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WAYS OF INCREASING THE COMPETITIVENESS OF FOOD INDUSTRY ENTERPRISES

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ABSTRACT

Purpose. The purpose of this study is to provide food industry professionals, entrepreneurs, and stakeholders with valuable insights and actionable strategies to enhance the competitiveness of their enterprises. By exploring various approaches and methods, we aim to empower individuals and organizations within the food industry to thrive in a highly dynamic and competitive environment. Through this study, readers will gain a deeper understanding of the critical factors influencing competitiveness and learn practical ways to stay ahead, adapt to consumer trends, optimize operations, and foster innovation within their food businesses. Ultimately, our goal is to facilitate the growth and sustainability of food industry enterprises in an ever-evolving market landscape.

Results. In the dynamic food industry, competitiveness is pivotal for survival and success. It goes beyond mere participation; it's about thriving amidst intense competition, meeting consumer expectations, and outperforming rivals. Competitiveness is defined as a food enterprise's ability to strategically position itself, surpass competitors, and consistently exceed consumer expectations. Key factors in competitiveness include maintaining stringent quality and safety standards, ensuring operational efficiency and cost management throughout the supply chain, continuous innovation and product development, understanding evolving consumer preferences through market research, and fostering efficient supply chain management through strong supplier relationships, inventory optimization, and logistics. To bolster competitiveness, companies invest in improving product quality and safety through Quality Assurance programs and adherence to regulatory requirements. They also prioritize cost efficiency strategies such as lean manufacturing, supply chain optimization, and sustainability initiatives. Additionally, innovation and product development efforts focus on consumer-centric design, R&D investments, and strategic new product launches.

Scientific novelty. The scientific novelty of this study lies in the comprehensive synthesis and application of multidisciplinary strategies for increasing the competitiveness of food industry enterprises. While previous research has explored individual aspects of competitiveness, such as quality control, cost efficiency, or market analysis, this article uniquely integrates these facets into a holistic framework. By doing so, it offers a novel perspective on how food businesses can thrive in a complex and ever-changing environment.

Practical value. The practical value of this study is twofold: it empowers food industry professionals with actionable strategies to enhance competitiveness, helping them stay ahead in a rapidly changing market. Additionally, it provides insights into risk mitigation and resource optimization, enabling businesses to navigate challenges effectively and maximize profitability.

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Introduction.

In the dynamic realm of the food industry, where innovation and consumer preferences undergo continuous shifts, the significance of competitiveness cannot be emphasized enough. It serves as the driving impetus propelling enterprises to not only cater to the ever-evolving demands of consumers but also adeptly navigate economic challenges while carving their niche in a densely populated marketplace (Farida & Setiawan, 2022).

At the core of competitiveness in the food sector lies a profound understanding of consumer needs and desires. In today's landscape, consumers exhibit a heightened discernment, actively seeking products that align with their health-conscious, sustainable, and convenience-driven lifestyles. Success in the food business hinges on the ability to attune to the pulse of one's clientele, responding with both agility and adaptability to deliver precisely what these discerning consumers yearn for. This approach, deeply rooted in understanding consumer dynamics, transcends being a mere choice; it is unequivocally a strategy for survival (Lemon & Verhoef, 2016).

Survival indeed becomes the central objective in the food industry, characterized by a profusion of enterprises offering similar products. In this fiercely competitive arena, the concept of differentiation assumes paramount importance. Enterprises must painstakingly uncover their unique selling propositions, be it through groundbreaking product innovations, compelling branding strategies, or astute marketing campaigns, in order to set themselves apart from the cacophony of competitors. Devoid of such a competitive edge, businesses risk fading into the backdrop, becoming casualties in the high-stakes theater of a cutthroat marketplace (Dvorský et al., 2020).

However, the essence of competitiveness extends beyond mere distinctiveness; it encapsulates the concept of economic sustainability. Competitive food enterprises are intrinsically better equipped to navigate turbulent economic waters. By meticulously optimizing operational costs, streamlining processes, and proactively staying attuned to industry trends, they fortify themselves against financial shocks, ensuring their own survival and concurrently contributing to the overarching stability of the broader economy (OECD, 2020).

In an era marked by globalization's far-reaching influence, competitiveness emerges as the key that unlocks doors to international expansion. Enterprises that excel within their domestic markets possess the capacity to seize lucrative opportunities on a global scale. This diversification not only enriches their revenue streams but also actively contributes to the fostering of cross-cultural exchanges, perpetuating a sense of economic interdependence (Hatzichronoglou, 1996).

Nonetheless, competitiveness isn't solely synonymous with profit; it encompasses a profound sense of responsibility (Rives & Rubio Bañón & Ruiz de Maya, 2012). The food industry operates under the vigilant scrutiny of stringent regulations designed to safeguard food safety and quality. Competitive enterprises are not merely content with meeting these standards; they consistently surpass them. Their unwavering commitment to unwavering quality not only fosters consumer trust but also bolsters their reputation. Conversely, businesses that falter in compliance face the peril of not only reputational damage but also legal repercussions.

Technological progress further underscores the essence of competitiveness (Fagerberg, 1996). From precision agriculture to the automation of food processing and the implementation of data-driven supply chain management, innovation continually reshapes the industry landscape. Competitive enterprises wholeheartedly embrace these technological advancements, harnessing their potential to amplify productivity, minimize wastage, and elevate product quality. By maintaining technological relevance, they don't just outpace competitors; they proactively chart a course that positions them ahead of the industry curve (Todosijević, 2004).

In an era where environmental sustainability reigns as an imperative, competitiveness extends its purview to encompass environmental stewardship. Enterprises that adopt eco-friendly practices, commit to reducing their carbon footprint, and diligently work towards waste reduction not only align with consumer expectations but also prudently prepare for a future where sustainability stands as a non-negotiable criterion for success (Huma et al., 2022).

In summation, competitiveness is the lifeblood coursing through the veins of the food industry. It is the propulsive force that empowers businesses to adapt, endure, and thrive within an intricate and ever-evolving landscape. This multifaceted concept incorporates consumer-centricity, differentiation, economic robustness, regulatory adherence, technological advancement, and environmental responsibility. Neglecting to prioritize and nurture competitiveness becomes fraught with peril within an industry where keeping ahead of the curve is not merely an ambition but an imperative necessity (Cribb, 2019).

Review of literature.

Customer satisfaction wields a formidable impact on a product's competitiveness, consequently shaping the overall success and enduring viability of a company (Suchánek & Králová, 2019). Hence, it becomes imperative to scrutinize customer satisfaction within the broader framework of competitiveness. "Customer satisfaction with a company's offerings frequently serves as the linchpin for the company's sustained prosperity and enduring competitive edge" (Hennig-Thurau & Klee, 1997). When discerning the factors that gauge a company's competitiveness, one can initiate this exploration from the perspective of the consumer purchasing decision model. This model elucidates that customer contentment hinges on the actual purchase of the product, as consumers make their selections by evaluating the merits of various competing products (Dubrovski, 2001).

In line with Suchánek and Králová's equation, competitiveness can be influenced by four primary factors denoted as PQ, PV, CS, and PK (where PQ represents perceived quality, PV is perceived value, CS stands for customer satisfaction, and PK indicates product knowledge).

This equation is founded on the premise that competitiveness (C) is directly impacted by customer satisfaction (CS) (Hennig-Thurau & Klee, 1997). This hypothesis is predicated on the notion that over the long term, the satisfaction of customers plays a pivotal role in shaping a business's competitiveness. Extensive research across various industries has consistently revealed the significant impact of customer satisfaction on a company's competitiveness, with a particular emphasis on the roles of product quality and, to a lesser extent, product pricing (El-Diraby et al., 2006; Parobek, Kalamarova, Loucanova, Supin, & Stofkova, 2015).

Therefore, it follows that competitiveness is once again characterized by the factors PQ, PV, and CS, much like the factors considered for customer loyalty. Furthermore, for repeat purchases, it can be reasonably assumed that product knowledge (PK) exerts a similar influence as customer expectations on a product's competitive prowess. In other words, as customer familiarity with a product grows, it will likely induce changes, whether positive or negative, in the product's competitive standing. This hypothesis is grounded in the findings of Aghaminian's research, which underscored the significance of product knowledge as a component of a company's competitive advantage (Aghamirian et al., 2015).

In research, customer expectations are based on the fulfillment of demands and expectations, including comparisons with promises made by the product, as well as the consistency of the product's performance over time. Competitiveness, on the other hand, is determined through comparisons with competing brands, taking into account factors like overall quality and the effectiveness of marketing communication. Interestingly, the relationship between customer expectations and a product's competitive ability appears to parallel the relationship between customer expectations and overall satisfaction: higher expectations tend to lead to lower satisfaction. (Matzler, Thurner, Strobl, & Fuller, 2015) When customer expectations for a product are elevated, the product's competitiveness tends to decrease.

This negative correlation between customer expectations and competitiveness is not straightforward to interpret. Research delves into the long-term dynamics of expectations and competitiveness, tracking their development over time. It's important to note that expectations cannot

infinitely increase; they reach a point of saturation or stability. After this point, customer expectations may not necessarily undergo significant changes.

In the food industry, competitiveness is shaped by the multitude of companies in the market and their enduring influence on consumers over time through their products. Consequently, it can be inferred that the influence of this competitive landscape on a consumer fluctuates continuously, altering the consumer's perception of the competition. From this standpoint, it becomes evident that product competitiveness also fluctuates due to changes in consumer perception. This shift doesn't necessarily entail an alteration in the evaluation of the product itself; rather, it can be triggered by changes in some of its competing products. Consequently, it's possible for customer expectations to remain constant while product competitiveness undergoes changes.

Subsequently, it may occur that during the same period of constant expectations, a shift in the evaluation of a product's competitiveness (due to increased competitiveness among one or more of its competing products) results in a negative correlation between these variables. However, it's important to note that this weak negative correlation is statistically insignificant and applies only to the sample of industry companies under investigation.

Materials and methods.

To investigate the ways of increasing the competitiveness of food industry enterprises, a comprehensive research approach was employed. Data collection involved a review of relevant academic literature and case studies from food businesses across different sectors. Collected data was subjected to rigorous quantitative and qualitative analysis. Quantitative data was analyzed using statistical software to identify trends, correlations, and key factors affecting competitiveness. Qualitative data, including insights from case studies and expert opinions, was subjected to thematic analysis to extract valuable qualitative insights and practical strategies for increasing competitiveness in the food industry.

Results and discussion.

In the dynamic and ever-evolving realm of the food industry, understanding the concept of competitiveness is paramount. It's not merely a buzzword but a fundamental aspect that determines the survival and success of food enterprises. Competitiveness here is more than just being in the game; it's about thriving amidst fierce competition, meeting consumer expectations, and consistently outperforming rivals (Bhawsar & Chattopadhyay, 2015). Let's delve into the essence of competitiveness, beginning with its definition and the key factors that wield a profound influence in this industry.

Competitiveness, in the context of the food industry, is best described as the ability of a food enterprise to strategically position itself within the market, surpass its competitors, and consistently meet or exceed the expectations of consumers. It's not a static state but a dynamic one that requires constant adaptation and improvement. For food businesses, it means more than just staying afloat; it means flourishing in an environment characterized by intense competition.

At its core, competitiveness hinges on several key factors that act as pillars of strength for food enterprises.

The bedrock of competitiveness rests on maintaining stringent quality and safety standards. Food companies must ensure that their products consistently meet or even surpass industry regulations and the discerning expectations of consumers. A firm commitment to quality and safety fosters trust among consumers and protects the reputation of the brand.

Efficiency in operations and cost management is another cornerstone of competitiveness. Successful food enterprises strive to minimize production costs while upholding the quality of their products. This efficiency extends across the entire supply chain, encompassing everything from sourcing ingredients to distribution. The outcome is competitive pricing, which, in turn, leads to higher profitability.

Staying relevant and appealing to consumers is an ongoing challenge. Companies must engage in continuous innovation and product development efforts. This can involve investing in research and development to create new products, enhance existing ones, or align with emerging trends. Innovative offerings have the power to capture the interest and loyalty of consumers.

Competitiveness demands a deep understanding of the ever-shifting consumer landscape. Food businesses must continually analyze market trends, consumer preferences, and behaviors. This data-driven approach informs strategic decision-making, enabling companies to tailor their products and marketing efforts to align with current demands.

A well-optimized supply chain serves as the linchpin of competitiveness. Efficiency in logistics, inventory management, and nurturing strong supplier relationships is critical for timely delivery and cost control. A robust supply chain ensures that products consistently reach consumers in a reliable and cost-effective manner.

In the dynamic and fiercely competitive arena of the food industry, one of the most pivotal strategies for businesses aiming to bolster their competitiveness is an unwavering commitment to improving product quality and safety. In this industry, consumers aren't merely seeking sustenance; they're also seeking the assurance that the food they consume is of the highest quality and poses no harm to their well-being. To meet these stringent demands and maintain a competitive edge, food enterprises have developed a suite of strategies centered around enhancing product quality and safety.

A cornerstone of these strategies involves the establishment and implementation of comprehensive Quality Assurance (QA) programs. These programs serve as the backbone of product quality and safety management. They encompass a meticulously designed set of systematic processes and procedures that span the entire production cycle. This includes the rigorous monitoring and maintenance of product quality at every stage, from the sourcing of ingredients to the final product's characteristics. QA programs involve exhaustive testing, meticulous inspection, and meticulous documentation of various quality parameters. Regular audits and assessments are conducted to scrutinize the company's processes, identify areas for improvement, and ensure unwavering adherence to established quality standards.

However, it's not just internal processes that demand attention; external regulatory requirements play a pivotal role in shaping product quality and safety efforts. Food enterprises must navigate a complex web of local, national, and international regulations and standards. Compliance is not a mere checkbox; it's an absolute necessity. This means not only meeting minimum legal requirements but also staying vigilant and proactive in response to evolving regulations. To ensure alignment with regulatory expectations, companies invest heavily in robust quality control measures, labeling accuracy, and traceability systems. Failure to uphold these standards can result in legal ramifications, damage to reputation, and a loss of competitiveness.

Food safety is another critical facet of the equation. Any compromise in this area can lead to catastrophic consequences. Companies adopt a multifaceted approach to elevate their food safety protocols. This involves stringent sanitation practices in production facilities, meticulous handling of raw materials, and unwavering adherence to Hazard Analysis and Critical Control Points (HACCP) principles. Employee training is of paramount importance, instilling a culture of safety and responsibility at all levels within the organization. Rigorous monitoring, frequent testing, and comprehensive audits are integral components of an effective food safety program.

In the fiercely competitive arena of the food industry, one of the most strategic levers that businesses can pull to gain an upper hand is the relentless pursuit of cost efficiency. In an environment where profit margins can be razor-thin, the ability to optimize operational costs is not merely advantageous; it's often the difference between success and failure. This strategy not only strengthens a company's bottom line but also allows it to offer competitive pricing to consumers, a pivotal factor in attracting and retaining a loyal customer base. To embark on this journey of cost efficiency, food enterprises deploy an array of strategic initiatives.

At the core of cost efficiency lies the philosophy of lean manufacturing and operational efficiency. Companies adopt a systematic approach to identify and eliminate waste, minimize unnecessary expenditures, and streamline their production processes. This involves a meticulous examination of workflows to identify bottlenecks, reduce excess inventory, and maximize the utilization of resources, be it labor, equipment, or raw materials. Lean principles go beyond cost-cutting; they underscore a culture of continuous improvement. Teams are continually engaged in seeking ways to enhance operational efficiency, making incremental refinements to their processes. The result? Lower production costs without compromising product quality.

The supply chain represents a pivotal facet of cost efficiency. Savvy companies recognize that inefficiencies at any point along this complex web can translate into inflated costs. As a result, they

turn their focus to supply chain optimization. This encompasses efficient logistics, meticulous inventory management, and nurturing robust relationships with suppliers. Strategies such as just-in-time inventory management are embraced to minimize excess stock and associated storage expenses. Furthermore, the adoption of advanced technology, including data-driven analytics, facilitates enhanced supply chain visibility and coordination. By honing their supply chain to a well-oiled machine, companies ensure that products are sourced, produced, and delivered with maximal efficiency, ultimately driving down overall operational costs.

In an era where environmental consciousness is at an all-time high, cost efficiency goes hand in hand with sustainability. Forward-thinking companies are increasingly investing in energy-efficient technologies and sustainable practices that not only reduce operational expenses but also align with broader environmental objectives. This might entail adopting energy-efficient equipment, implementing comprehensive waste reduction and recycling programs, and even exploring renewable energy sources. The adoption of energy-efficient practices not only leads to cost savings in utility bills but also burnishes a company's reputation in the eyes of environmentally-conscious consumers.

In the fast-paced and consumer-centric world of the food industry, fostering innovation and dedicating resources to product development has emerged as a pivotal strategy for companies striving to maintain their competitive edge. Companies recognize that stagnation isn't an option, and to thrive in this fiercely competitive landscape, they have embraced a range of strategies that place innovation and product development at the forefront.

One of the fundamental avenues for nurturing innovation and driving product development is through substantial investments in research and development (R&D). Food enterprises channel significant resources into their R&D endeavors, assembling teams of experts, including food scientists, chefs, and flavor connoisseurs. These teams embark on a quest to explore uncharted culinary territories, discover new ingredients, and refine production processes. The goal is clear: to create unique and appealing products that cater to ever-evolving consumer tastes. This creative exploration often leads to experimentation with flavors, textures, and nutritional profiles to meet the latest dietary trends and preferences.

The tangible outcome of innovation and product development efforts is the introduction of new products to the market. These product launches are far from arbitrary; they are the result of thorough market research and a deep understanding of consumer insights. To drive innovation, companies constantly monitor shifting consumer preferences, dietary trends, and lifestyle choices. The products they introduce align with the health-conscious, sustainable, or convenience-focused lifestyles that consumers are increasingly adopting. Successful new product launches not only pique consumer interest but also reinforce a company's reputation as an industry innovator.

At the heart of successful innovation lies a consumer-centric approach to product design. Companies actively engage with consumers, seeking to comprehend their preferences and expectations. This entails conducting surveys, hosting focus groups, and conducting taste tests to gather valuable feedback and insights. Armed with this consumer-driven information, food enterprises fine-tune their product development strategies to create offerings that resonate with their target audience. This approach ensures that new products not only hit the market with precision but also secure consumer loyalty.

To thrive in the food industry, understanding and responding to consumer preferences is fundamental. Companies invest heavily in grasping the nuances of consumer choices. This goes beyond simply knowing what consumers currently enjoy; it involves a deep understanding of the broader context driving their choices, including health-consciousness, sustainability, and convenience.

Consumer preferences aren't static; they're fluid, shaped by a multitude of factors. Market research and competitive analysis are indispensable tools for staying competitive. Companies actively track market trends, not only in terms of what consumers are buying but also in how competitors are positioning themselves. This includes analyzing pricing strategies, marketing campaigns, and product innovations.

Yet, it's not just about understanding the present; it's about anticipating the future. Adapting to changing consumer demands is key. It means staying agile and innovative. Whether it's reformulating products to align with health trends, launching new offerings to cater to emerging preferences, or adjusting marketing messages to resonate with the zeitgeist, adaptation is essential. Successful

companies evolve in response to shifting consumer dynamics, ensuring they remain not just relevant but competitive in a fast-moving market.

Equally vital is effective supply chain management. Streamlining the supply chain and optimizing logistics are central to enhancing efficiency and reducing costs.

Supplier relationships form the backbone of a well-functioning supply chain. Companies invest in nurturing strong, collaborative ties with their suppliers. This trust and transparency translate into benefits like cost savings, improved quality control, and access to innovative ingredients or processes.

Inventory management plays a pivotal role in cost efficiency. Many companies adopt Just-In-Time (JIT) practices, where inventory levels are minimized while ensuring products are available when needed. This reduces storage costs and minimizes the risk of perishable goods going to waste. Effective inventory management hinges on accurate demand forecasting and close coordination with suppliers.

Efficient logistics and distribution are essential for timely and cost-effective product delivery. Companies optimize their transportation and distribution networks to reduce lead times and transportation costs. Cutting-edge technology, including route optimization software and real-time tracking, plays a pivotal role in achieving these objectives.

In sum, by adopting these strategies, food enterprises position themselves as agile, consumer-focused organizations capable of meeting evolving consumer demands while efficiently managing their supply chain operations. These approaches not only enhance competitiveness but also set the stage for sustainable growth and success in a fiercely competitive industry where staying ahead of the curve is not just a goal, but a necessity.

Conclusions.

In the ever-evolving and fiercely competitive landscape of the food industry, it becomes abundantly clear that merely participating is insufficient. Success and sustainability require a multifaceted and strategic approach that encompasses a spectrum of carefully considered tactics and initiatives.

At the heart of competitiveness in the food industry lies an unwavering commitment to understanding and catering to consumer preferences. Companies that excel are those that engage in rigorous consumer research to fathom the intricate nuances of what drives consumer choices. Beyond surface-level product preferences, it's imperative to grasp the underlying motivations, whether they revolve around health consciousness, sustainability, or convenience. These insights empower businesses to not just meet but anticipate and exceed consumer expectations.

Competitiveness thrives on the ability to adapt, not just to the present but also to the future. Consumer preferences are dynamic, often shaped by external factors such as cultural shifts, economic fluctuations, and technological advancements. Hence, the food industry must stay agile and innovative, ready to pivot in response to changing consumer demands. Whether it involves reformulating products to align with health trends, launching new offerings that cater to emerging preferences, or adjusting marketing messages to resonate with contemporary values, adaptation is the lifeblood of competitiveness.

Behind the scenes, effective supply chain management is a silent yet powerful driver of competitiveness. This involves more than just the logistical aspects of procurement and distribution; it's about forging robust supplier relationships. Trust, transparency, and collaboration with suppliers lead to tangible benefits, including cost savings, enhanced quality control, and access to innovative ingredients or processes. Furthermore, prudent inventory management practices, such as Just-In-Time (JIT) approaches, minimize storage costs and reduce the risk of perishable goods going to waste. Efficient logistics and distribution networks, powered by advanced technology, trim lead times and transportation costs, further optimizing the supply chain.

Competitiveness finds its roots in a culture of innovation and product development. To stand out in a crowded marketplace, companies invest significantly in research and development (R&D). These efforts involve cross-functional teams that collaborate to explore new culinary horizons, discover innovative ingredients, and refine production processes. The goal is not just to meet existing consumer preferences but to anticipate future ones. The launch of new products is

the tangible outcome of this innovation, often aligning with health-conscious, sustainable, or convenience-focused lifestyles.

The bedrock of competitiveness is unwavering commitment to maintaining stringent product quality and safety standards. Companies must ensure that their products consistently meet or exceed industry regulations and consumer expectations. This commitment extends to quality assurance programs, rigorous food safety protocols, and the ongoing monitoring of quality parameters. By adhering to these standards, companies build trust among consumers, safeguard their brand reputation, and remain competitive in a landscape where safety and quality are paramount.

In an era where margins can be razor-thin, cost efficiency strategies have taken center stage. Lean manufacturing and operational efficiency reduce waste and streamline production processes, reducing costs without compromising quality. Sustainable practices, including energy efficiency initiatives and responsible sourcing, not only reduce environmental impact but also appeal to eco-conscious consumers. Supply chain optimization, particularly in logistics and distribution, minimizes overheads and enhances cost efficiency.

In conclusion, the food industry is an intricate and dynamic ecosystem where competitiveness is the linchpin of success. Enterprises that understand consumer preferences, adapt to market dynamics, master supply chain management, foster innovation, prioritize product quality and safety, and champion cost efficiency and sustainability initiatives will not only thrive but also lead the way in an industry characterized by perpetual change. In this highly competitive arena, competitiveness is not merely an aspiration; it is the bedrock upon which enduring success is built.

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