

## HEALTHY FOOD FOR SNACK LOVERS: THE WAY TO SUCCESS IN THE MARKET OF HEALTHY FOOD PRODUCTS

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**Goal:** healthy snacks have received increased attention in the food science and technology literature. Nevertheless, studies exploring how factors in the micro and macro market environment can create opportunities and threats for companies in the healthy snacks market are still lacking. The goal of this research is to provide a road map to help companies' strategic directions by examining the micro and macro market environment variables of the healthy snack market. **Methodology:** we conducted interviews with stakeholders of the healthy snack sector who are knowledgeable and skilled in monitoring and assessing both micro and macro environmental factors. The managers of the firms that are the suppliers, producers, sellers, and distributors of the industry, as well as customers who are aware of healthy food consumption, were interviewed in-depth and semi-structured interviews. Then, content analysis was employed, which uses a set of procedures to make valid inferences from the text.

**Findings:** a correct and accurate strategic orientation starts with a successful analysis process. In this context, the main problems/developments are identified through sectoral structure and sectoral trend analyses, and the opportunities and threats that these will present to companies are revealed. Finally, marketing actions have been proposed to seize these opportunities and overcome the threats. At this point, three important strategic marketing objectives that will guide the strategic orientation of the companies stand out. **Originality and contribution of the authors:** the paper is the first jointly to examine two sides of the healthy snack market (firm and customer perspective). The study's findings, which were based on in-depth interviews with managers of healthy snacks companies and customers who have high health awareness, provide a road map for firms engaged in strategic marketing.

**Keywords:** healthy snacks, market environment, sectoral structure, sectoral trends, content analysis, consumer expectations.

**JEL:** M10, M31, L10.

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## INTRODUCTION

Food markets differ significantly from country to country and even from province to province, depending on local stakeholders, market factors, socioeconomic circumstances, food types, and dietary preferences. However, all food markets share the critical responsibility of giving the local population access to safe and healthy foods. This essential purpose lies at the core of the World Health Organisation's initiatives for healthy food markets as a building block of healthy life, which is defined as a way of living that reduces the risk of becoming seriously ill or dying early [WHO, 2017]. Indeed, the increase in chronic diseases such as diabetes and high cholesterol, the prevalence of eating disorders such as anorexia and obesity, the need to strengthen immunity against epidemics, and the growing population make the healthy food sector an attractive market [Aschbrenner et al., 2018]. Such that, the global healthy food market was worth 841 bn US doll. in 2022 and is estimated to increase to one trillion US doll. by 2026 [Statista, 2023]. The healthy food market therefore represents an opportunity for companies that want to develop products with an approach that is affordable and attractive to society [Cano et al., 2021].

Although the term "healthy foods" is used to refer to a broad range of natural and organic foods, including grains, lean proteins, fruits, and vegetables, it is often examined in relation to healthy snacks [Turnwald et al., 2020; Vržina, Pepur, 2021]. Snacking behaviour is characterized as eating between meals and has become a common habit in many parts of the world [Wang et al., 2017]. With their increasing contribution to daily energy intake, especially in recent years, healthy snacks stand out as a growing submarket under the healthy food segment umbrella [Alcaire et al., 2021]. In global, the healthy snacks market is expected to grow at an average annual rate of 6.6 between 2022 and 2030, thus reaching 152.3 bn US doll. by that time.

The growth of the market for healthy food in general and healthy snacks in particular has also been the subject of scientific interest. It's crucial to keep in mind that current studies have focused on digitalization [Michel-Villarreal et al., 2021], artificial intelligence (virtual nutritionists, etc.) [Mukodimah et al., 2018], and robotization (optical and portable sensors, etc.) [Burrell et al., 2018], particularly in the fields of mechanical, electrical, electronic, chemical, food, metallurgical, and computer engineering. However, companies face the challenge of adapting to or overcoming environmental trends, as environmental issues are highly volatile, requiring strict assessment. For this reason, as noted by [Kunc, Bhandari, 2011], companies should look for strategies that can enable them to gain and sustain competitive advantages by expanding their market share or preserving their competitive position by means of engagement of stakeholders and focusing on the micro and macro environments in dynamic and competitive environments.

We argue here that exploring the role of micro and macro environmental factors for the relationship between the growing market and competitiveness advances our understanding of the healthy snacks market in several ways. Specifically, to date, the complex relationships between healthy snack production and consumption are generally discussed and modelled in the food science and technology area, and articles are published in journals (Food Quality and Preference, Journal of the Academy of Nutrition and Dietetics, Trends in Food Science & Technology, etc.) within this scope [Grunert et al., 2016; Findholt et al., 2017]. In this respect, companies need a strategic marketing analysis that centres on the effects of environmental factors to develop marketing actions enabling superior competitive outcomes.

Here, a strategic marketing analysis helps companies in discovering new ways of thinking about and implementing marketing strategy. This is because a strategic

marketing analysis develops a company's most valuable strategic assets — its mental models and tools for thinking about the future — in the face of ever changing and evolving industry structures and macro trends [Amit, Schoemaker, 1993]. Indeed, strategic marketing analysis is the influential road map that shows how sectoral and macro trends can be balanced with differentiating marketing actions to get a competitive edge in the marketplace.

Further, even though every company typically has a strategic plan, it is a problem that developing a strategic marketing plan is not given priority [McDonald, 1992; Siddiqui et al., 2023]. Strategic planning is a systematic process that charts the future direction of an entire company, including financial, human resources, production, sales, and marketing efforts [Guyadeen et al., 2023]. Strategic marketing planning, in contrast, centres on the target market and examines the micro- and macro-market environments to determine the marketing strategies and actions required to achieve the organization's ultimate objectives [Lee et al., 2013]. The need for a strategic marketing plan that will serve as a conduit between producers and consumers and cover the activities related to all of the company's products is evidently growing, particularly in the market for healthy snacks where the idea of "food and human acting hand in hand" for a healthier life gains importance. The literature lacks research exploring how factors in the micro and macro market environment can create opportunities and threats for firms in the healthy snacks market. In this study, we argue that identifying these factors and their effects will improve our insights on how to develop the appropriate strategic marketing actions. Indeed, as much as the ultimate goal of strategic marketing is to create customer value, it is the analysis phase that provides the power to do so. Several scholars, for example, argue that incorrectly identifying the elements in different market environments is the reason why strategic

marketing plans fail [McDonald, Rogers, 1998; Cooper, 2000].

In addition, in the success of micro and macro environmental analysis, it is important to exchange information with stakeholders who can monitor and evaluate environmental trends. Stakeholders should be approached holistically and understanding a sector should start from understanding its stakeholders [Möller, Nenonen, Storbäck, 2020]. This understanding is in line with Ackoff's system definition that "each stakeholder has an impact, and none has an independent impact, on the whole" [Ackoff, 1974]. For this reason, it is impossible to properly comprehend the micro and macro environmental elements that affect a sector without considering the perspectives of its suppliers, buyers, producers, distributors, sellers, and customers [Otto et al., 2023].

Accordingly, the purpose of this research is to examine the micro and macro market environment variables of the healthy snack market and to propose marketing actions that will help healthy snack companies in their strategic orientation.

These actions are then grouped and three strategic marketing objectives is discovered. In this sense, this study contributes to the health food literature by providing simultaneous insights from stakeholders (manufacturers, suppliers, distributors, buyers, customers) about sectoral and broad-based forces through in-depth interviews and by suggesting actions that should be prioritised in marketing strategies. More specifically speaking, this research contributes to the following areas: (1) discovering the determinations related to sectoral forces and factors; (2) providing new and fresh marketing actions about the opportunities and threats posed by these factors; (3) emerging three important strategic marketing objectives by the grouping of marketing actions.

The rest of the paper is organized as follows. The conceptual framework is outlined in Section 1. Section 2 explains the methodology used for the research. Research

findings are presented in Section 3. Section 4 discusses the results. The conclusion of the paper and further implications are also outlined in Section 4.

## CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

The practices of international start-ups and enterprises clearly show that the usual rules no longer carry out healthy food production and that health technology trends are followed with care and attention. Tellspec Inc. has developed a food sensor that analyzes consumer foods at the molecular level, providing consumers with information about what is in their food beyond the nutrition label. Consumer Physics has introduced the Scio handheld sensor, which can analyze the chemical composition of food, pills, or plants and wirelessly transmit those results to the user's smartphone in real-time. Nima's pocket-sized sensor lets consumers test their food for gluten in minutes, anytime, anywhere. Habit company has developed a set of dietary guidelines tuned to each individual on the micro level by offering a do-it-yourself kit that enables users to collect personal bio-data [Bell, 2018]. In this context, it is a globally recognized reality in which it is possible to deliver healthy food to society at a sustainable quality with next-generation technologies [Koca, 2021]. Consumers, who have become increasingly conscious, especially after the COVID-19 pandemic, have started to follow the trail of healthy food.

One of the most attractive groups of the healthy food market is the healthy snacks product group. A healthy snack is a food product made from nutritious ingredients with low saturated fat and refined sugar and consumed outside the main meals [Holmer, 2010]. The consumption of snacks during the day provides a lot of energy but little nutrients. This is a concern because unhealthy eating habits with a higher energy intake than generally needed are recognized as a cause of weight gain [Holmer,

2010; Patterson, 2010]. It should be noted that the effects of obesity and being overweight are serious. In addition to causing various physical disabilities such as difficulty walking and dressing, and psychological problems such as low self-esteem and anxiety, being overweight significantly increases the risk of contracting several noncommunicable diseases, including cardiovascular disease, cancer, and diabetes [Benito-Ostolaza et al., 2021]. While these risk factors increase due to excessive consumption of sugary, caffeinated, and carbohydrate-dense foods, healthy snack foods play an essential role in reducing their effects [Almond, Currie, Duque, 2018]. Such a that, previous research has demonstrated the positive impact of healthy snacks on consumers' attention and memory [Cohen et al., 2016].

The marketing of healthy snacks as a growing market group is a complex process and is different from the marketing practices of traditional foods [Chen, Eriksson, 2019]. The central aspect of the marketing of healthy snacks in particular is about trying to achieve a balance between engaging in commercial activity and providing consumers with food that is affordable, high-quality, and sustainable [Coello et al., 2022]. Therefore, the resoluteness of healthy snack companies is based on market developments and consumer expectations. On the other hand, previous research shows that effective strategic marketing planning requires key stakeholders to be included in the planning process [Bornhorst, Ritchie, Sheehan, 2010; McCamley, Gilmore, 2018]. This collaborative working is especially necessary and valuable considering the stereotyping of snacks as unhealthy food in some cultures [Jackson et al., 2022]. In this regard, a viewpoint on market-related factors must be built, in which all stakeholders (producers, suppliers, distributors, sellers, buyers, and consumers) collaborate, thus providing a chance to break stereotypes. At this point, industry representatives in particular offer in-depth insights into changes in the micro

and macro market environments, while customers can provide clues to expectations and latent demands [Torlak, Altunışık, 2018].

## METHODS

### Methodological procedure

C. Gilligan and R. W. Wilson have mentioned two main stages of a strategic marketing plan. The stage one is strategic and marketing analysis [Gilligan, Wilson, 2003]. This analysis process provides the marketer a detailed understanding about the nature of the micro and macro market environment likely to be encountered. The stage two focuses on where the organization wants to go. Here, the marketing actions that will create a competitive advantage in the marketplace are determined. In doing so, the materials of the first phase are used. In this context, we here analyse the sectoral structure and trends of the healthy snacks market through in-depth interviews with both sectoral representatives and customers and then present insights into the opportunities and threats that these factors will create. Next, marketing actions are recommended to contribute to the strategic direction of companies.

Following Yin's methodology, we used in-depth, semi-structured interviews to enhance marketing efforts in the healthy snack sector [Yin, 2003]. In-depth, semi-structured interviews are a flexible form of qualitative data collection used by researchers in the social sciences [Knott et al., 2022]. They give people the chance to express in their own words how they perceive and comprehend the world around them, and they also give researchers the chance to investigate complicated behaviors, viewpoints, and emotions and to learn about a wide range of experiences [Knott et al., 2022; Longhurst, 2003]. In this context, we conducted in-depth, semi-structured interviews with the managers of healthy food firms.

Then, customers who are significant market stakeholders were interviewed.

### The sample

During the research process, we used the purposive sampling method [Patton, 2002]. Purposive sampling techniques are frequently employed in qualitative studies and are characterized as choosing units (such as individuals, groups of individuals, or organizations) based on the particular goals associated with a research study's questions [Teddle, Yu, 2007].

To make market inferences in this regard, five healthy snack companies in Istanbul, which are critical stakeholders of the sector, were selected for the study. These companies are critical stakeholders of the sector because they produce a wide range of healthy snack products for individual consumers and industrial buyers, build equipment and facilities, conduct food R&D and formulation studies, and provide sectoral training and consultancy services. Specifically stated, while all these companies develop food formulations through food R&D studies and offer their products to final consumers, two companies also supply raw materials to other companies in the sector. In addition, one of the companies is a company that produced the first freeze dry machine and the first freeze dried product. It also supports other companies in many areas such as facility installation, education, and consultancy. Therefore, the selected companies are not only sellers but also producers, suppliers, buyers, and distributors of the sector. Furthermore, they have also received government support such as Tübitak and Koşgeb as well as sectoral awards. Therefore, the managers of these companies were contacted as they could evaluate the micro and macro environmental conditions in a fair, transparent, and objective manner.

Because non-managerial members may tend to misrepresent their responses due to their personal and professional concerns, we used the top and middle-level managers



as our key informants to prevent response bias [Koson et al., 1970]. They may specifically seek to conceal their shortcomings or their unbiased judgments. On the other hand, managers can offer more trustworthy information about the company and the industrial forces and have a bird's-eye view of the operations and sector because they are directly accountable for the company's performance [Kumar, Stern, Anderson, 1993; Akgün, Dayan, Di Benedetto, 2008].

For this study, we also conducted interviews with consumers, who are important actors in the stakeholder system. Managers give in-depth information about the businesses and industry-related environmental issues, but we needed interviews with consumers to help identify changes in consumer demands and expectations. For this reason, we also chose 21 people who regularly eat healthy foods for this study. To test their attitudes about organic foods and their health awareness, we modified the [Gould, 1988; Teng, Wang, 2015] scales and applied to them. We then determined the item's average values, and we eliminated the customers whose average was less than 3.75. As a result, in-depth and semi-structured interviews were conducted with 15 consumers who were found to have high health awareness and attitudes towards healthy foods.

### Qualitative data collection

After qualifying the participants, we first informed them that their answers would be kept anonymous and would not be linked to them personally or to related companies, projects, or products and services. In this way, we improved the respondents' eagerness to collaborate without being concerned about unfavorable outcomes. Then, we highlighted that there were no right, and wrong responses and that managers and consumers should honestly respond to each open-ended question. By using these procedures, participants were less likely to adjust their responses to what they believed would be

more socially acceptable or what researchers wanted them to say [Podsakoff, Organ, 1986].

Later, we conducted 20 in-depth, on-site, semi-structured interviews [Yin, 2003]. The 20 interviews ranged in length from 45 to 60 min. Every interview was conducted in person and recorded. To assess factors related to suppliers, competitors, substitute products, distribution channels, customers, and competitive situations, seven questions were developed for managers. These questions such as "What are the elements that produce advantages and drawbacks in providing consumers with healthy food goods in comparison to other products?" and "What are the rational, emotional, and social benefits of healthy food products in the customer?" etc. are in the form. In addition, a few of these questions were created to determine the effective macro-environmental conditions to reveal the sectoral trend.

Nine questions were also asked of consumers to determine the motivators that lead to healthy food consumption, expectations from healthy food producers, rational and emotional aspects affecting purchasing preferences, and factors determining satisfaction after purchase.

Additionally, our semi-structured interview protocols allowed us the flexibility to probe participants for details about their consumers and jobs and enabled us to discuss them together. Immediately following each interview, we filled out observation notes to capture any information about the main themes of the interview and research objectives.

### Qualitative data analysis

Since most qualitative data are written, we used a content analysis design, which follows Krippendorff's approach (division into units, recording, data reduction/elimination, analytical inference, narration) to draw meaningful inferences from the text [Krippendorff, 2004]. Here, the primary goal of using content analysis was to expose the

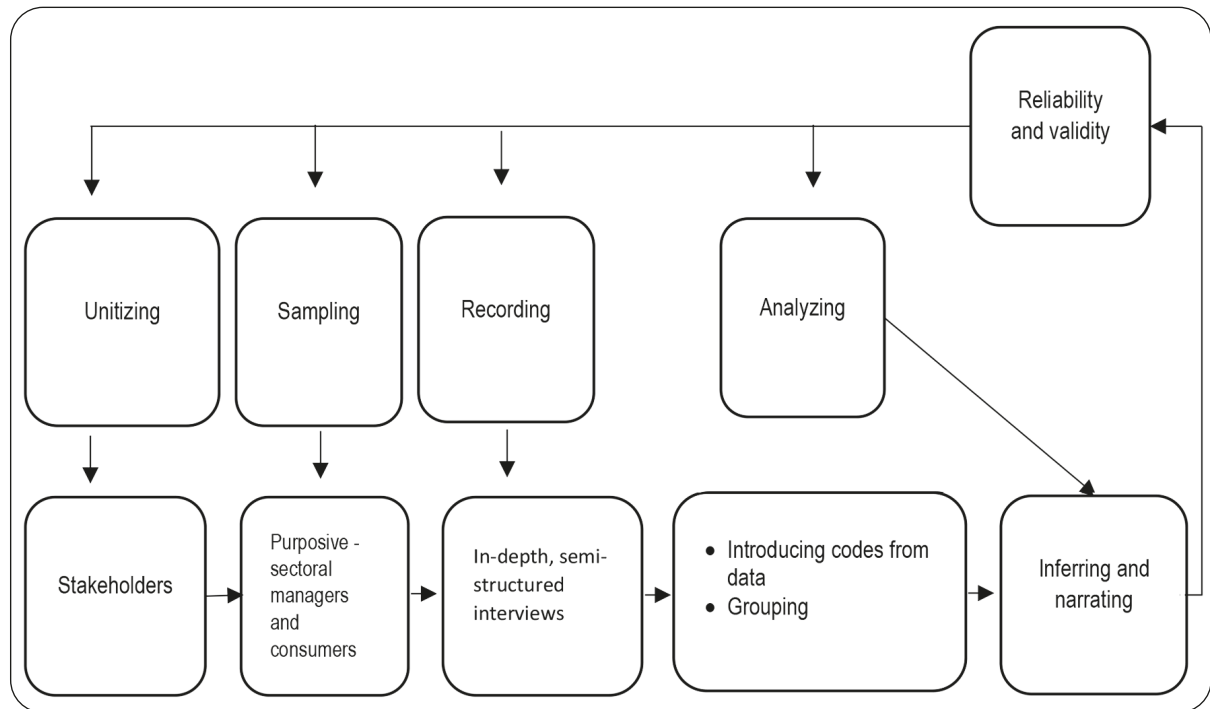


Fig. 1. Analytic procedure

structural characteristics and trends of the healthy food sector, the current situation of companies, and consumer expectations [Downe-Wamboldt, 1992].

H. F. Hsieh and S. E. Shannon further defined content analysis as “a research approach for the subjective interpretation of the content of text data through the systematic classification process of coding and detecting themes or patterns” in their works on qualitative research methodology [Hsieh, Shannon, 2005, p. 1278]. Researchers recommended using inductive (traditional), deductive (directive), and summative methodologies while doing content analysis. Here, we specifically used the inductive approach. In this approach, codes are derived from data and determined during the data analysis process [Hsieh, Shannon, 2005]. The data analysis process is shown in Figure 1.

The interviews were conducted by two researchers. We separately read each transcript to gain a basic understanding of the content after transcribing the semi-structured interviews’ qualitative data. We then developed codes to record our initial opinions. Our goal was to improve accuracy and reduce bias among researchers [Krippendorff, 2004]. After reexamining and harmonizing any findings that were inconsistent with one another, a consensus was eventually reached [Saldana, 2014].

**Trustworthiness**

As recommended by [Lincoln, Guba, 1985], we evaluated the reliability and validity of our qualitative content analysis by looking at its credibility, dependability, confirmability, and transferability. We employed triangulation and sustained engagement to ensure credibility, which pertains to the truth value within the findings such that they are both believable and supported by the evidence supplied. We conducted multiple interviews with managers from various firms as well as with customers to provide triangulate evidence [Shenton, 2004] to

verify research findings and analyst triangulation using multiple interviewers, analysts, and translators [Van Maanen, 1979].

We carried out the entire step of content analysis as outlined by [Krippendorff, 2004] in the overall design of our study to ensure dependability, which refers to the degree to which data change over time and the adjustments made in the researcher's decisions during the analyzing procedure. We did this by giving participants a brief audit trail of the content analysis's analytical processes [Lincoln, Guba, 1985].

We used an audit trail (combining many information sources) and triangulation to ensure confirmability, which refers to the objectivity or impartiality of the data [Polit, Beck, 2006]. We conducted the research ethically and diligently.

We conducted interviews at the firm and consumer levels, enriching the source of the findings, to improve transferability, which is defined as the extent to which the results may be applied to different settings or groups and the number of informants or study objects [Akgün et al., 2017].

## RESULTS

### Sectoral structure and trends

Our research addresses the strategic marketing actions for healthy snack companies to cope with new market challenges and opportunities by conducting systematic micro and macro environmental analysis. The stakeholders, rivals, customers, substitute goods, and suppliers represent the micro-market factors which constitute the sector's structure (Table 1).

Within the PESTEL framework, sectoral trends are also addressed (Table 2).

The managers asserted that the primary focus of R&D studies in the manufacturing of healthy snacks is freeze-drying technology. Freeze drying is a sort of drying technique that reduces both food damage and nutrient loss. The managers stated that

canning, freezing, and drying operations are all included in the conventional drying method. Nutrients in the food are continuously lost throughout this process. Nevertheless, freeze-drying technology reduces these losses. The managers cited three factors, including food degradation, loss of nutritional content, and short shelf lives, as the main justifications for the industry's concentration of freeze-drying technology.

Although freeze-drying technology is used elsewhere, managers claimed that using it in Turkey would be much more cost-effective. They observed that the ease and convenience with which this technology enables the production of healthy snacks while consuming little energy and earning large time savings makes start-ups more competitive. It has been underlined that the primary goal of start-ups utilizing this technology should be to position themselves as notable and well-recognized actors in the industry, both in terms of machinery technology and exporting the products. The managers who expressed their perspectives on the competition claim that since there are few significant domestic rivals at this stage of the market's growth life cycle, foreign-based businesses pose the greatest threat.

Managers also emphasized that marketing communication and brand management are the most challenging aspects of competition, particularly when compared to rivals from other countries. Managers assert that one of the main causes of this shortage is that the companies producing healthy snacks are startups as well as companies backed by technoparks. These firms ignore marketing activity in favor of concentrating their already limited financial resources on production's technical and R&D aspects. Managers have started to realize that at this point, there hasn't been enough communication with all industry stakeholders.

Managers highlighted that the industry for healthy foods would also need to address the issue of hygienic packaging. Because the safety, hygienic standards, and quality of traditional packaging cannot be fully



Table 1

## Sectoral structure analysis

Sectoral power	Determination	Impact on the industry		Strategic marketing action
	Factor/Problem	Opportunity	Threat	
Competitors	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Few market entry barriers</li> <li>• Successful marketing practices of competitors</li> <li>• Focusing on the technical issues and ignoring the changing dynamics in the market due to the greater interest in R&amp;D activities</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The core competency in machine production and facility installation</li> <li>• Energy and time saving</li> <li>• Increasing market share by being available and cheaper</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• High competition intensity</li> <li>• Lack of brand awareness</li> <li>• Trap of marketing myopia</li> <li>• The distortion of the perception of premium products due to low price focus</li> <li>• Attracting fewer investors than competitors in other countries</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The consistency across all touchpoints</li> <li>• Listening to the voice of the customer</li> <li>• Building a distinctive brand story that stays in the customer's mind</li> <li>• The application of value-based pricing strategy</li> <li>• High-technology production processes</li> <li>• The development of a unique distribution network</li> </ul>
Substitute Goods	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Dietary supplements</li> <li>• Appetite suppressant herbal supplements</li> <li>• Vitamins and collagen</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Unpredictable adverse effects of herbal products</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• A painless and easier way to lose weight</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Successfully communicating the benefits and values of products</li> <li>• Building a unique value proposition</li> </ul>
Stakeholders	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Insufficient cooperation with external stakeholders</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Cooperation protocols with stakeholders, joint projects</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Inability to follow market dynamics</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• A stakeholder analysis</li> <li>• Stakeholder prioritization</li> <li>• Periodic touch-base sessions</li> </ul>
Suppliers	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The presence of local and small suppliers</li> <li>• The lack of a large number of specialised suppliers and low accessibility as health food technology is a relatively new and growing discipline</li> <li>• The strong agricultural and food industry in Turkey</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Easy raw material procurement</li> <li>• Increasing investments in healthy food production technologies</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The lack of technological support</li> <li>• Legal obligations prolonging the process and not knowing enough about legal issues</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• To develop studies to simplify legal obligations</li> <li>• Training of technological suppliers</li> <li>• Backward vertical integration</li> </ul>

End of Table 1

Sectoral power	Determination	Impact on the industry		Strategic marketing action
	Factor/Problem	Opportunity	Threat	
Customers	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Mindfulness for healthy eating</li> <li>• Hygienic food, Hygienic packaging, Hygienic delivering</li> <li>• Transparency</li> <li>• Customizability</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Growing demand</li> <li>• New and competitive business model</li> <li>• New business partnerships</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Increase in costs</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Building integrated business intelligence</li> <li>• Creating a digital customer journey</li> <li>• Developing humanized mobile applications</li> </ul>

guaranteed. The long-term usability of the product will increase with hygienic packaging, which will also foster trust between buyers and producers of healthy snacks.

Although equipment used to produce healthy food uses very little energy, managers claimed that the global energy crisis and rising energy prices are the biggest threats to the industry. At this point, it is among the expectations of the companies to carry out studies to reduce the energy costs supported by the state and to prevent energy shortages. While managers indicated they did not perceive any political or legal impediments, they made sure to underline that they did not engage in any hazardous activity and the manufacturing process did not even have any chemical additives. According to them, companies do not need to apply preservatives to increase shelf life as they would with conventional drying technologies, they do not have any legal or political challenges, and the industry is safeguarded in this way.

The findings of interviews with consumers revealed that they make connections between particular keywords with the product category. A group of customers claims that “snacks that do not impair human health, do not harm human health in the long term when eaten, and do not contain additives” are what constitute healthy snacks. Another group described it as snacks that do not have a fabrication process at the manufacturing processes and do not contain trans fats, sweeteners, colorants, and other additives. When it comes to selecting health

snacks, one customer said that in this case she “scrutinizes the packaging, the expiry date, and the ingredients of the product”. This study suggests that companies should concentrate on packaging and labeling since consumers who choose healthy snacks are worried about these factors.

Five consumers cited regular sleep schedules and consuming only natural, unadulterated meals as essential elements of healthy living. There was also discussion of other methods for creating a healthy lifestyle, such as following a regular diet and taking vitamin and mineral supplements. The findings also revealed that eating under the daily calorie requirement is one of the consumers’ healthy living goals. At this point, it appears that customers may turn to nutritional supplements, appetite suppressants, and satiating herbal recommendations and vitamins as substitutes for healthy snacks for less energy intake. This finding is consistent with the findings of micro market environmental factors.

The factors that affect consumers’ decisions to buy healthy snacks were then covered. Here, it may be argued that a variety of factors influence how consumers decide what to eat. The biggest reason, although there are others, is the worry that one’s health will deteriorate. She acts in this way, according to one of the customers, because of “fear that she will not get better after her health is lost”. Such that, those who eat balanced meals frequently feel content and fulfilled because they live healthy lives.

Table 2

## Sectoral trend analysis

Factor	Determination	Impact on the firm		Strategic marketing action
	Factor/Problem	Opportunity	Threat	
Political	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Global food crisis</li> <li>• Russian restrictions on energy supply</li> <li>• US and European sanctions against Russia</li> <li>• Good Turkish-Russian relations</li> <li>• Turkey's mediation role</li> <li>• Disruption of the global food supply chain</li> <li>• Sustainable development goals of United Nations</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The number of tourists coming to Turkey from Russia, Ukraine, and European countries, especially to the Aegean and Southern regions</li> <li>• The protection of Turkey from restrictions and sanctions</li> <li>• The emergence of new products and services, financing and resource support on the theme of social innovation</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Increasing energy and food supply costs</li> <li>• Decline in the quality of raw materials due to disruptions in the supply chain</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Entering the European and Russian market</li> <li>• Establishing strong market relations in both procurement and end-product delivery</li> <li>• Enriching domestic resources with machinery production and facility setup</li> </ul>
Economic	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The effect of political factors on economic indicators</li> <li>• Rise in inflation</li> <li>• Currency fluctuations</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Strengthening domestic resources</li> <li>• Increasing demand for domestic brands and products</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Declining share of healthy snacks in customers' wallets</li> <li>• Increase in investment and production costs</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Backward and forward integrations</li> <li>• Push promotions</li> <li>• Ensuring resource and funding diversity</li> <li>• Identify and build key strategic partnerships</li> </ul>
Socio-cultural	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Traditional food beliefs and practices in different cultural backgrounds</li> <li>• Urbanization, population growth, and changes in age distribution, education level, and cultural awareness</li> <li>• Changing society's expectations for technology in healthy food</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Directing people with the traditional culture to healthy food consumption</li> <li>• Qualified, high-aware and questioning young population to have a healthy food consumption awareness</li> <li>• Creating qualified human resources for the sector by young people who want to train themselves in this field</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Lack of trust in healthy food producers</li> <li>• Lack of qualified human resources in the field of food technologies due to brain drain</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Incorporating cultural cuisine and eating customs into the manufacturing process and product range</li> <li>• Explaining the benefits of health and food technologies through advertisements and other means, as people's cultural beliefs and values directly affect their consumption habits</li> <li>• Carrying out convincing studies for the qualified population and investors to invest in this sector and prefer it for employment</li> </ul>

End of Table 2

Factor	Determination	Impact on the firm		Strategic marketing action
	Factor/Problem	Opportunity	Threat	
Socio-cultural		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Gaining the trust and support of the community</li> </ul>		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Emphasizing the impact of products and services produced by startups in this field on social sustainability</li> <li>Raising awareness of health and food technologies investors and stakeholders about socially oriented projects, using various incentives at this point</li> </ul>
Technological	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Increase in the need for qualified researchers and technical staff due to the increase in the development rate of new technologies</li> <li>Development of digital channels</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Development and assimilation of technological learning processes</li> <li>Reduction in physical distribution channel costs</li> <li>Personalization and humanization of products and services</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>R&amp;D investment costs</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Activities within the scope of technological solution partnership</li> <li>Discovering digital touchpoints on consumers' journeys to purchase healthy snacks</li> </ul>
Ecologic	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Increasing ecological and sustainable environmental awareness</li> <li>Development of waste disposal methods</li> <li>Increasing awareness of healthy living</li> <li>Pandemic diseases</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Strengthening of brands using health technology in Turkey</li> <li>Efficient use of natural resources</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Increase in costs as a result of the necessity of investments in the name of natural protection</li> <li>The risk of depletion of natural resources</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Creating a sustainable brand identity by integrating the aim of providing consumer well-being (service to the community, pioneering solutions to social issues, environmental awareness, health awareness, consumer and community happiness) into corporate policies</li> </ul>
Legal	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Developments in intellectual property rights, patent, and trademark protection</li> <li>Food safety and quality standards across different countries</li> <li>Ethical behavior, transparency, and honesty</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Reduction of uncertainties; reducing anxiety</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>International market entry barriers</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Consistency in processes and procedures</li> <li>Quality standardization</li> </ul>

This study also uncovered what healthy snacks consumers anticipate from companies. The majority of interviewees pointed out two main problems with snack consumption: "Food is not prepared in hygienic circumstances, and prices are high". Given that customers believe that underpricing also conveys the sense that the snacks are harmful, affordable price is crucial in this situation. Using seasonal fruits and vegetables is another vital consideration for those who consume healthy snacks. Another matter that requires discussion is the customer demand for transparency. Those who tend to eat well and are highly worried about their health want to know how their snacks are made, where it is made, where the raw materials are from, etc. In this way, consistency across all touch points and the integration of technologies into the customer journey will reshape the customer experience.

According to healthy food consumers, the products they prefer to stay away from are acidic beverages and sugary foods. It was also noted that many individuals dislike caffeine-containing beverages. This is due to the proven negative effects that certain foods and drinks have on the human body. The production, preservation, packaging, and shipping of goods like frozen meals, milk and dairy products, fish, and meat, on the other hand, are subject to their expectations of better hygiene standards. This study demonstrates that to generate market demand, a healthy environment must be maintained throughout the entire process, from the supply of raw materials through the delivery of the finished product to the target customers.

The consumers chosen for the interview admitted that they occasionally indulged in packaged foods like chocolate, chips, fast food, and packaged beverages like cola, even though they were aware of their unhealthiness. This was an intriguing finding, given that they tended to consume healthy foods and had a high level of health awareness. This finding suggests market potential and provides a clue about using alternative pro-

duction technologies to change the stated products into a healthier state.

Healthy food consumers purchase from food providers they think to be healthy. Additionally, they consumed healthy snacks every day. The high price of various product categories, according to some customers, is a deterrent to making more frequent purchases from these companies. Others, however, countered that the price factor is not really that important. The most important factor, according to one participant, is not pricing but the company's track record for providing healthful goods. Some participants claimed that not all companies that produce healthy snacks can be trusted. It is clear from this result that efficient marketing communication is required.

About consumers' post-purchase behaviour, this study revealed that satisfying experiences lead to repeat purchase behaviour and even increase preferences for different product types of the brand. In addition, consumers expressed that they frequently recommend the snacks they like and are happy with to others. This finding is important because consumers stated that they were highly influenced by the praiseworthy recommendations they received from trusted sources, especially when purchasing nutritious snacks. In this context, reference groups should be correctly identified in promotional activities, and informal communication through word-of-mouth marketing should be encouraged.

## CONCLUSION

This study aims to analyse the micro and macro market environment factors through in-depth interviews with industry stakeholders and to provide a roadmap to help companies in their strategic orientation. A correct and accurate strategic orientation starts with a successful analysis process. In this context, the main problems/developments are identified through sectoral structure and sectoral trend analyses, and the opportunities and



threats that these will present to companies are revealed. Marketing actions are then proposed to acquire these opportunities and overcome the threats. Accordingly, Figure 2 provides three important strategic marketing objectives that emerge from the grouping of marketing actions, which will guide the strategic orientation of companies.

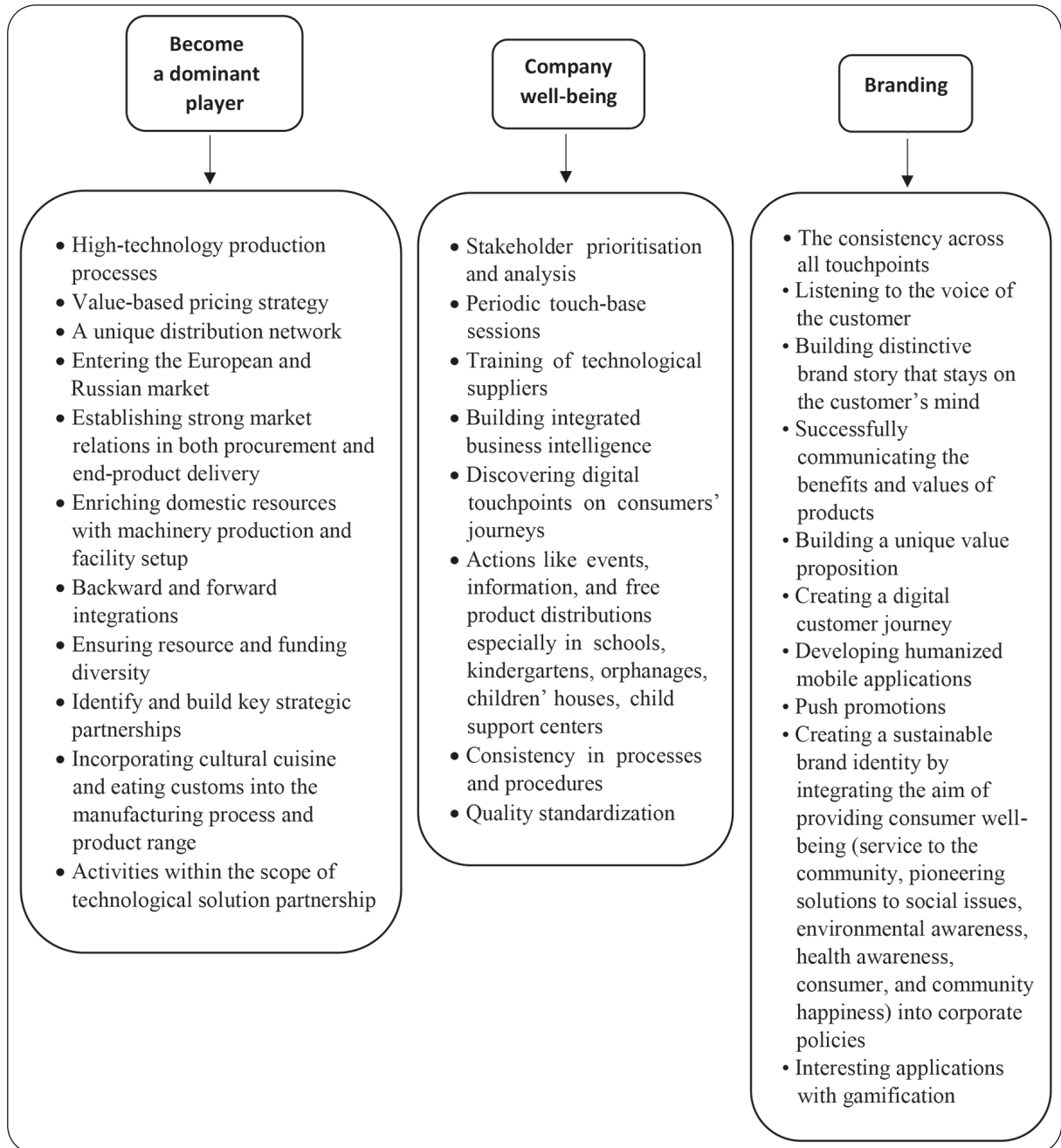
This study reveals that the first strategy that companies should prioritise in their strategic direction should be to become one of the dominant players in the sector in national and international markets. In other words, it is to use proactive market strategies in a growing market and to become a market leader or challenger brand. According to our findings, although there are salient healthy snacks companies in Turkey, it is understood that the roles in the market have not yet been filled in light of the expectations that the sector will turn into a large sector of 38 bn US doll in 2028. The rising demand for products indicates the attractiveness of the market (Table 1). While the market is in a growth stage and a dominant brand has not yet been formed in minds, firms need to penetrate their existing markets first with their growth strategy, diversify their products, and then make efforts for market development and internationalization [Tanusondjaja et al., 2018; Keskin et al., 2021].

Especially due to the sanctions imposed on Russia and the political and economic factors that have adversely affected European countries (Table 2), Turkish brands may consider these markets as an opportunity. This finding is consistent with the market opportunities-related literature. According to this literature, companies adapt quickly to changes triggered by unique events like war and sanctions, and these events lead them to respond to new market opportunities in ways that provide competitive advantage [Nerlinger, Utz, 2022]. Here, designing target-oriented products suitable for specific or niche markets helps firms to seize new market opportunities [Peschel, Grebitus, 2023].

Our findings reveal that Turkish businesses are more energy and time efficient

than their rivals because they are situated in eco-systems like technoparks, use non-traditional production techniques, and succeed at both the manufacture of machines and the installation of facilities. They should therefore take actions to increase their exposure to the market while using these advantages. For instance, integrating the target market's traditional foods or cooking techniques with food technologies (e.g. freeze-drying technology) into healthy snacks can give companies a distinct competitive advantage.

The second issue that needs to be prioritized is to ensure the well-being of the company and holistic marketing understanding. Trying to dominate the market will also require institutional growth. Especially, it is important to get rid of individual dependencies in management. The consumers' expectations are not only to ensure sustainability based on the product but also to adopt the sustainable corporate logic as a whole (see "consumers" factor in sectoral structure analysis). This finding is consistent with the idea of incorporating ethical and social marketing and fairness management by [Nguyen, Rowley, 2015]. Remember that consumers expect brands to be transparent, humane, and compassionate and that these companies will fulfil those expectations by not using refined sugars, chemicals, or GMO materials, investing in health and, by extension, healthy generations, and providing corporate governance in this direction [Lee, Park, 2016]. According to our findings, consumers continue to eat unhealthy foods like cola, candy, crisps, and high-carbohydrate foods even if they are aware of their harmful effects. In particular, to date, numerous studies have consistently shown that a positive hedonic reaction to unhealthy foods is the main driving force driving the consumption of unhealthy snacks [Alcaire et al., 2021]. In this respect, companies need stakeholder co-operation to enforce stricter regulations in the further inspection/banning of ultra-processed products. Actions like events, information, and free product distributions



*Fig. 2.* Key strategies and marketing actions

should be taken, especially in schools, kindergartens, orphanages, children's houses, and child support centers to encourage kids to engage in physical activity and develop healthy snacking habits. Companies should also engage in national social responsibility projects and take a role in developing solutions to issues with unhealthy nutrition and the management of diseases like obesity brought on by unhealthy nutrition. The implementation of these actions at the corporate level should be facilitated by integrated software, integrated business intelligence, and the development of both financial and non-financial performance indicators.

Finally, the third issue that needs to be prioritized for firms is branding. In this sense, firms should identify the advantages and difficulties (gain-pain) of customers in their current consumption of healthy snack products, thus revealing the latent demands and building the value proposition they offer to their customers [Meng, Somenahalli, Berry, 2020]. In particular, to consistently communicate the differentiating value proposition to customers across all touchpoints, companies should implement an omnichannel strategy. When a company adopts omnichannel communication they can integrate the customer experience both online and offline channels through each of the touchpoints with their customers [Hickman, Kharouf, Sekhon, 2020]. An effective website, mobile website, and mobile application will facilitate personalization, especially in all marketing mix components [Chang et al., 2022]. The personal touch to the customer, the humanization of digital tools, their suitability for use, and interesting applications with gamification will place the brand in the mind of the consumer in a distinctive way.

The packaging for healthy snacks should clearly state the key benefits that will boost consumers' health (vitamins and nutrients, satiety, favorable energy intake, balancing body values, etc.). The labels should contain information on the ingredients, energy, and fat content of the products, as well as the place of manufacture and even the source

of the raw materials. The visibility of healthy snacks should be increased in chain convenience stores, health, and natural food stores, and cafes in fitness centres and gyms. As the brand grows, distribution points should be expanded to unique points suitable for targeted customer segments. Additionally, mass media channels including healthy food and lifestyle magazines, TV shows, events, seminars, and fairs are all effective ways to raise brand awareness. Furthermore, a social media platform, blog, or chat forum where customers can discuss their product experiences can be utilized to generate buzz for the brand.

In summary, the healthy packaged food market has a growth trend and firms should take a challenging role and implement a proactive growth strategy instead of being a follower in the market in the face of an unsaturated demand. The low number of brands responding to the rising demand and the fact that a strong sense of loyalty has not yet been formed reduces the switching costs of consumers. This gives firms a significant advantage, along with their strengths. It is envisaged that they will achieve the targets they desire in the market, especially by being supported by well-being and strong branding.

There are some methodological limitations in this study. Specifically, the study's generalizability is constrained by the sample size because it was done in a particular national setting, Turkish firms in general, and the Istanbul district in particular. It is significant to stress that readers should exercise caution when extending the findings to various cultural situations. The results should be confirmed with more samples and different product groups. We encourage further studies in the future, focusing on perhaps more specific variables within the area of the relationships between healthy food consumption, food production, and healthy food technologies. We would also encourage studies focusing on the drivers of healthy food consumption to be analyzed by future research.

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## ***Полезная еда для любителей перекусов: путь к успеху на рынке продуктов здорового питания***

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**Цель исследования:** в научно-технической литературе о продуктах питания повышенное внимание уделяется проблематике здоровых закусок. Однако исследований, в которых рассматривается, как факторы микро- и макрорыночной среды создают возможности и угрозы для компаний на рынке здоровых снеков, недостаточно. Цель статьи — представить дорожную карту, которая поможет компаниям определить стратегические направления, изучив переменные микро- и макрорыночной среды рынка здоровых закусок. **Методология исследования:** проведены интервью с заинтересованными сторонами сектора здоровых закусок. Менеджеры фирм, которые являются поставщиками, производителями, продавцами и дистрибьюторами отрасли, а также клиенты, осведомленные о потреблении здоровой пищи, опрашивались в рамках углубленных и полуструктурированных интервью. Затем был применен контент-анализ с использованием набора процедур для получения обоснованных выводов из текста. **Результаты исследования:** основные результаты получены с помощью анализа отраслевой структуры и отраслевых тенденций. Выявлены возможности компаний и угрозы, стоящие перед ними. Предложены маркетинговые действия, направленные на использование этих возможностей и преодоление возникающих угроз. На данный момент выделены три важные стратегические маркетинговые цели, которые будут определять стратегическую ориентацию компаний. **Оригинальность и вклад авторов:** в статье впервые рассматриваются две стороны рынка здоровых закусок (с позиции фирмы и потребителя). Результаты исследования, которые были основаны на углубленных интервью с менеджерами компаний, производящих здоровые закуски, и клиентами, об-

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ладающими высокой осведомленностью о здоровье, представляют собой дорожную карту для фирм, занимающихся стратегическим маркетингом.

*Ключевые слова:* полезные снеки, рыночная среда, отраслевая структура, отраслевые тенденции, контент-анализ, ожидания потребителей.

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