential for international market expansion. With stronger branding and better communication of certifications, Romanian honey, dairy, and artisanal products could enter premium niches abroad. Furthermore, European and national support programs offer opportunities to improve branding, packaging, and promotional strategies through available funding.

At the same time, several threats must be considered. Romanian producers face strong competition from well-established European brands such as Arla, Langnese, or Parmalat, which benefit from powerful marketing teams, high budgets, and polished communication. Imported products with strong brand identities can overshadow Romanian goods even when the local products are higher quality. Digital saturation also poses a challenge, as social

media algorithms and the growing number of online competitors make visibility harder to maintain without consistent and strategic communication. Finally, economic pressures such as rising production costs, market fluctuations, and new EU regulations can affect small producers who are already limited in resources and may struggle to adapt quickly. Together, these elements show that communication is both a key advantage and a major challenge for Romanian agri-food producers. To remain competitive, the sector must build on its strengths authenticity, quality, and emotional storytelling while addressing weaknesses and preparing for external threats through more professional, coherent, and strategic communication practices.

CONCLUSIONS

The findings of this research show that communication is not simply an accessory to marketing in the Romanian agri-food sector, but a core element that shapes how competitive producers can become. In a market where consumers demand transparency, authenticity, and emotional connection, the way producers communicate their values and practices often determines whether their products stand out or remain unnoticed. The study highlights that Romanian agri-food producers who invest in clear branding, strong visual identity, and consistent digital communication enjoy higher visibility, stronger consumer trust, and greater market recognition.

The examples analysed, ranging from honey producers to dairy farms demonstrate that visual communication, especially through logos, storytelling, and social media presence, plays a decisive role in building brand identity. Producers who use attractive, modern, and meaningful logos are better able to differentiate themselves online, attract new customers, and maintain long-term loyalty. Digital platforms such as Facebook and Instagram have become crucial tools, particularly for small and medium-sized farms that lack the resources to compete through large-scale advertising. Effective use of these channels allows them to connect directly with consumers, present their production processes, and explain what makes their products unique.

Despite these positive observations, the study also shows that communication remains a challenge for many Romanian producers. A large number still rely on basic packaging, minimal online presence, or traditional

communication methods that no longer meet modern consumer expectations. This limits their competitiveness, especially when facing imported products that invest heavily in marketing and branding. Strengthening communication skills and strategies is therefore essential for the sector's future development.

Overall, the research concludes that communication is a strategic driver of competitiveness in the Romanian agri-food sector. When producers combine quality products with coherent visual identity, transparent messaging, and active digital engagement, they can significantly enhance their market position. For Romania to consolidate its presence on both national and international markets, producers and institutions must continue to develop stronger communication strategies that highlight authenticity, local heritage, and responsible production. In this way, communication becomes not only a promotional tool, but a long-term investment in the value and reputation of Romanian agri-food products.

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