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Cascade strategic analysis of growing product categories in the online food retail sector

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Abstract. The relevance of this study stems from the accelerated digitalisation of the food retail sector, the growing share of e-commerce channels, and the need for strategic management of product category development amid shifting consumer demand. The aim of the study was to develop and justify a cascading approach to the strategic analysis of growing product categories in online food retail, based on the integration of portfolio models and SWOT analysis to enhance the soundness of strategic management decisions. A cascade approach was used for the strategic assessment, combining the BCG and GE/McKinsey portfolio models with SWOT analysis, as well as methods of structural analysis, analysis of online sales dynamics, calculation of compound annual growth rates (CAGR) and the share of product categories in the e-commerce structure. The research was based on statistical data from the international platform Statista for the period 2018-2024. The results of the study indicate uneven development across product segments in the food e-commerce sector and allow for the identification of categories with the most stable growth dynamics and structural strengthening of their positions in the digital channel. In particular, it has been established that the highest average annual growth rates are demonstrated by the categories "bread and cereal products" (24.07%), "confectionery and snacks" (21.01%), "semi-prepared foods" (21.08%) and "meat" (over 20%), confirming the emergence of high-demand segments in online trade. It was shown that the effectiveness of e-commerce development in the food sector depends on a combination of demand factors, logistics infrastructure, digital services and the specific storage and transport requirements of different product groups. Portfolio analysis using the BCG model revealed the presence of "stars", "question marks" and "cash cows", whilst the GE/McKinsey matrix confirmed varying levels of market attractiveness and competitive position across individual product segments. A SWOT analysis identified key drivers of growth (rising online demand, digitalisation of services) and constraints (logistics costs, price volatility, regulatory barriers). The proposed approach enables a shift from quantitative diagnosis of product category dynamics to the formulation of differentiated strategic directions for their development and can be used to justify business strategies and government policies supporting the digital transformation of the food market

Keywords: digital commerce; food market; portfolio evaluation; competitive advantages; digital sales channels; management decisions; strategic planning

INTRODUCTION

In the current climate, e-commerce in food products is becoming a key channel for ensuring product availability and adapting the market to crisis situations. The use of a cascading strategic approach combining the Boston Consulting Group (BCG), GE/McKinsey and SWOT analysis matrices allows for a differentiated assessment of product categories and the development of practice-oriented development strategies to improve the effectiveness of online sales. The development of e-commerce for food products in Ukraine is hampered by a number of structural and market constraints: underdeveloped delivery and cold chain infrastructure, limited digital literacy among certain population

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groups, low levels of trust in online services, and the specific nature of products requiring special storage and transport conditions. The lack of comprehensive tools for forecasting and strategic management of the sector hinders its scaling and effective functioning in the face of fluctuating demand and external shocks.

In the academic literature, the issue of e-commerce development in the food sector is examined from various methodological perspectives, notably through the prism of the digital transformation of retail, consumer behaviour, logistics innovations, and strategic management of product categories. In particular, E. Pantano *et al.* (2020) noted that digitalisation is changing the structure of food markets and transforming traditional sales channels through the development of omnichannel retail models and the personalisation of consumer interactions. According to the authors, the introduction of digital technologies in retail enhances the competitiveness of businesses and facilitates the adaptation of business models to new consumer practices. A separate area of research focuses on analysing the behavioural aspects of food consumption in the digital environment. In particular, authors A. Kuikka *et al.* (2024) investigated the factors shaping consumer loyalty in the online food retail environment and demonstrated that trust in the digital platform, service quality and effective communication with customers are of key importance. The researchers emphasised that a positive consumer experience and personalised interaction contribute to increased repeat purchases and the strengthening of online retailers' competitive positions. In turn, S. Nakano (2023) analyses the characteristics of consumer demand concentration in online food retail and notes that the structure of the online shopping basket differs significantly from traditional purchases in physical stores. The author highlights the growing role of recommendation algorithms, digital personalisation and consumer behaviour models in shaping demand for food products in the digital environment. Meanwhile, R. Bharati *et al.* (2025), in their study of consumer feedback on online food purchases during the pandemic, found that customer satisfaction is significantly influenced by delivery speed, product availability, the quality of logistics services and the transparency of digital communication.

Logistical and infrastructural factors play a significant role in the development of e-commerce in food products. In particular, M. Olumekor *et al.* (2024) found in their study that internet access, transport infrastructure and household expenditure patterns are key determinants of the uptake of online food shopping. The authors emphasise that infrastructure constraints directly hinder the development of e-commerce in the food sector, particularly in regions with lower levels of digital and logistical accessibility. In parallel, a research area is emerging dedicated to the strategic management of product portfolios in retail and e-commerce. J. Bieńkowska & C. Sikorski (2024) demonstrated that combining quantitative and qualitative methods of strategic analysis enhances the soundness of managerial decisions, as it allows formalised assessments to be supplemented by an interpretation of contextual factors and strategic constraints. At the same time, T. Musikavanhu & S. Kabanda (2023), having conducted a systematic review of research in the field of e-commerce in food products, found that academic studies predominantly focus on individual functional aspects (logistics, order fulfilment, consumer behaviour), whilst integrated strategic approaches remain underdeveloped. The authors emphasise that such fragmentation limits the ability to formulate comprehensive management decisions for digital food markets. Thus, the academic literature has produced a significant body of theoretical and methodological work on the study of e-commerce in food products; however, the issue of integrating various strategic analysis tools into a single analytical system remains under-explored. This necessitates the development of comprehensive approaches that allow for the integration of market dynamics, the competitive positions of product categories, and strategic development factors.

The aim of this study was to develop an innovative cascade model for the strategic analysis of growing product categories in the online food retail sector, combining portfolio models (BCG, GE/McKinsey) and SWOT analysis to formulate differentiated strategic decisions. To achieve this aim, the following tasks were identified: to identify key growing product categories in the online channel and assess their competitive positions and market attractiveness; to conduct a portfolio analysis of product categories using the BCG and GE/McKinsey matrices; to integrate the results of the SWOT analysis to formulate strategic development directions for each category. The scientific novelty lies in the development of a cascading model for the strategic analysis of growing product categories in the online food retail sector, which integrates the results of portfolio analysis (BCG, GE/McKinsey) and SWOT analysis into a single, coherent system of strategic assessment.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

The methodological basis for the study of the development of e-commerce in food products is a combination of general scientific and specialised methods of scientific inquiry, which has enabled a comprehensive analysis of market trends, structural changes and the strategic characteristics of product categories. A systematic approach was applied, along with methods of structural-logical analysis, comparative analysis, and economic-statistical methods, as well as tools for strategic and portfolio analysis. The choice of methods was dictated by the need to study both the dynamic quantitative changes in the market and the qualitative characteristics of its development. The study involved an analysis of academic publications on e-commerce in the food sector, consumer behaviour, and the logistical aspects of online retail operations. In particular, the work by E. Pantano *et al.* (2020) was utilised, as well as systematic reviews. These sources enabled the formation of the theoretical framework of the study and the identification of key drivers of e-commerce development. The empirical basis of the study consisted of statistical data from official sources,

in particular analytical reports by McKinsey & Company (2022; 2023; 2024; 2025) on the development of food retail in Europe, as well as market forecasts by Statista (n.d.) regarding the online food retail segment in Ukraine.

The period of empirical analysis covered 2018-2024, due to the use of comparable and fully verified statistical data from international analytical databases, which ensure consistency in measurement methodology across years and the validity of intertemporal comparisons. Data for 2025, at the time of collection and initial processing, were preliminary or forecast in nature, which limits their use for forming consistent time series within the scope of portfolio analysis. The use of partial or forecast values for 2025 in portfolio analysis may distort the dynamics of indicators due to differences in the methodology used to derive them. Analytical processing, interpretation of results and model building were carried out in 2025 based on the most up-to-date complete annual data available. The first and second stages of the study are aimed at identifying product categories with the most pronounced growth potential in the online food retail sector. Their implementation is methodologically necessary, as the BCG matrix is used not as a primary screening tool, but as a means of portfolio diagnosis for an already established analytical sample. The selection of the top three categories was based on formalised criteria of dynamics, structural significance and demand stability, ensuring the validity of the subsequent application of portfolio models in a digital context.

The study involved the systematisation of product categories and their classification by growth rate and market share. To this end, a structural-dynamic analysis method was applied, along with the calculation of the compound annual growth rate (CAGR), which enabled an assessment of the long-term development dynamics of individual segments of the food e-commerce market. The analysis was conducted at the product category level rather than for individual brands or companies, which aligns with the logic of portfolio models of strategic analysis (BCG, GE/McKinsey) and helps to avoid the distortions characteristic of fragmented digital markets.

The methodology for calculating growth indicators for product categories takes into account that, for each product category in the online food retail sector, the following data were used: annual online sales volumes for 2018-2024, in million USD; and the total volume of online food retail for the corresponding years. The analysis period covers 7 years. To assess the long-term dynamics of online sales for each product category, the CAGR indicator was applied, which allows for the smoothing of year-on-year fluctuations and the consideration of crisis shocks (in particular, the downturn in 2022):

$$CAGR_i = \left(\frac{V_{i,2024}}{V_{i,2018}}\right)^{\frac{1}{n}} - 1, \quad (1)$$

where $V_{i,2018}$,$V_{i,2024}$ – the volume of online sales of the i-th product category in 2018 and 2024 respectively; n – the number of years in the analysis period. To assess the structural significance of each category, its share in the total volume of e-commerce in food products was determined:

$$Share_{i,t} = \frac{V_{i,t}}{V_{total,t}} \cdot 100, \quad (2)$$

where $V_{i,t}$ – the volume of online sales of the i-th category in year t; $V_{total,t}$ – the total volume of e-commerce in food products in year t. The calculation was carried out separately for 2018 and 2024. To identify changes in the structure of the digital market, the share growth rate was used, which characterises the strengthening or weakening of a category's position in e-commerce:

$$\Delta Share_i = Share_{i,2024} - Share_{i,2018}. \quad (3)$$

Interpretation: $\Delta Share_i > 0$ – the category is strengthening its position within the e-commerce structure; $\Delta Share_i < 0$ – the category is losing relative significance, even in the context of absolute growth. Based on the calculated indicators, the selection of the top three growing categories was carried out according to a set of criteria: high average annual growth rate; positive growth in structural share; sustained recovery in volumes in 2023-2024; economic and logistical suitability for scaling in the digital channel.

The limitation of the analysis to three product categories is due to the need to combine analytical depth with methodological integrity of the study. It is precisely these top three categories that provide a representative reflection of the core growth of e-commerce in food products, whilst allowing for a comprehensive cascade analysis using BCG and GE/McKinsey matrices and SWOT analysis without compromising the substantive quality of strategic conclusions. Increasing the number of categories does not alter the typology of strategic positions, but significantly reduces the depth of interpretation, which contradicts the objectives of strategic analysis within the scope of a single academic article.

In the third stage, portfolio methods of strategic analysis were employed, enabling the classification of product categories by market growth rate and relative market share. Additionally, SWOT analysis was applied to assess internal and external factors influencing the development of e-commerce, thereby providing a comprehensive strategic overview of the market under study. The application of the BCG matrix for the initial classification of product categories by online market growth rates and relative market share enabled the identification of strategic category groups and their overall development potential in the e-commerce channel. The use of the GE/McKinsey matrix, which serves as a tool for the internal differentiation of categories previously identified as strategically significant (in particular, "stars" according to the BCG matrix), enabled a transition from an aggregated classification to a multidimensional strategic assessment that takes into account the market's economic attractiveness, the competitive position of categories, consumer behavioural characteristics, logistical constraints and the level of digital maturity.

The assessment of the criteria for the attractiveness of the e-commerce market and the competitive position of product categories was carried out using an expert-based approach as part of the study conducted in 2025. Eight specialists in the field of e-commerce and food retail, including e-commerce market analysts and representatives of online retailers, were involved in the expert assessment. Experts were selected based on criteria including at least three years' professional experience and practical involvement in relevant market or analytical projects. The expert assessment was conducted on a five-point scale (1-5), where 1 represents the minimum level of a criterion and 5 the maximum level. The composite indicators of market attractiveness and competitive position were determined using a weighted sum formula:

$$I_j = \sum_{k=1}^{m} w_k \cdot s_{jk}, \quad (4)$$

where I_j is the integrated indicator for the j-th product category; w_k is the weight of the k-th criterion; s_{jk} is the expert assessment of the j-th category according to the k-th criterion. SWOT analysis in the fourth stage of the study is applied as a tool for the strategic integration of portfolio analysis results, rather than as an independent descriptive method. Its use is methodologically appropriate only after constructing the GE/McKinsey matrix, as it is this matrix that allows for the quantitative identification of the strengths and weaknesses of the competitive position, as well as the key factors of market attractiveness in the context of the digital transformation of trade. The final stage involved summarising the results obtained and formulating strategic recommendations for the development of e-commerce in food products in Ukraine. The combination of quantitative methods (CAGR, structural analysis) and qualitative tools (SWOT, portfolio analysis) ensured the validity of the conclusions and their practical applicability for strategic market management.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The development of food trade in Ukraine during 2018-2024 took place against a backdrop of profound structural changes caused by crisis and war-related factors, which significantly transformed sales formats, logistics chains and consumer behaviour. The dynamics of retail sales in the pre-war period (2018-2022), during a phase of sharp contraction and a stage of gradual recovery, created the conditions for rethinking the role of digital sales channels and the infrastructural mechanisms underpinning the food market (Ilchuk *et al*., 2025a; 2025b). The innovative aspect of this study lies in the application of a cascading approach to strategic analysis, which combines portfolio methods (BCG, GE/McKinsey) and SWOT analysis for various product categories, enabling the formalisation of complex interrelationships between market parameters and the forecasting of market development under conditions of external shocks and internal transformations.

An analysis of academic research in the field of e-commerce in general, and in the grocery sector in particular, shows that most studies focus on specific aspects – technological innovations, logistics solutions, consumer behaviour or the impact of crises. Research by M. Groh (2014) indicates a growing importance of integrated approaches to the strategic management of product categories, the integration of digital technologies, service personalisation, and the adaptation of logistics models to different types of goods. At the same time, most existing studies apply portfolio or matrix tools in isolation, without establishing a coherent logic for transitioning from quantitative growth assessment to strategic management decisions. Therefore, to ensure the methodological integrity of the study, the results of the portfolio and SWOT analyses were integrated into a single cascading model for the strategic assessment of the development of e-commerce in food products (Fig. 1). Figure 1 illustrates the sequence of stages in the study of e-commerce in food products, from problem formulation to the development of strategic recommendations. This structure allows the research logic to be clearly traced, ensures transparency regarding the methods used and their connection to the practical value of the results obtained. In particular, it shows how quantitative (CAGR, market share, sales dynamics) and qualitative methods (SWOT, portfolio analysis) are combined for a comprehensive assessment of growing product categories. The analysis was conducted at the product category level rather than the brand level, ensuring the correct application of portfolio models (BCG, GE/McKinsey) in the context of e-commerce (Table 1).

Table 1. Trends and selection criteria for growing product categories in the online food retail sector in 2018-2024

Category	Year, million USD							CAGR 2018-2024, %	Share 2018, %	Share 2024, %	Share growth, percentage points
	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023	2024				
Bread and cereal products	22.09	29.36	54.95	88.74	12.86	38.44	80.56	24.07	7.02	10.18	3.16
Semi-prepared foods	8.80	11.70	19.37	28.85	4.57	13.14	27.73	21.08	2.8	3.44	0.64
Confectionery and snacks	39.62	52.83	89.06	134.70	19.96	59.31	124.40	21.01	12.58	15.4	2.82
Meat	41.84	56.52	89.87	133.30	20.02	60.21	129.00	20.64	13.28	15.92	2.64
Dairy products and eggs	24.31	32.13	47.99	68.81	12.01	32.24	67.02	18.41	7.72	8.13	0.41
Vegetables	24.86	32.13	48.67	70.05	13.93	33.79	67.72	18.18	7.89	8.19	0.3
Fish and seafood	11.51	14.74	22.09	31.67	6.65	15.58	30.91	17.9	3.65	3.73	0.08
Fruit and nuts	20.90	26.88	40.46	57.99	11.87	28.17	56.00	17.85	6.64	6.76	0.12
Sauces and spices	5.78	7.07	9.19	12.65	3.96	7.38	13.78	15.58	1.84	1.63	-0.21

Table 1. Continued

Category	Year, million USD							CAGR 2018-2024, %	Share 2018, %	Share 2024, %	Share growth, percentage points
	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023	2024				
Oils and fats	7.57	9.13	12.27	16.43	5.20	9.23	16.21	13.53	2.4	1.86	-0.54
Spreads and sweeteners	10.32	11.87	14.45	18.23	8.07	11.66	17.88	9.59	3.28	1.95	-1.33
Pet food	44.49	52.80	66.30	87.35	8.58	31.93	67.35	7.16	14.12	6.99	-7.12
Baby food	4.45	4.59	4.89	5.12	4.11	4.45	4.99	1.93	1.41	0.45	-0.96

Source: calculated using formulas 1-3 and compiled by the author based on data from Statista (n.d.)

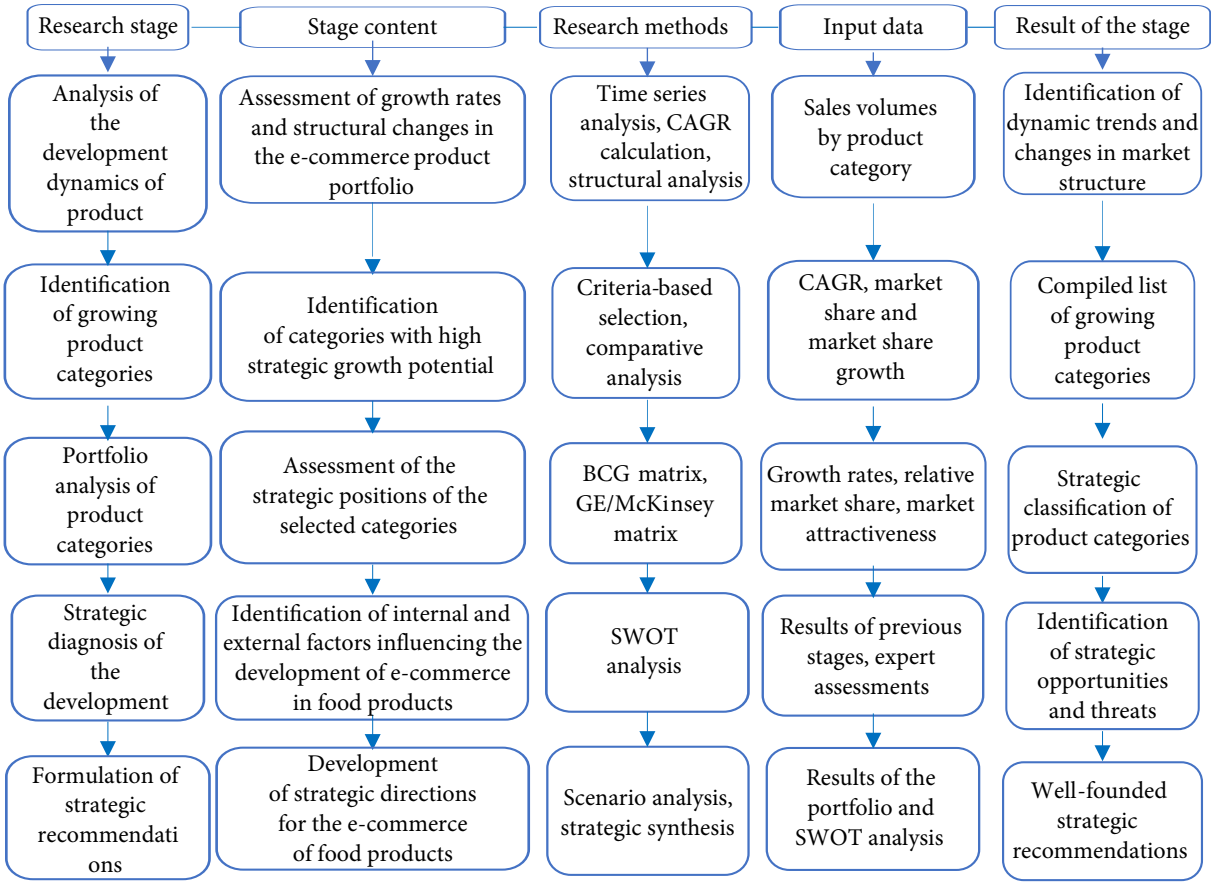

Figure 1. Cascade model of strategic analysis of the development of e-commerce in food products

Source: developed by the author based on X. Pan (2023), C.-Y. Hung & C.-C. Wang (2024), O.Ye. Mazur (2024), V.Z. Enríquez *et al.* (2025)

Analysis of the data in Table 1 shows that the highest average annual growth rates in 2018-2024 are demonstrated by the categories "bread and cereal products" (24.07%), "confectionery and snacks" (21.01%), "semi-prepared foods" (21.08%) and "meat" (20.64%). At the same time, it is "confectionery and snacks" (+2.82 p.p.) and "meat" (+2.64 p.p.) that are characterised by the largest increase in structural share. In contrast, the categories "pet food" (7.16%) and "baby food" (1.93%) have the lowest growth rates and negative or minimal dynamics in structural changes, indicating their relative stagnation. Thus, it is the categories of "bread and cereal products", "confectionery and snacks", and "meat" that combine the highest average annual growth rates with a positive increase in structural share, justifying their inclusion in the subsequent portfolio analysis. The selected product categories are characterised not only by high growth rates but also by a steady increase in market share within the structure of e-commerce in food products, which indicates their strategic attractiveness and the relevance of further portfolio analysis. In the first and second stages of the study, growing product categories in e-commerce for food products were identified based on the average annual growth rate of online sales, their share in the total volume of e-commerce for food products, and the increase in their share within the overall e-commerce structure. The results of the calculations showed that the most dynamic categories are "meat", "bread and cereal products", as well as "confectionery and snacks". These categories are characterised not only by high growth rates but also by a significant strengthening of market positions in

the digital channel, which justifies their further analysis using portfolio and matrix methods of strategic management.

The third stage of the study was aimed at conducting an initial portfolio diagnosis of the selected growing product categories in the e-commerce food sector using the BCG and GE/McKinsey matrices. Unlike the second stage, which was of a selection nature, the BCG matrix is used for the strategic interpretation of the categories' positions in the digital channel and to determine their role in the e-commerce portfolio. The BCG matrix is widely used in classical strategic management research, particularly in international studies devoted to modelling portfolio analysis and forecasting the development of business units (Pan, 2023; Enríquez *et al.*, 2025). At the same time, contemporary research shows its adaptation to the conditions of the digital economy and e-commerce, with an emphasis on modifying classical approaches in the context of online markets (Hung & Wang, 2024). A separate strand consists of academic works by Ukrainian researchers, which focus on the challenges of adapting the BCG matrix to the analysis of product ranges and the specifics of national markets, particularly in the context of the transformation of retail systems (Mazur, 2024). However, overall, the application of the BCG matrix in empirical studies of e-commerce in food products remains underdeveloped, which necessitates its further adaptation to the specifics of digital platforms and its use as a basic tool for multi-criteria strategic analysis.

The application of the BCG matrix at the product category level, rather than at the level of companies or brands, is methodologically sound in the context of e-commerce in food products, as the digital market is characterised by a high level of demand aggregation, multi-brand competition, and the dominance of platform-based sales models. This prevents distortions associated with the competitive structure of individual companies, thereby facilitating a focus on the strategic dynamics of demand. The classic BCG matrix has been adapted to the specifics of online food retail by transforming its basic variables. Within the scope of the study: the growth rate reflects the dynamics of online sales of the product category in 2018-2024; market share is interpreted as the share of the relevant category in the total volume of online food retail, rather than as the competitive share of an individual entity. This approach allows the BCG matrix to be used not as a tool for competitive analysis, but as a portfolio model for assessing structural changes in digital demand.

In the context of e-commerce in food products, the quadrants of the BCG matrix are interpreted as follows: "stars" – product categories with high growth rates in online sales and a significant share in the structure of e-commerce in food products; they act as key drivers of digital development and require priority investment; "question marks" – categories with high growth dynamics but a relatively small share; they require a strategic choice between scaling up or gradual withdrawal; "cash cows" – stable categories with a high share but moderate growth rates; can serve as a source of funding for digital innovation; dogs – categories with low growth rates and a limited structural role in e-commerce (Pan, 2023; Hung & Wang, 2024; Enríquez *et al.*, 2025). The BCG matrix was constructed for the three categories selected in the first stage: "bread and cereal products", "confectionery and snacks", and "meat". The positioning coordinates were: the compound annual growth rate (CAGR, %) of online sales; and the share of the product category in the total volume of online food trade in 2024. The positioning results are presented in tabular form (Table 2), taking into account the calculations set out in Table 1, and visualised as a schematic BCG matrix.

Table 2. Positioning of growing product categories in the BCG matrix

Product category	Growth rate of online sales	Share of e-commerce in food products	Position in the BCG matrix
Bread and cereal products	High	High	Stars
Confectionery and snacks	High	Medium-high	Stars
Meat	High	High	Stars

Source: author's own work

To construct the BCG matrix, the growth rates of online sales and the share of product categories in the structure of e-commerce in food products were first normalised and transformed into relative qualitative levels to ensure comparability and strategic interpretation of the data. Normalisation was carried out using an interval approach, taking into account the mean values of the sample under study. Specifically, the mean values of the indicators were determined and the limits of deviation from them were established. On this basis, the indicators of online sales growth rates (CAGR) and the share of product categories in the total volume of e-commerce were interpreted according to the following levels: low level – values below the sample average; medium level – values within an interval close to the mean (±20%); medium-high level – values between the medium and high levels; high level – values exceeding the upper threshold of the interval distribution. This approach ensures consistency between quantitative data and their strategic interpretation within the BCG matrix and helps avoid distortions associated with the direct use of absolute values in portfolio analysis (Fig. 2). It should be noted that, according to the results of the BCG matrix, all analysed product categories fall into the star quadrant. This is not a methodological limitation of the study, but reflects the logic of the phased selection carried out in the first stage, where only categories with high growth potential and positive dynamics in market share were included for further analysis. Thus, the BCG matrix in this study serves as a tool for initial portfolio diagnosis rather

than a comprehensive market analysis. At the same time, despite belonging to the same quadrant, these categories differ in terms of the nature of demand, logistical complexity and sensitivity to digital services, which justifies a more in-depth analysis in the next stage of the study using the GE/McKinsey matrix and SWOT analysis.

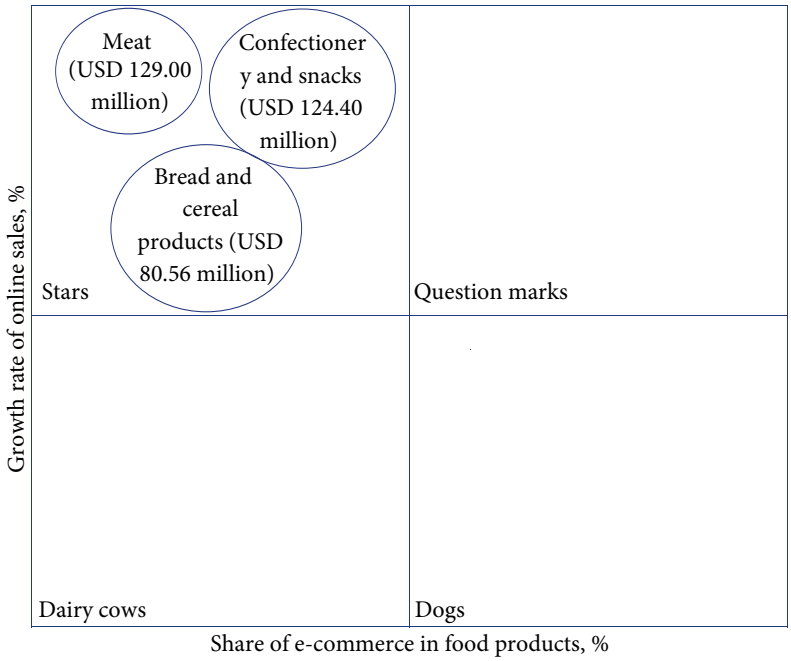

Figure 2. Adapted BCG matrix for portfolio analysis of growing product categories in food e-commerce
Source: author's own work

The analytical rationale for using portfolio models in research into e-commerce in the food sector is consistent with the empirical findings of McKinsey & Company (2022; 2023; 2024; 2025), which point to a growing differentiation among food e-commerce product categories in terms of growth rates, profit margins and investment attractiveness. According to McKinsey's sector studies, following the COVID-19 pandemic, a stable core of star categories in online food sales has emerged, requiring active strategic support, whilst certain categories are showing signs of stagnation despite overall market growth. The application of the GE/McKinsey matrix in the third stage of the study is driven by the need to overcome the methodological limitations of the BCG matrix. Although the BCG matrix allows for an initial portfolio diagnosis and the identification of key drivers of digital growth, its two-factor nature (growth rate and market share) does not account for the multi-factor nature of product category competitiveness in the context of the digital transformation of retail.

Unlike the BCG matrix, the GE/McKinsey matrix provides a multidimensional strategic assessment, allowing for the simultaneous consideration of: economic parameters of market development; behavioural characteristics of online consumers; logistical and operational constraints of e-commerce; and the level of digital maturity of categories. Thus, the GE/McKinsey matrix is used not for reclassification, but for the internal differentiation of categories that in the BCG matrix belong to the same quadrant ("stars"). To construct the GE/McKinsey matrix, two integrated groups of indicators were formed: the attractiveness of the e-commerce market for the product category; and the competitive position of the product category in the digital channel (Table 3). The assessment was carried out on the basis of expert weighting of the criteria, followed by the calculation of integrated scores for each category. The GE/McKinsey matrix scores for the growth product categories – "bread and cereal products", "confectionery and snacks", and "meat" – are shown in Table 4.

Table 3. Criteria for assessing the attractiveness of the e-commerce market for food products and the competitive position of the product category in e-commerce

Criteria for assessing the attractiveness of the e-commerce market for food products	Economic interpretation	Weight
Growth rate of the e-commerce segment	Long-term potential for scaling online sales	0.25
Category margins	Ability to generate added value in the digital channel	0.20
Price sensitivity	Stability of demand under conditions of price fluctuations	0.15
Repeat purchases	Frequency and regularity of online orders	0.20
Logistical complexity	Costs of storage, delivery and order fulfilment	0.20
Total		1.00

Table 3. Continued

Criteria for assessing the competitive position of a product category in e-commerce	Strategic interpretation	Weight
Level of digital presence	Presence on marketplaces and in omnichannel networks	0.20
Share of online sales	Degree of category integration into the digital channel	0.20
Level of brand loyalty	Stability of consumer choice online	0.20
Availability of own-brand products	Control over product range and pricing	0.15
Demand analytics and personalisation	Ability to use data to drive sales	0.25
Total		1.00

Source: calculated by the author based on formula 4

Table 4. GE/McKinsey matrix integrated indicators for growing product categories

Indicator	Product category		
	Bread and cereal products	Confectionery and snacks	Meat
Criteria for assessing the attractiveness of the e-commerce market for food products			
Market attractiveness	High	High	Medium-high
Growth rate of the e-commerce segment	5	5	4
Category margin	4	4	5
Price sensitivity	4	3	4
Repeat purchases	5	4	3
Logistical complexity	3	3	5
Overall score	4.35	3.90	3.90
Criteria for assessing the competitive position of a product category in e-commerce			
Competitive position	High	Medium-high	High
Level of digital presence	5	4	5
Share of online sales	4	3	5
Level of brand loyalty	4	3	4
Availability of own-brand products	4	3	3
Demand analytics and personalisation	4	4	4
Overall score	4.20	3.50	4.40
Strategic zone	Invest and scale	Selective growth	Invest with a focus on efficiency

Source: calculated by the author

The results of an in-depth strategic assessment show (Fig. 3) that, although all three categories belong to the Star quadrant in the BCG matrix, their strategic positions differ significantly. The "bread and cereal products" category is characterised by a combination of high market attractiveness and a strong competitive position, which justifies an aggressive investment strategy aimed at scaling up and technologically upgrading digital sales channels. "Confectionery and snacks" demonstrate high market potential, but are somewhat weaker in terms of competitive position, which justifies a strategy of selective growth with an emphasis on brand loyalty, personalisation and the development of own-brand products. The "meat" category is characterised by a strong competitive position within a market of medium-to-high attractiveness, which is linked to logistical complexity and high operational costs. This makes it advisable to focus investments primarily on improving operational efficiency and optimising digital delivery services. The results obtained from the GE/McKinsey matrix form the analytical basis for the next stage of the study – a SWOT analysis, which allows for a detailed examination of the internal strengths and weaknesses of each product category, as well as the identification of external opportunities and threats to their further development in the digital environment. In contemporary research on e-commerce in food products, SWOT analysis is predominantly used as a standalone tool for the qualitative interpretation of market conditions or as a supplementary method for strategic assessment without a clear formalisation of its link to the results of quantitative analysis. The academic publications by M.M. Helms & J. Nixon (2010), E. Gürel & M. Tat (2017), and B. Phadermrod *et al.* (2019) focus primarily on describing the strengths and weaknesses of digital retail formats, as well as the opportunities and threats of the external environment, without ensuring the systematic integration of SWOT analysis with the results of portfolio or multi-criteria diagnostics. In this context, the question of integrating the results of the BCG and GE/McKinsey matrices into the structure of SWOT analysis based on a cascading approach – whereby qualitative strategic conclusions are formed on the basis of previously identified quantitative strategic positions of product categories – remains methodologically unresolved. It is precisely the elimination of this methodological gap that justifies the application of SWOT analysis at the fourth stage of the study as an integrative tool for summarising the results of portfolio analysis, taking into account the specific nature of e-commerce in food products under conditions of heightened market instability.

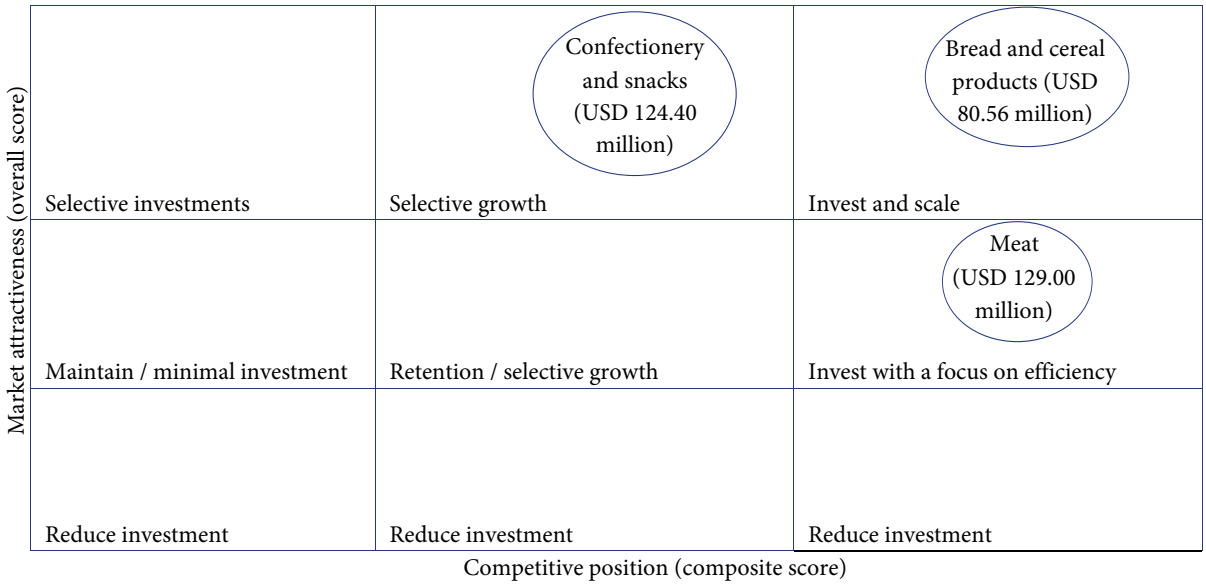

Figure 3. In-depth portfolio differentiation of growing product categories in food e-commerce based on the GE/McKinsey matrix

Source: author's own work

Within the scope of the study, the elements of SWOT analysis are interpreted as follows: strengths (S) are formed on the basis of high integrated assessments of the competitive position of product categories in the GE/McKinsey matrix; weaknesses (W) reflect the parameters for which the relevant product categories received lower expert scores according to the criteria of competitive position; opportunities (O) are based on factors of the attractiveness of the e-commerce market for food products; Threats (T) cover external risks to the operation of e-commerce in food products in Ukraine, in particular logistical, regulatory, macroeconomic and military factors. This approach enables a transition from an aggregated strategic position of categories to the identification of the internal and external factors shaping their development within the food e-commerce sector. Table 5 presents a SWOT analysis of the product category "bread and cereal products".

Table 5. SWOT analysis of the product category "bread and cereal products"

S	**W**
Strong competitive position in e-commerce (GE/McKinsey)	Low margins in certain sub-categories
High frequency of online purchases	Limited opportunities for premiumisation
Low logistical complexity of delivery	High price sensitivity among consumers
O	**T**
Growing demand for basic products in the online channel	Inflationary pressure on raw materials
Development of own brands	Disruptions in supply chains
Scaling up ultra-fast e-commerce models	State regulation of prices for essential goods

Source: author's own analysis

An analysis of the "bread and cereal products" category shows that even under conditions of low margins and high consumer price sensitivity, staple foods retain significant strategic potential in e-commerce thanks to stable demand, low logistical complexity and opportunities for scaling through private labels. In contrast to this category, the next product group – "confectionery and snacks" – is characterised by a higher level of emotional consumption, active use of digital marketing and significantly broader opportunities for personalising the offering, which results in a different configuration of strengths and weaknesses, as well as strategic risks (Table 6).

Table 6. SWOT analysis of the "confectionery and snacks" product category

S	**W**
High attractiveness of the e-commerce market	Medium-high competitive position
High potential for personalisation	Dependence on imported raw materials
Strong brand loyalty	Price volatility

Table 6. Continued

O	T
Growth in impulse online shopping	Inflationary fluctuations in household income
Active use of digital marketing	Increasing competition from private-label products
Expansion of the range of functional snacks	Tighter regulations on product composition

Source: author's own analysis

Further analysis of the "meat" category allows the study to be expanded by including products with fundamentally different operational characteristics, primarily high logistical complexity, the need for a cold supply chain, and heightened regulatory requirements regarding product quality and safety (Table 7).

Table 7. SWOT analysis of the "meat" product category

S	W
Strong competitive position in the digital channel	High logistical complexity
High proportion of online sales	High costs for the cold chain
Stable underlying demand	Limited opportunities for rapid scaling
O	**T**
Development of guaranteed delivery services	Military risks of supply disruption
Integration of traceability and quality control systems.	Tighter veterinary regulations
Rising demand for ready-to-eat products	Rising energy costs

Source: author's own analysis

The SWOT analysis confirms that the selected growth product categories, despite belonging to the same portfolio segment in the BCG matrix, are characterised by significantly different strategic profiles. This indicates the limitations of relying solely on portfolio models for management decision-making and justifies the advisability of combining them with an analytical and integrative SWOT analysis.

The fifth stage of the cascading strategic analysis involves formulating differentiated strategic recommendations for the development of growing product categories in the e-commerce food sector, based on a synthesis of the results of the BCG, GE/McKinsey matrices and SWOT analysis. At this stage, there is a transition from analytical interpretation to practice-oriented strategic management, which ensures the applied value of the research. Unlike classical approaches, where strategic recommendations are formulated separately for each analytical model, within the scope of this study they are integrative in nature and based on cascade logic.

An analysis of the results indicates that for product categories which fall within the "stars" quadrant of the BCG matrix but occupy different strategic zones in the GE/McKinsey matrix, it is not advisable to apply a one-size-fits-all digital development strategy. In particular, "bread and cereal products" – an aggressive scaling strategy focused on expanding omnichannel sales models, developing own-brand products and optimising operational costs through low logistical complexity; "confectionery and snacks" – a selective growth strategy focused on personalisation, digital marketing, consumer behaviour analytics and expanding the range of high-value-added products; "meat" – an investment strategy focused on efficiency, involving logistics optimisation, the development of guaranteed delivery services, digital quality control and the minimisation of operational risks. Thus, the final stage of the cascade analysis transforms the results of the portfolio and SWOT models into practical strategic decisions tailored to the specific characteristics of individual product categories within the online food retail sector. Each row of Table 8 integrates the results of BCG → GE/McKinsey → SWOT, ensuring a cascading logic for strategic decision-making and emphasising a differentiated approach to the development of each product category.

Table 8. Integration table of strategic development directions for growing product categories in the online food retail sector (synthesis of BCG, GE/McKinsey and SWOT analysis)

Category	BCG position	GE/McKinsey zone	SWOT: Key factors	Dominant strategy	Management priorities
Bread and cereal products	Star	High appeal/ strong position	S: high repeatability of online purchases, low logistical complexity W: low margins O: growing demand for staple foods T: inflationary pressure	Invest and scale	Own brands, fast delivery, price optimisation
Confectionery and snacks	Star	High appeal/ medium-strong position	S: strong brand loyalty, high potential for personalisation W: dependence on imports O: growth in impulse buying T: increasing regulatory requirements	Selective growth	Personalisation, digital marketing, product range expansion

Table 8. Continued

Category	BCG position	GE/McKinsey zone	SWOT: Key factors	Dominant strategy	Management priorities
Meat	Star	Medium-high attractiveness/ strong position	S: high base demand, strong online position W: logistical complexity, cold chain O: guaranteed delivery services; T: military and energy risks	Invest with a focus	Cold chain, micro-fulfilment centres, quality control

Source: author's own analysis

The results of this study are consistent with the findings of contemporary scientific and applied research published in peer-reviewed journals, and confirm the relevance of the applied cascading approach to the strategic analysis of growing product categories in the food e-commerce sector. The proposed approach provides a consistent combination of portfolio tools (the BCG and GE/McKinsey matrices) with an assessment of the logistical, resource and digital determinants of product segment development. The bibliometric analysis by M. Monoarfa *et al.* (2024) confirms the growing academic interest in issues relating to e-commerce in food products, particularly in the context of logistics systems, digital platforms and consumer behaviour. The authors highlight the concentration of research on issues of supply chain efficiency and the digital transformation of retail. This confirms the relevance and scientific validity of the chosen research direction.

Researchers F. Ellis-Chadwick *et al.* (2007) have demonstrated, within the framework of the resource-based view, that the competitiveness of retail companies is shaped by the effective use of information, organisational and logistical resources. The authors emphasise that it is not only the availability of resources that is key, but their ability to be integrated into a single strategic management system. This is directly confirmed by the results of the cascade analysis presented, which takes into account the interrelationship between companies' resource base and the effectiveness of product category development. In the work by A. Hübner *et al.* (2016a), it was established that the effectiveness of e-commerce in food retail depends to a large extent on the level of integration of sales channels and the flexibility of the distribution system. The authors emphasise that an omnichannel environment requires adaptive inventory management and coordination of flows between online and offline channels. This correlates directly with the results of the current study, according to which different product categories (in particular the meat and grocery groups) demonstrate varying sensitivity to the logistics infrastructure and require differentiated strategic decisions within the BCG matrix. In the study by A. Hübner *et al.* (2016b), it is shown that the choice of delivery model is a critical factor in the competitiveness of online food retail. The authors argue that decisions regarding the organisation of the last mile of supply should be based on product category characteristics, demand density and service speed requirements. The results of this study confirm the need to differentiate logistics strategies for perishable and non-perishable goods, which is consistent with the logic of category management within the proposed cascade approach.

M. Mkansi & A.L. Nsakanda (2019) demonstrate that integrating a physical network of stores into an e-commerce system creates additional advantages for order fulfilment and improves the efficiency of the last mile of delivery. The authors emphasise that using stores as logistics hubs allows for reduced costs and faster customer service. This is fully consistent with the findings of this study regarding the need to combine online and offline infrastructure when formulating product category development strategies. The study by A. Grewal *et al.* (2017) focuses on the role of digital presence, personalisation and omnichannel integration in shaping effective retail strategies. The authors note that digital technologies are changing consumer behaviour and increasing the importance of product category segmentation. This is consistent with the findings of this study, which found that product groups respond differently to digital sales channels and marketing tools. The work by A. Alrasheed *et al.* (2024) demonstrates that companies' level of digital maturity, the use of data analytics and process automation significantly influence the effectiveness of e-commerce in the food sector. The authors emphasise that technological factors are becoming decisive in shaping competitive advantages. This correlates with the findings of this study, according to which the growth rates of product categories depend not only on market conditions but also on the level of digital transformation of business models. The study by E. Pantano *et al.* (2020) demonstrates that crises significantly alter the structure of consumer demand and exacerbate the uneven development of product categories in the retail sector. The authors note that during crises, demand shifts towards basic essential goods. This is consistent with the findings of this study regarding the asymmetric development of categories during various periods of economic instability. Thus, the results of the author's cascading strategic analysis are consistent with a wide range of contemporary research, confirming the importance of category differentiation, logistical adaptation, a resource-based approach and digital transformation in the development of e-commerce in food products. The proposed model demonstrates its versatility and suitability for application in the context of dynamic changes in consumer markets and growing competition.

CONCLUSIONS

The application of a cascading strategic analysis using BCG, GE/McKinsey and SWOT matrices in the study of e-commerce in food products allows for a comprehensive

assessment of the competitive positions and market attractiveness of individual product categories, as well as the formulation of differentiated strategic development directions. The five-stage approach, which involves identifying growth categories, portfolio diagnosis, strategic differentiation, integration of internal and external factors, and the formulation of target strategies, provides a logical transition from analytical description to practice-oriented strategic management. The research findings indicate that different product categories, even when belonging to the same quadrant of the BCG matrix, have distinct strategic profiles in the GE/McKinsey matrix and different strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats in the SWOT analysis. Furthermore, the combination of portfolio models and SWOT analysis forms a coherent, cascading logic of strategic management, enabling decisions to be adapted to the specific characteristics of each product category and digital sales channel. In particular, the analysis found that the average annual growth rates of individual food e-commerce categories in 2018-2024 ranged from approximately 20% to over 24%, with the highest growth rates recorded in the categories of "bread and cereal products" (around 24.07%), "confectionery and snacks" (21.01%), "semi-prepared foods" (21.08%) and "meat" (over 20%). This indicates the emergence of segments with increased demand in online sales channels.

The BCG matrix revealed that some of these categories fall into the "stars" and "question marks" categories, characterised by high market growth rates and an uneven share of online sales, whilst other categories remain in the "cash cows" segment, with stable but lower growth rates. In the GE/McKinsey matrix, these same categories demonstrate varying levels of market attractiveness (from medium to high) and differing competitive strength, confirming the uneven development of e-commerce within a single product sector. A SWOT analysis has identified the sector's key strengths, including the growing share of online channels in total retail turnover, the development of digital infrastructure, and changes in consumer behaviour. At the same time, key threats have been identified, including logistical constraints, price volatility and regulatory barriers, which may hold back the potential of certain categories. Throughout the period under review, e-commerce in food products demonstrated strong growth dynamics and resilience to external shocks; however, strategic planning must take into account logistical, pricing and regulatory constraints. The findings enable businesses and government bodies to develop practical development strategies, enhance the efficiency of digital channels and ensure market competitiveness. Further research could focus on forecasting the impact of strategic decisions on the long-term dynamics of e-commerce, particularly in high-value-added segments. Thus, cascading strategic analysis demonstrates high potential both for scientific justification and for the practical implementation of e-commerce development strategies for food products, ensuring a combination of analytical accuracy and managerial utility.

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Каскадний стратегічний аналіз зростаючих товарних категорій електронної торгівлі харчовими товарами

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Анотація. Актуальність дослідження зумовлена прискореною цифровізацією роздрібної торгівлі харчовими товарами, зростанням частки електронних каналів збуту та необхідністю стратегічного управління розвитком товарних категорій в умовах трансформації споживчого попиту. Метою дослідження було розроблення та обґрунтування каскадного підходу до стратегічного аналізу зростаючих товарних категорій електронної торгівлі харчовими товарами, що базується на інтеграції портфельних моделей та SWOT-аналізу для підвищення обґрунтованості стратегічних управлінських рішень. Для стратегічної оцінки використано каскадний підхід, що поєднує портфельні моделі BCG та GE/McKinsey із SWOT-аналізом, а також методи структурного аналізу, аналізу динаміки онлайн-продажів, розрахунку середньорічних темпів зростання (CAGR) і частки товарних категорій у структурі електронної торгівлі. Інформаційну базу дослідження становили статистичні дані міжнародної платформи Statista за 2018-2024 роки. Результати дослідження свідчать про нерівномірність розвитку товарних сегментів електронної торгівлі харчовими товарами та дозволяють виокремити категорії з найбільш стійкою динамікою зростання та структурним посиленням позицій у цифровому каналі. Зокрема, встановлено, що найвищі середньорічні темпи зростання демонструють категорії «хліб і круп'яні вироби» (24,07 %), «кондитерські вироби та снеки» (21,01 %), «напівфабрикати» (21,08 %) та «м'ясні продукти» (понад 20 %), що підтверджує формування сегментів підвищеного попиту в онлайн-торгівлі. Показано, що ефективність розвитку електронної торгівлі харчовими товарами залежить від поєднання факторів попиту, логістичної інфраструктури, цифрових сервісів та специфіки зберігання і транспортування різних груп продуктів. Портфельний аналіз за моделлю BCG засвідчив наявність категорій типу «зірки», «знаки питання» та «дійні корови», тоді як матриця GE/McKinsey підтвердила різний рівень ринкової привабливості та конкурентної позиції окремих товарних сегментів. SWOT-аналіз дозволив ідентифікувати ключові драйвери розвитку (зростання онлайн-попиту, цифровізація сервісів) та обмеження (логістичні витрати, цінова волатильність, регуляторні бар'єри). Запропонований підхід дозволяє перейти від кількісної діагностики динаміки товарних категорій до формування диференційованих стратегічних напрямів їх розвитку та може бути використаний для обґрунтування бізнес-стратегій і державної політики підтримки цифрової трансформації продовольчого ринку

Ключові слова: цифрова комерція; продовольчий ринок; портфельне оцінювання; конкурентні переваги; цифрові канали реалізації; управлінські рішення; стратегічне планування