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## MANAGEMENT OF COMPETITIVE ADVANTAGES IN CONFECTIONERY INDUSTRY ENTERPRISES: A CASE STUDY OF SLOVAKIA AND UKRAINE

The aim of this research is to substantiate the choice of a competitive strategy by monitoring the competitive advantages of enterprises in the confectionery industry, using Ukraine and Slovakia as case studies. The research materials include statistical data on the development of the confectionery industry in Ukraine and Slovakia from Ukrstat and Eurostat. To compare the competitive advantages of confectionery enterprises in both countries, methods such as diagnostic analysis, statistical data analysis, and case studies were employed. Expert evaluations from the confectionery industry in Ukraine and Slovakia were used to monitor and assess competitive advantages.

The monitoring procedure followed a structured sequence of actions: (1) identifying development trends in the confectionery industry, (2) determining key competitive advantages, and (3) conducting an expert assessment of these advantages. Based on this assessment, priorities were established, and a competitive strategy was defined. The competitive advantages evaluated by experts included the dynamics of confectionery production, revenue growth, digitalization of sales, average product prices, operational efficiency, brand development, product innovation, ingredient safety, and export potential.

The results of the expert assessment indicate that the confectionery enterprises of Ukraine and Slovakia have significant potential for growth and strengthening their competitive position. Ukrainian enterprises, in particular, benefit from larger production volumes, a more innovative product assortment, and higher product quality. To further enhance their competitive advantages, Ukrainian enterprises should focus on digitalizing sales and expanding into new markets to boost exports. For Slovak enterprises, increasing production volumes, digitizing sales, refining product policy to expand assortments, and diagnosing export potential are recommended strategies for gaining competitive advantages.

**Keywords:** *competitive strategy, management of competitiveness, competitive advantages, confectionery industry enterprise, Ukraine, Slovakia*

**JEL classification:** *F29, L20, L66, M20, M31*

Метою дослідження є обґрунтування вибору конкурентної стратегії на основі моніторингу конкурентних переваг підприємств кондитерської галузі (на прикладі України та Словаччини). Матеріалами для дослідження були статистичні дані про розвиток кондитерської промисловості в Україні та Словаччині з Укрстату та Євростату. Для порівняння конкурентних переваг підприємств кондитерської промисловості України та Словаччини використовувалися методи діагностичного аналізу, аналізу статистичних даних та кейси. Для моніторингу та оцінки конкурентних переваг використано експертні оцінки в кондитерській галузі України та Словаччини. Процедура моніторингу конкурентних переваг підприємств кондитерської галузі відбувалася в такій послідовності дій. По-перше, визначено тенденції розвитку підприємств кондитерської галузі. По-друге, визначено ключові конкурентні переваги. По-третє, проведено експертну оцінку обраних конкурентних переваг. На основі оцінки вибрано пріоритети та визначено конкурентну стратегію. До потенційних індикаторів, які відображають конкурентні переваги підприємств кондитерської галузі, які пропонувалося оцінити експертам, належать динаміка виробництва кондитерських виробів, динаміка виручки, цифровізація продажів, середні ціни на кондитерську продукцію, ефективність, розвиток бренду, інноваційність продукту, безпечність інгредієнтів, експортний потенціал. За результатами експертної оцінки можна констатувати, що підприємства кондитерської галузі України та Словаччини мають конкурентний потенціал для зростання та зміцнення. Українські підприємства мають більше можливостей завдяки великим обсягам виробництва, інноваційному асортименту та високій якості продукції. Для отримання конкурентних переваг українським підприємствам кондитерської галузі доцільно зосередитись на цифровізації продажів та освоєнні нових ринків збуту з метою збільшення обсягів експорту. Для отримання конкурентних переваг словацьким підприємствам кондитерської галузі треба збільшити обсяги виробництва, діджиталізувати продажі, звернути увагу на товарну політику щодо розширення асортименту, провести діагностику експортного потенціалу кондитерської галузі.

**Ключові слова:** конкурентна стратегія, управління конкурентоспроможністю, конкурентні переваги, підприємство кондитерської промисловості, Україна, Словаччина

**JEL classification:** F29, L20, L66, M20, M31

## Introduction

The confectionery industry worldwide is one of the most dynamically developing sectors of the economy and a fast-growing segment of the consumer market. This is driven by changing demand influenced by healthy eating trends, as well as the industry's ability to adapt to consumer preferences through innovation and the development of flexible competitive strategies. New products with original consumer properties are constantly emerging in the confectionery market. Given these trends, the development of competitive advantages for confectionery industry enterprises should consider a set of marketing and production parameters, such as quality, affordability for the consumer. This will allow for the formation of an effective competitive strategy, the planning of various innovations, and the promotion of confectionery products in both domestic and international markets.

Today, the global confectionery market is developing rapidly, with the world's leading

manufacturers, including large multinational corporations, effectively implementing product and technological innovations. They aim to achieve high profitability from new products by optimizing production and promotion costs [11].

In 2022, global confectionery sales in US dollars grew by 11.1% compared to 2021 and by 22.1% compared to 2019, as consumers view chocolate and candies as a fun part of life (81%) and an affordable treat (74%) according to the fourth annual State of Treating report published by the National Confectioners Association [12]. According to growth forecasts, the overall category will reach \$54.3 billion in 2027.

## Literature review

The paper is based on the hypothesis that, to remain competitive, enterprises in the confectionery industry must continuously monitor the business environment and implement strategic measures in a timely manner.

The trends in the development of confectionery industry show the effectiveness

of a comprehensive product policy. The confectionery companies produce traditional confectionery products and premium novelties that are affordable for the mass consumer while increasing the added value in the industry.

Leading companies in the confectionery industry may use marketing mix or hybrid strategies that combine global positioning in all markets in which they operate with tailoring their marketing programs to the local market [3]. Confectionery brands easily adapt to the economy, thanks to competitive prices, significant advertising activity, an intensive distribution strategy and a wide range of products.

The limitations and prospects for developing a sustainable marketing mix in the confectionery industry highlight the social and environmental significance as key elements of the industry's competitive potential [28].

The development of the Indian confectionery industry is based on recognizing the role of confectionery consumption as part of a balanced, healthy diet [4]. When forming a business development strategy in a global environment, attention is given to the marketing and competitive components [9]. The competitiveness of an enterprise is closely linked to the risks that influence it [8]. A key criterion for assessing competitive advantages is the export capabilities of the enterprise [10].

Regarding methods for assessing and monitoring the competitive advantages of enterprises, researchers recommend using a wide range of tools.

The assessment of the competitiveness of confectionery enterprises can be carried out on the basis of an integral indicator [6]. To assess the competitive advantages of food industry enterprises, an analytical tool known as the "value chain" is employed [7]. Additionally, the assessment of the competitive advantages of enterprises can be carried out on the basis of a system of balanced indicators [5].

The confectionery industry is focused on meeting consumers' additional needs while demonstrating a low level of vulnerability

to economic downturns, both domestically and globally. Despite various negative trends in the food market, confectionery products remain in demand among consumers.

The monitoring of competitive advantages in confectionery industry enterprises is tracked through several indicators, including changes in production volumes, income levels, price dynamics, the digitalization of sales, the effectiveness of product policies, brand development, product innovation, ingredient safety, and changes in export volumes

It is worth noting that despite the ongoing war in Ukraine, manufacturers in the confectionery market have continued to operate. In fact, they have transformed the risks to their businesses into opportunities for growth, as evidenced by the return of Ukrainian manufacturers to developed markets and their expansion into new foreign markets.

The confectionery industry in Slovakia is developing slowly, with most of the demand being met by imports from Austria, the Czech Republic, and Germany.

**The purpose of the paper** is to substantiate the selection of a competitive strategy based on monitoring the competitive advantages of enterprises in the confectionery industry, using the examples of Ukraine and Slovakia

#### **Methodology and empirical data**

For a comparative analysis of the key competitive advantages of enterprises in the confectionery industry in Ukraine and Slovakia, basic marketing indicators were used, such as the volume of confectionery products, volume of chocolate confectionery, volume of preserved pastry goods and cakes, volume of sugar confectionery, confectionery revenue, price per unit in the candy industry, and type of sales channels for the candy industry. The study of global leaders' experiences in the confectionery market helped to substantiate the competitive strategy for confectionery enterprises. The statistical data used in this research were provided by Eurostat (Statista) and Ukrstat.

To compare the competitive advantages of enterprises in the confectionery industry

of Ukraine and Slovakia, methods such as diagnostic analysis, statistical data analysis, and case studies were used. To monitor and evaluate these competitive advantages, expert evaluations from employees of confectionery enterprises in Ukraine and Slovakia, as well as feedback from consumers of confectionery products, were utilized. The consistency of expert assessments was verified. As a result of the research, the key competitive advantages of confectionery enterprises in Ukraine and Slovakia were identified, and competitive strategies for their further development were summarized

### **Empirical results**

#### **Procedure for monitoring the competitive advantages of confectionery industry enterprise**

The procedure for monitoring the competitive advantages of confectionery industry enterprises follows this sequence of actions. First, trends in the development of confectionery industry enterprises are identified. Next, the key competitive advantages for the industry's development are determined. Following that, an expert assessment of the selected competitive advantages is conducted. Based on this assessment, priorities are set, and a competitive strategy is formulated. Additionally, it becomes possible to evaluate shortcomings and weaknesses in comparison to competitors.

#### **Trends in the global confectionery industry market**

Monitoring trends in the global confectionery market is essential for enhancing the competitive advantages of producers. It has been established that nearly all segments of the global confectionery market are characterized by steady growth in demand and sales.

The main directions for the development of production and innovation activities among confectionery manufacturers are shaped by the following trends.

First, there is a growing demand for healthy food products. The primary challenge in the global confectionery industry is finding a balance between creating products that are both healthy and appealing. To address this,

manufacturers are developing innovative new products. Consumers of confectionery are increasingly focused on natural ingredients, the absence of artificial colors and flavors, and the exclusion of genetically modified organisms (GMOs).

Secondly, consumers in the confectionery industry are increasingly drawn to personalized nutrition and the introduction of new products with various functional benefits, such as those with high milk or vitamin content. Additionally, the confectionery industry is influenced by population income levels and shifting consumer preferences. Since confectionery products are not essential goods, manufacturers must consider not only their own capabilities but also the purchasing power of consumers. The confectionery market is highly segmented and demands close attention to consumer preferences.

There is also growing demand for craft and personalized confectionery products. Organic products are perceived as premium, and a significant competitive advantage is derived from product taste, premium brand positioning, and high ratings from market experts.

Thirdly, consumers are increasingly focused on the safety of ingredients in confectionery products, prioritizing the reduction of sugar, saturated fats, and trans fats, while seeking products with higher content of whole grains, vitamins, and healthy fats. In addition to the traditional selection criteria—price, quality, and taste—there is now an expanded set of healthy lifestyle indicators, such as health & wellness (health and well-being), safety, and transparency. Consumers want clear information about the composition and origin of raw materials.

In other words, global trends in the development of the confectionery industry shape the basis of competitive strategies for enterprises in this sector. Recently, there has been increased focus on product policy, specifically in areas such as product assortment, production innovation, eco-friendliness of ingredients, and the introduction of novelties. Pricing strategies are also increasingly aligned with consumer

incomes. Additionally, brand development and communication strategies, effective sales practices (including digitization), and the pursuit of new markets and export opportunities have become key components.

#### **Indicators of the development of the confectionery industry in Ukraine and Slovakia and its competitive advantages**

To effectively monitor producers in the confectionery industry, it is first necessary to determine production volumes and their dynamics, the profitability of the confectionery industry, dynamics of prices for confectionery products, and the sales channels used.

Tables 1-5 present current and forecasted trends in the global confectionery

market, along with trends in the Slovak and Ukrainian markets in terms of production volumes, revenues, sales channels, and average price levels for confectionery products.

Table 1 shows a steadily growing trend in confectionery production volumes. In terms of production volumes, the leaders are flour-based confectionery and cakes, followed by sugar-based and chocolate confectionery. Slovakia produces 6-7 times less confectionery products than the Ukrainian confectionery industry. In 2022, due to military operations in Ukraine, confectionery production decreased by approximately 20-30%, but forecasts indicate a gradual recovery in sales volumes. During

*Table 1*

**Confectionery volume in 2014-2027**

Type of confectionery	Region	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022
Chocolate Confectionery	Worldwide, in billions of kilograms	18.05	17.81	17.28	17.08	16.92	16.75	17.04	17.11	17.19
	Slovakia, in millions of kilograms	19.29	20.32	20.78	21.28	21.75	22.01	23.00	23.89	24.31
	Ukraine, in billions of kilograms	0.37	0.26	0.23	0.23	0.23	0.22	0.23	0.22	0.15
Preserved Pastry Goods & Cakes	Worldwide, in billions of kilograms	67.48	66.57	65.09	64.25	63.26	62.24	63.54	63.20	63.12
	Slovakia, in millions of kilograms	178.9	180.3	178.1	189.4	194.5	195.7	201.8	209.1	214.0
	Ukraine, in billions of kilograms	1.67	1.18	1.09	1.08	1.10	1.04	1.28	1.20	0.81
Sugar Confectionery	Worldwide, in billions of kilograms	22.59	22.13	21.86	21.89	21.85	21.75	22.33	22.42	22.57
	Slovakia, in millions of kilograms	29.06	30.24	31.72	34.76	36.92	38.36	39.59	40.98	42.73
	Ukraine, in billions of kilograms	0.36	0.25	0.24	0.24	0.24	0.23	0.28	0.26	0.18

Source: formed by the authors based on [14; 18; 22; 26; 27]

*Table 2*

**Confectionery revenue worldwide, in trillions of USD (US\$)**

Type of confectionery	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022
Chocolate Confectionery	0.18	0.17	0.17	0.18	0.19	0.19	0.20	0.21	0.22
Preserved Pastry Goods and Cakes	0.43	0.40	0.41	0.42	0.44	0.44	0.46	0.49	0.51
Sugar Confectionery	0.14	0.13	0.13	0.14	0.15	0.15	0.16	0.17	0.18

Source: formed by the authors based on [24]

Table 3

**Revenue comparison of confectionery worldwide, in billions of USD (US\$)**

Country	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022
Slovakia	1.25	1.08	1.10	1.23	1.38	1.39	1.51	1.71	1.91
Ukraine	7.66	5.02	5.07	6.11	7.36	8.63	10.60	11.14	8.42

Source: formed by the authors based on [17;21]

Table 4

**Price per unit in the candy industry, in USD**

Country	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022
Worldwide	6.32	6.03	6.27	6.55	6.87	7.09	7.22	7.65	8.11
Slovakia	4.86	4.15	4.22	4.43	4.84	4.80	5.06	5.54	6.01
Ukraine	2.59	2.42	2.65	3.22	3.83	4.73	4.82	5.38	6.01

Source: formed by the authors based on [15; 19; 23]

Table 5

**Types of sales channels in the candy industry, in percent**

Country	Sales Channel	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022
Worldwide	Offline	98.4	98.0	97.4	96.6	95.3	94.6
	Online	1.6	2.0	2.6	3.4	4.7	5.4
Slovakia	Offline	99.4	99.2	99.1	98.7	98.3	97.8
	Online	0.6	0.8	0.9	1.3	1.7	2.2
Ukraine	Offline	99.5	99.4	99.2	98.7	98.0	97.5
	Online	0.5	0.6	0.8	1.3	2.0	2.5

Source: formed by the authors based on [16; 20; 25]

2022, almost 20% of enterprises in Ukraine's confectionery industry were affected by military actions or were closed. Although production volumes decreased, this did not cause an imbalance or shortage of products in the market. This is because, in percentage terms, consumption volumes also decreased due to population migration and a decline in purchasing power.

According to the information in Table 2, we can conclude that the global income from the confectionery industry is constantly growing. Table 3 presents a comparative estimate of income from the confectionery industry in Ukraine and Slovakia. The income generated by Ukraine's confectionery industry is 6-7 times higher than the Slovak economy.

The study of average prices per unit of confectionery products in Table 4 shows a shift in the competitive advantages of the Ukrainian confectionery industry in 2022.

While in 2014, average global prices were three times higher than those for Ukrainian confectionery products, and Slovak confectionery prices were twice as high as Ukrainian prices, by 2022, the average prices for Slovak and Ukrainian confectionery products were equal. Starting from 2023, prices for Ukrainian confectionery products are predicted to exceed those of Slovak products. This trend reflects changes in the marketing policy of the confectionery industries in the studied countries and the availability of competitive potential.

Regarding the comparison of confectionery distribution channels (Table 5), direct retail sales dominate, although online sales are gradually increasing. This shift allows for the development of innovative approaches in the implementation of marketing strategies within the confectionery industry.

The analysis of novelties in the global confectionery industry shows that

chocolate bars, cookies, and waffles are particularly attractive due to the variety of flavors offered. The advantage of hard caramel lies in the use of natural ingredients. Additionally, continuous innovations are being introduced in the markets for premium chocolate, confectionery for children, snacks, reduced-sugar products, organic options, products with natural ingredients, as well as transparent and eco-friendly packaging.

The main competitive trends in confectionery packaging include minimalism, with a focus on the naturalness of the product, interactivity, reusability, portioning, transparency, and environmental friendliness. Overall, confectionery enterprises in Ukraine and Slovakia operate in a highly competitive environment, facing strong competition from both domestic and foreign companies.

#### **Confectionery industry in Ukraine**

Ukrainian manufacturers supply 90% of the country's confectionery products, with only 10% being imported. However, the export geography of Ukrainian products shifted slightly in 2022, as exports to the Russian Federation and Belarus were halted, while exports to EU countries increased. Overall, export volumes in 2022 decreased by 10% [13].

The top 5 confectionery manufacturers of Ukraine include Roshen Corporation; Confectionery factory 'AVK'; 'Konti' production association; Corporation 'Biscuit-chocolate'; Confectionery factory 'Zhytomyr sweets'.

#### **Confectionery industry in Slovakia**

Slovakia's confectionery industry, on the other hand, faces a different situation, with the majority of sales coming from imported products. Slovakia's leading top manufacturers include beeLOL, Boggi's, Pečivárne Lipt. Hrádok, Silmark, and BiBi.

Among the key trends in the confectionery market is the strengthening of competition due to the slowdown in global consumption growth. Manufacturers are exploring new export markets and expanding their presence abroad. While the consumption of sugar-based confectionery is decreasing, there is a rise in 'intuitive eating'

behaviour, with consumers moving away from previously imposed dietary restrictions. The consumer's choice of products is primarily influenced by price, quality, and appearance.

#### **Leaders of the global confectionery industry**

Table 6 presents the leading companies in the global confectionery industry, whose divisions are successfully operating in both Ukraine and Slovakia.

Giant manufacturers of the confectionery industry are located mainly in the USA and Europe. Nestle (Switzerland) and Haribo (Germany) also have high positions. The top companies in the confectionery industry have several factories that are close to the target consumer market.

Regarding the major confectionery giants operating in Ukraine and Slovakia, the following should be noted. The Mars Company began its operations in Ukraine in 1994. In Ukraine, the Mars Company is represented by well-known brands such as Snickers, Mars, Twix, Bounty, M&M'S, Skittles, Orbit and others. Mars entered the Slovak market in 1992. Since 2016, the Slovak market has been managed by the Mars Multi Sales Central Europe division, which connects the markets of the Czech Republic, Slovakia, Hungary, and Romania. This division operates in the categories of confectionery products, including chocolate, chewing gum, and sweets.

The Ferrero Group entered the Ukrainian market in 1995, introducing its world-famous confectionery products such as Raffaello, Kinder Chocolate, Kinder Surprise, Nutella, and Tic Tac to consumers. Currently, Ferrero Česká is one of the leading companies in the chocolate confectionery sector in the Czech Republic and Slovakia. Its products, including Nutella, Tic Tac, Kinder Bueno, Kinder Surprise, Kinder Chocolate, Ferrero Rocher, Raffaello, and Mon Chéri, as well as chilled products like Kinder Mliečny Rez and Kinder Pinguí, have firmly established themselves in both the Czech and Slovak markets.

Mondelēz Ukraine is a Ukrainian enterprise that is part of the Mondelēz

Table 6

**Global confectionery market: leading companies 2022, based on net sales**

Leading companies worldwide	Net sales in 2022 (in billion U.S. dollars)	Net sales in 2018 (in billion U.S. dollars)
Mars Inc.	20	18
Ferrero Group	14,27	12
Mondelez International	11,78	11,56
Hershey Co.	8,97	7,53
Nestlé SA	8,20	8,82
Chocoladenfabriken Lindt & Sprüngli AG	4,96	4,1
Pladis	3,97	1,96
Haribo GmbH	3,30	3,18
Perfetti Van Melle	3,02	2,93
General Mills	2,22	1,57

Source: formed by the authors based on [1; 2; 14]

International group. The company is represented in Ukraine by popular brands such as Milka and Korona chocolate, Oreo, TUC, and Belvita cookies, Milka Choco bakery, Barney the Bear biscuit cakes, Lux chips, Dirol chewing gum, and Halls lollipops. Mondelez Ukraine operates the Trostyanetska Chocolate Factory and its subsidiary, 'Chipsy Lux' LLC.

In the Czech Republic, Slovakia, and Hungary, Mondelez operates five factories, producing local biscuit brands such as Opavia and Györi Édes, along with chocolate brands like Figaro and Sport.

Despite the presence of many global companies in the national confectionery markets of Ukraine and Slovakia, the percentage of imports and exports in the confectionery industry remains relatively low.

At the same time, Ukraine exports a variety of flour-based products, including sweet biscuits, cakes, croissants, and straws. Chocolate products, being more expensive, have matched the lower-cost flour segment in terms of monetary value. The main export categories include chocolate candies, chocolate blocks, bars, and pastes without filling. Sugar-based products, such as caramel and toffee, remain one of the most important export groups.

Leaders of the Ukrainian confectionery market are actively seizing opportunities to introduce new products to foreign markets. In

2022, Ukrainian sugar-based confectionery products were in high demand in Poland, Romania, and Kazakhstan, while chocolate products were popular in Romania, Bulgaria, and Kazakhstan. Poland, Turkey, and Germany were the main importers of sugar confectionery to Ukraine, while Poland, Germany, and the Netherlands were key importers of chocolate.

The export characteristics by segment are as follows. Sugar confectionery products were primarily exported to Poland (including jelly candies, lollipop caramel, white chocolate, sunflower sugar halva, caramel-flavored popcorn, and chewy marshmallows) and Kazakhstan (including marmalade, caramel candies with filling, and white chocolate). In terms of chocolate products, Kazakhstan imported porous dark chocolate, milk chocolate, and glazed candies with filling, while Romania imported cocoa-based candies and milk chocolate.

The main sales markets for flour-based products are as follows: Moldova (including biscuits, waffles, crackers, sponge cake with filling, breadcrumbs, and cheesecakes), Romania (waffles, sweet dry cookies, crackers, and cake), Kazakhstan (sugar cookies, chocolate-covered waffles, and rye croutons), Georgia (sweet dry cookies, milk chocolate-covered cookies, waffle cups, frozen loaves, and oatmeal cookies), and Germany (chocolate-covered waffles, dry cookies with filling, and salty cookies).



The importing companies are mostly multinational companies with representation in many countries around the world.

Expert assessment of the key competitive advantages of confectionery enterprises in Ukraine and Slovakia

An expert assessment was conducted to determine the key competitive advantages of confectionery enterprises in Ukraine and Slovakia. Confectionery industry experts were given a questionnaire in which they were asked to evaluate the companies' competitive advantages on a 10-point scale, with 10 being the maximum score and 1 being the minimum. A total of 236 experts participated, including managers from confectionery enterprises in Ukraine and Slovakia, as well as consumers of confectionery products from these countries.

The potential competitive advantages evaluated in the questionnaire included factors such as the dynamics of confectionery production, revenue growth of manufacturers, digitalization of sales, average price levels of confectionery products, product policy effectiveness, brand development, product innovation, ingredient safety, and export potential. Experts were also asked to determine the importance of each competitive advantage on a scale from 0 to 1, with the total value of all competitive

advantages not exceeding 1. Table 7 presents the results of the expert assessment

The results of the expert evaluation indicate that confectionery enterprises in Ukraine and Slovakia have significant competitive potential for growth and strengthening. Ukrainian enterprises, in particular, possess greater opportunities thanks to their larger production volumes, innovative product assortments, and the high quality of their manufactured goods.

A concordance coefficient of 0.764 was calculated to assess the consistency of the experts' opinions, indicating a high degree of agreement among the experts.

#### **Discussion and conclusion.**

Based on the obtained data characterizing the competitive advantages of the confectionery industries in Ukraine and Slovakia, Table 8 presents the results of a comparative analysis of the key competitive advantages of confectionery enterprises, as proposed in the research.

The results of the comparative analysis indicate that Ukrainian enterprises in the confectionery industry possess more competitive advantages in the market and are successfully leveraging them. To further strengthen their competitive position, it is advisable for Ukrainian confectionery enterprises to focus on the digitalization

Table 7

#### **Results of the expert assessment of the competitive advantages of confectionery industry enterprises in Ukraine and Slovakia**

Competitive advantage	Average expert assessment		Rank of competitive advantage	Integrated assessment of competitive advantages	
	Ukraine	Slovakia		Ukraine	Slovakia
Change in production volumes	7.654	5.688	0.09	0.689	0.512
Changes in income levels	6.472	6.954	0.11	0.712	0.765
Price fluctuations	5.886	6.142	0.1	0.589	0.614
Digitalization of sales	2.360	2.146	0.12	0.283	0.258
Product policy effectiveness	8.598	4.226	0.15	1.289	0.634
Brand development	6.044	5.226	0.1	0.604	0.523
Innovativeness	8.542	8.564	0.16	1.367	1.370
Safety of ingredients	7.408	8.566	0.09	0.667	0.771
Changes in export volumes	3.674	2.214	0.08	0.294	0.177
Total value				6.494	5.624

Source: formed by the authors based on research results

Table 8

**Comparative analysis of the key competitive strategies of confectionery enterprises in Ukraine and Slovakia**

The key competitive strategy	Ukraine	Slovakia
Trends in changes in production volumes	Growth, more substantial volumes, compared to Slovakia	Gradual growth
Trends in changes in the income level of confectionery industry enterprises	Increase	Increase
Price fluctuations for confectionery products	Significant growth, which negatively affects competitiveness	Little growth
Digitalization of sales	Small percentage of sales are online, but the trend is increasing	Small percentage of sales are online, but the trend is increasing
Effectiveness of the product policy of confectionery manufacturers	Constant expansion of the assortment	Slight expansion of the assortment
Brand development	Brand support	Brand support
Innovative activity of confectionery manufacturers	Trend for healthy food	Fitness sweets, sweets without sugar
Safety of ingredients	Quality standards support	Quality standards support
Trends in the export of confectionery products	Growth of export volumes	Minimal export

Source: *formed by the authors based on research results*

of sales and the development of new markets to increase export volumes. In this context, the competitive strategy should be marketing-oriented, with a particular focus on optimizing the sales policy within the food market.

To gain competitive advantages, Slovak confectionery enterprises should focus on increasing production volumes, digitizing sales, expanding their product assortments, and conducting diagnostics of their export potential. In this regard, their competitive strategy should be marketing-oriented, with a focus on both product and sales policies in the food market.

Therefore, the confectionery industries in Ukraine and Slovakia are highly competitive, with companies from both countries continually innovating to create new, competitive food products.

The confectionery industries of Ukraine and Slovakia face several challenges, including the need for innovation, ever-changing consumer preferences, and rising raw material costs. However, these challenges also create opportunities for companies that can adapt and evolve.

As a result, managing competitive advantages and crafting a competitive strategy have become essential for adapting the industrial management systems of the confectionery industry to an increasingly dynamic competitive environment. This adaptability allows companies to quickly identify strategies for enhancing their competitiveness.

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## MANAGEMENT OF COMPETITIVE ADVANTAGES IN CONFECTIONERY INDUSTRY ENTERPRISES: A CASE STUDY OF SLOVAKIA AND UKRAINE

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The global confectionery industry is one of the most dynamically developing sectors of the economy and one of the fastest-growing segments of the consumer market. This growth is driven by shifting demand, influenced by healthy eating trends, as well as the industry's ability to adapt to consumer preferences through innovation and the development of flexible competitive strategies.

This paper is based on the hypothesis that, for effective competition, enterprises in the confectionery industry must continuously monitor the business environment and implement strategic measures in a timely manner.

The aim of this research is to substantiate the choice of a competitive strategy by monitoring the competitive advantages of enterprises in the confectionery industry, using Ukraine and Slovakia as case studies.

The research materials include statistical data on the development of the confectionery industry in Ukraine and Slovakia from Ukrstat and Eurostat.

To compare the competitive advantages of confectionery enterprises in both countries, the authors used methods such as diagnostic analysis, statistical data analysis, and case studies were employed. Expert evaluations from the confectionery industry in Ukraine and Slovakia were used to monitor and assess competitive advantages.

The monitoring procedure followed a structured sequence of actions: (1) identifying development trends in the confectionery industry, (2) determining key competitive advantages, and (3) conducting an expert assessment of these advantages. Based on this assessment, priorities were established, and a competitive strategy was defined.

The competitive advantages evaluated by experts included the dynamics of confectionery production, revenue growth, digitalization of sales, average product prices, operational efficiency, brand development, product innovation, ingredient safety, and export potential.

The potential competitive advantages of confectionery industry enterprises, which experts were asked to evaluate, included the dynamics of confectionery production, revenue dynamics, digitalization of sales, average prices for confectionery products, efficiency, brand development, product innovation, ingredient safety, and export potential. The results of the expert assessment indicate that the confectionery enterprises of Ukraine and Slovakia have significant potential for growth and strengthening their competitive position. Ukrainian enterprises, in particular, benefit from larger production volumes, a more innovative product assortment, and higher product quality. To further enhance their competitive advantages, Ukrainian enterprises should focus on digitalizing sales and expanding into new markets to boost exports. For Slovak enterprises, increasing production volumes, digitizing sales, refining product policy to expand assortments, and diagnosing export potential are recommended strategies for gaining competitive advantages.

As a result of this study, a methodological approach was developed to assess the competitive advantages of enterprises in the highly competitive confectionery industry. This approach enables enterprises in this sector to gain additional advantages in the global market. Identifying competitive advantages becomes a fundamental characteristic for providing information support in managing a company's competitive capabilities in a global context.

This article contributes to the study of methodologies for monitoring, evaluating, and managing the competitiveness of confectionery enterprises, with potential applicability to enterprises in other industries. The research also opens avenues for further studies in competitiveness management, the confectionery industry, and marketing management.

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