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FORMATION AND IMPLEMENTATION OF THE STRATEGY FOR STRENGTHENING THE COMPETITIVENESS OF THE RESTAURANT BUSINESS ENTITY

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Topicality. In the current crisis conditions of unstable but still dynamic development of the restaurant services market, the problem of strengthening the competitiveness of restaurant business entities is becoming particularly relevant. The restaurant industry is one of the most sensitive to changes in consumer sentiments, modern tendencies, economic fluctuations and technological innovations. Success in this market is determined by the ability of companies to quickly respond and adapt to new challenges, offer a unique product and provide high-quality service. In conditions of pandemic, military activity and further transformations of consumer behaviour, it is competitiveness that becomes a key factor in the survival and development of restaurant business entities. Special attention should be given to the study of strategies for increasing the competitiveness of network operators of the restaurant market, that have significant resources and potential for implementing innovations. At the same time, the scale of activity and the complexity of business processes pose additional challenges in managing service quality and operational efficiency. As a result, the elaboration of scientifically sound approaches to forming and implementing strategies to enhance competitiveness of restaurant business entities is an urgent and ongoing task of modern economic science and management practice. **The aim of the article and research methods.** The aim of the article is to study the essence of the issue, to ground theoretical bases, to work out methodological approaches and practical recommendations for the formation of the strategy for increasing the competitiveness of restaurant business enterprises. The interpreted research topic requires the use of general economic, analytical and statistical methods, which allow to determine theoretical approaches, to ground a hypothetical research toolkit, to form an appropriate system of the strategy for strengthening the competitiveness of the restaurant business entities. **Results.** The obtained results are analysed. They consist in the development of theoretical foundations and in the elaboration of practical recommendations concerning the formation of the strategy for increasing the competitiveness of restaurant business enterprises. The definition of the concept of “competitiveness of a restaurant business entity” is studied and improved, taking into account the specifics of the industry and modern market development trends. A methodological approach to the comprehensive assessment of the competitiveness of a restaurant chain, based on the integral indicator, is offered. It takes into account financial and non-financial aspects of the restaurant business entity’s activities. The feasibility of using a digital transformation strategy as an optimal direction for strengthening the competitiveness of a restaurant chain in modern conditions is substantiated. The perspectives for further research are a thorough study of the methodology and testing the strategy for increasing the competitiveness of the restaurant business entities, which can be supplemented by practical modern insights into this sphere and external factors. **Conclusions and discussion.** The study demonstrates the relevance of the offered measures in order to increase the competitiveness of

the restaurant business entities, develops the strategy for the “!FEST” restaurant chain, and also grounds the choice of the optimal strategic approach. The sources used in this study confirm the importance of forming and implementing the strategy for increasing the competitiveness of the restaurant business entities.

Keywords: restaurant, efficiency, competitiveness, restaurant business, strategy, quality management, enterprise development.

Introduction

The problem formulation. Research on the competitiveness of enterprises is one of the key tasks of modern economic science and opens new opportunities for business development. Under market conditions and increasing competitive pressure, the ability of enterprises to compete effectively becomes a determining factor in their success and dynamic growth. The issue of competitiveness is especially relevant for restaurant business entities, which operate in highly competitive environments due to a large number of market participants and relatively low barriers to entry into this industry. Therefore, understanding the development and implementation of a strategy for increasing the competitiveness of the restaurant business entities, along with theoretical and methodological approaches is an important task for good grounding of the industry, particularly, in improving its competitiveness and appeal to consumers.

State study of the problem. Theoretical and practical aspects of the competitiveness of the restaurant business entities have been widely studied by a significant number of domestic and foreign scientists. In particular, V. Ivaniuta (2008) defines the competitiveness of an enterprise as its ability to stand out among competitors through high efficiency of economic activity and the ability to adapt to economic changes, satisfying needs with its goods and services. L. Kryvenko (2018) notes that the competitiveness of an enterprise is determined by its ability to satisfy consumer needs with goods and ensure production efficiency, which differentiates it. The works of E. Tsybulska and V. Matsyhura (2018) make significant contributions to theoretical approaches to the formation of a strategy for increasing competitiveness. The competitiveness of an enterprise is one of the basic categories of modern economic science, which attracts the attention of many researchers. Its importance grounds on the fact that in market conditions, it is competitiveness that determines the viability of an enterprise, the results of its functioning and development perspectives. The complexity and multifaceted nature of this concept has led to the emergence of a significant number of scientific approaches to its interpretation, each of which focuses on certain key characteristics of competitiveness. Practical insights are devoted to the publications D. V. Naherniuk (2016), who presented the main factors that shape the competitiveness of restaurant enterprises; P. A. Fisunenکو (2020), who formed approaches to determining the competitiveness of an enterprise, etc. In addition, strategic aspects of competitiveness have been worked out by such scientists as Z. V. Yurynets (2015), I. V. Smolin (2015), I. Levytska et al. (2023). It should be noted that in spite of numerous studies, today, there is no unified understanding regarding the formation and implementation of a competitiveness strategy for the restaurant business entities and the systematisation of this area in the practice of implementing the activities of a restaurant chain, as well as its tools and performance indicators, which once again proves the relevance of conducting this study.

Unresolved issues. The relevance of the study lies in substantiating the provisions on the development of theoretical foundations and developing practical recommendations for the methodological formation of the strategy for increasing the competitiveness of the restaurant business enterprises.

Aim and methods

The aim of the article is to ground theoretical provisions, develop methodological approaches and practical recommendations for forming the strategy for increasing the competitiveness of the restaurant business enterprises using a restaurant chain as a case study.

Research methods. The research methodology is based on the hypothesis of the effectiveness and feasibility of applying the digital transformation strategy as the optimal direction for increasing the competitiveness of a restaurant chain in modern conditions. To develop this approach, statistical data are analysed to assess the dynamics and structure of the Ukrainian restaurant services market, identify the main trends in its development, and systematise theoretical approaches that allow identifying the relationships between competitiveness factors and building a conceptual model of its increase. Thus, the methods of semantic analysis, synthesis and induction are used to formulate theoretical approaches. The method of systems analysis and synthesis is applied to assess the relationship between competitiveness factors and develop a model for its increase. Also, in turn, the method of historical and logical approaches is used to outline the tasks and study the evolution of scientific views and their influence on the essence of competitiveness and the features of its formation in the sphere of restaurant services. Additionally, the method of economic analysis helps in assessing the efficiency of resource use for a restaurant business entity. The use of a complex of these methods ensure the comprehensiveness and reliability of scientific results and the validity of the developed practical recommendations.

The information base of the study is domestic and foreign scientific works on the restaurant business; analytical reviews and reports of industry associations; publications of domestic and foreign scientists on the issues of competitiveness of enterprises in the restaurant services field; information resources of the Internet; resources of social network analytics and own observations.

Research results

Research into the competitiveness of a restaurant business entity is one of the key tasks of the modern economic system. In the aspect of market relations and increasing competitive pressure on the markets, the ability of enterprises to compete effectively becomes a determining factor in their successful functioning and dynamic development. The issue of competitiveness is particularly relevant for the restaurant business, where competition traditionally has a high level of intensity due to the significant number of market participants and relatively low barriers to industry entry.

The argumentation of the key provisions of the considered approaches provides grounds to characterise the competitiveness of an enterprise as a complex comparative characteristic that reflects the level of superiority across a set of performance indicators used to assess an enterprise's capabilities. These capabilities determine its success

in a certain market in relation to the set of indicators of competing enterprises. Based on this definition, it is possible to distinguish the main components of the competitiveness of an enterprise (Fig. 1).

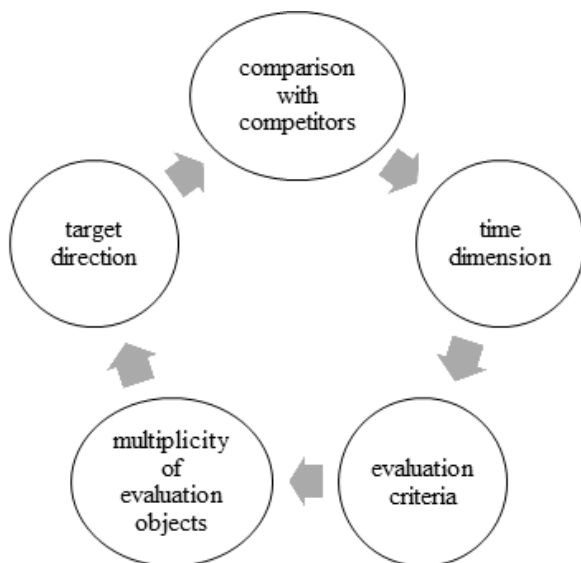


Fig. 1. The main components of an enterprise's competitiveness

Source: compiled by I. H. Ansoff and E. J. McDonnell (1990), M. E. Porter (1985), I. V. Smolin (2015)

Thus, the success of restaurant business enterprises in the competitive struggle is determined by their ability to offer consumers a unique combination of these parameters, which will allow them to form sustainable competitive advantages and implement the chosen market strategy.

An effective strategy for increasing the competitiveness of a restaurant business entity must take into account all aspects of the influence of the external and internal environment, as well as potential opportunities and threats. The goal of implementing such a strategy is to strengthen the enterprise's ability to successfully compete in the market of this industry based on the effective use of available resources, adaptability to market conditions and maximum satisfaction of consumer needs. The programme for increasing the competitiveness of a restaurant should combine price and non-price methods, while considering the specifics of the target segment. Particular attention should be paid to analysing the state and trends of the development of the restaurant services market: demand dynamics, competitor activity, the emergence of new formats and concepts.

The main criterion for the competitive success of a restaurant is a clear positioning in the market that meets the expectations of target consumers and distinctly distinguishes the establishment from competitors. The formation of a market behaviour strategy involves making interrelated decisions regarding this aspect (Figure 2).

To identify the competitive opportunities of the restaurant business entity, we conducted a comprehensive assessment of the competitiveness of the "¡FEST" restaurant chain. Thus, according to the financial results report, the net income from the sale of products of the "¡FEST" restaurant chain in 2023 amounted to UAH 161.6 million,

which is UAH 93.3 million or a 2.37 rise than in 2022. Such a rapid revenue growth is due to the restoration of demand for restaurant services after the lifting of quarantine restrictions, as well as the opening of new establishments, as indicated in Table 1.

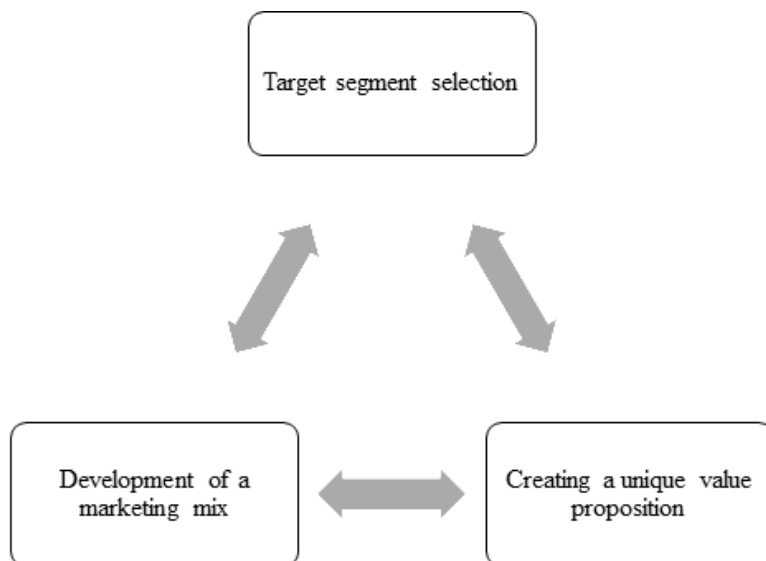


Fig. 2. Market behaviour strategy

Source: compiled by A. A. Motsa, S. M. Shevchuk and N. M. Sereda (2022)

Tabl. 1. Revenue dynamics of LLC “!FEST” for 2019–2023, thousand UAH

Indicator	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023	Growth rate 2023/2022, %
Net income from product sales	97 534,0	36 824,6	42 190,1	68 361,5	161 636,9	136,3%
Other operating income	105,8	197,6	112,4	87,9	478,3	444,3%
Other income	472,6	188,4	104,5	573,2	34,7	–93,9%
Total income	98 112,4	37 210,6	42 407,0	69 022,6	162 149,9	134,9%

Source: compiled by L. Stryhul, V. Aleksandrova and T. Zhadan (2022)

The dynamics of income also directly affected the formation of the company’s financial results. As evidenced by the data of the report on the financial results of this restaurant chain, in 2023 “!FEST” received a net profit of UAH 1242.4 thousand, which is 33.5% lower than in the previous year. It is worth noting that the financial result before tax increased by 9.3% and amounted to UAH 2431.1 thousand. The decrease in net profit is mainly due to the increase in expenses, in particular, increased cost of goods sold, other operating and other expenses (Stryhul et al., 2022).

To assess the effectiveness of a company’s activities, it is advisable to analyse relative profitability indicators – return on sales and return on equity.

Tabl. 2. Dynamics of profitability indicators of LLC “!FEST” for 2019–2023

Indicator	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023
Sales profitability, %	2,67%	0,08%	2,87%	2,73%	0,77%
Return on equity, %	22,34%	0,22%	11,35%	15,43%	2,37%

Source: compiled by L. Stryhul, V. Aleksandrova and T. Zhadan (2022)

As can be seen from Table 2, in 2023 the company demonstrated rapid growth in its activity. Net income from sales increased 2.37 times compared to the previous year and reached UAH 161.6 million. Overall, revenues increased by 134.9% to UAH 162.1 million. At the same time, the growth rate of expenses turned out to be higher, which led to a 33.5% decline in net profit, falling to UAH 1.2 million. However, profitability indicators deteriorated. Return on sales decreased from 2.73% to 0.77%, and return on equity from 15.43% to 2.37%. In addition, according to the results of its own study of financial statements and liquidity analysis, it can be said that the company has solvency problems. The values of coverage, quick and absolute liquidity ratios are lower than the regulatory ones. Therefore, the company’s perspectives will largely depend on the ability of the company’s management to develop and implement an effective financial and market strategy, taking into account the challenges of the competitive environment.

The conducted competitive analysis of the restaurant chain makes it possible to identify the following key competitive advantages of the restaurant business entity “!FEST”: the uniqueness of its restaurant concepts, a strong reputation for food and service quality, a high level of customer service in line with international hospitality standards, and an active marketing strategy focused on both attracting new customers and retaining loyal ones. The company leverages modern communication channels, such as social networks, blogs and messengers, implements loyalty programs and organizes various events; synergy from the effect of scale, which allows optimising costs and business processes through centralised management, joint purchasing and pricing policies, as well as cross-marketing between the establishments of the chain.

At the same time, the analysis of competitive positions also revealed certain weaknesses of the company that need improvement: insufficient level of digitalisation of activities, high employee turnover, dependence on tourist flows, limited space of establishments, underrepresentation in regions outside Lviv, since most of the “!FEST” establishments are concentrated in Lviv, and only a few are represented in other cities of Western Ukraine. Given the ambitious plans for the development of the network, the company should more actively enter new regional markets.

Thus, the analysis made it possible to identify and systematise key problem areas in the activities of the company “!FEST”, which limit the realisation of its competitive potential. On the operational level, shortcomings include underdeveloped digital communication with guests, insufficient business process automation, and outdated equipment and infrastructure. In terms of human resources, high staff turnover remains a pressing issue.

Based on these findings, both theoretical generalisations and practical recommendations are considered necessary.

In order to maintain competitive advantages and increase market share, the holding company “!FEST” needs to develop and implement a comprehensive strategy for

increasing competitiveness, which will cover all key aspects of the company's activities – organizational, personnel, production, marketing, financial, innovative, etc. Based on the analysis of the company's activities, its competitive positions and the results of expert interviews, a number of strategic measures were proposed to increase the competitiveness of “!FEST”.

Definitely, the company critically needs to catch up with competitors and industry leaders in the digitalisation sphere. This requires the development and implementation of a company-wide digital strategy, including a phased transition to electronic document management, automation of key processes and increased reliance on data-driven decision-making.

The primary task should be to create a unified omnichannel ecosystem for interacting with guests. Another priority area of digitalisation should be the introduction of modern front-office and back-office automation systems. This will speed up the service process, minimise the human factor, optimise business processes and, as a result, increase the operational efficiency of establishments. Table 3 identifies and groups the expected effects of the digital transformation of the restaurant chain under study. According to industry experts, comprehensive digitalisation of a catering establishment can increase revenue by 15–20% and reduce operating costs by 10–15%.

Table 3. Expected effects of the digital transformation of the restaurant chain “!FEST”

Tool	Expected results	Potential economic impact
Mobile application development	Increase in the number of orders by 20–30%; Increase in the average check by 10–15%; Reaching new customer segments	Additional revenue 15–25 million UAH
Website modernization	50–70% increase in traffic; 5–7% increase in order conversion; Increased frequency of repeat visits	Additional revenue of UAH 5–7 million
Front office automation	Acceleration of table turnover by 15–20%; Reduction of errors by 80–90%; Savings for self-employed waiters by 30–40%	Additional revenue 10–15 million UAH; Cost savings 2–3 million UAH
Back-office automation	Reduction of waste and losses by 10–15%; Reduction of warehouse inventories by 20–25%; Optimisation of staff work schedules	Cost savings of UAH 3–5 million; Release of working capital of UAH 5–7 million

Source: compiled by the author

A promising niche may also be the provision of catering services on an outsourced basis. Entering the B2B segment will allow not only to smooth out seasonal fluctuations, but also to gain a reputation as a reliable partner in adjacent industries. At the same time, it is necessary to develop a strategy for entering promising foreign markets. Given the historical and mental ties, the first direction may be to expand the presence in neighboring European countries: Poland, the Czech Republic, Slovakia, Hungary, Romania.

In the financial projection, the strategic goal of “!FEST” should be sustainable profitable growth that will increase the company’s value for shareholders. for this goal may include: 20–25% annual revenue growth, achieving an EBITDA margin of 20–22%, a 2–2.5 times increase in net profit by 2030; an increase in Return on Invested Capital (ROIC) from 12% to 18%.

According to preliminary calculations, the total amount of capital investments for a 5-year perspective may amount to UAH 100–150 million, allocated to the digitalization of business processes, upgrading of the material base of institutions, and marketing activities. It is also important to ensure diversification of financing sources: along with reinvesting profits, attract credit resources, private investments, and funds from bond placement. Achieving these financial goals will require significant changes income and expense management policies. The offered strategy for increasing competitiveness is certainly ambitious and large-scale. Its implementation will require significant investment, management, and personnel resources from the company “!FEST”.

A separate focus should be on change and risk management. Transferring business to “digital rails”, transforming business processes, restructuring corporate culture – all these challenges established practices and competencies. To minimise the risks of disruption of strategic initiatives, it is recommended to form a register of potential threats for each project at the initial stage. These may include, in particular, a shortage of investment resources, the outflow of key specialists, disruptions in supply chains, conflicts with landlords, force majeure events, etc.

Thus, the developed strategy for increasing the competitiveness of the “!FEST” restaurant chain covers all key aspects of the company’s activity. It combines ambitious breakthroughs and long-term goals with clear metrics and a balanced system of indicators. For each functional area, concrete actions have been identified to eliminate bottlenecks, unlock internal potential, and leverage market opportunities. It is important that these measures are interconnected and complementary, so their synergistic effect will ensure a comprehensive transformation of the company’s business model.

Conclusions and discussion of results

The operationalisation of the theoretical basis was carried out on the basis of semantic approaches formulated in the scientific literature to the definition of the term “enterprise competitiveness”. Thus, competitiveness is considered in the study as the ability of a business entity to offer consumers services that are of greater value to them than the services of competitors. In turn, the key positive point of the value approach is the concentration of attention on the needs and demands of consumers as the main guidelines for ensuring competitiveness, which corresponds to modern trends in the development of competitive relations, characterised by the increasing importance of non-price competition and growing demands for individualised offerings.

Basic problem spheres in the activity of the selected restaurant business entity “!FEST” were identified and systematised, which limit the realisation of its competitive potential. At the operational level, these include the underdevelopment of digital channels of interaction with guests (lack of a mobile application and a fully functional website), insufficient automation of business processes (menu management, inventory, logistics, calculations), and the obsolescence of some equipment and infrastructure of establishments.

A holistic strategy was defined and formed to strengthen the competitive positions of the “!FEST” restaurant chain in the national market for the period until 2030. Its cornerstone was recognised as the digital transformation of key business processes based on Industry 4.0 technologies.

Thus, the selection of the digital transformation strategy as the optimal approach to increasing the competitiveness of the “!FEST” restaurant chain was grounded through a weighted scoring method. This method enabled the comparison of alternative strategies (digitalisation, market development, product development) across seven key criteria: compliance with goals, resource availability, risks, economic effect, flexibility, synergy with current initiatives, and stakeholder acceptance. It was proven that digital transformation best meets the strategic priorities of “!FEST” in terms of innovative leadership, service personalisation, and operational efficiency. In spite of the high initial investments, it can provide the most tangible and sustainable increase in competitiveness and become the basis for the implementation of other strategic initiatives of the company.

The scientific novelty lies in improving the concept of “competitiveness of a restaurant business enterprise” by studying the specific characteristics of the industry in modern market conditions. Furthermore, a methodological approach was developed for the comprehensive assessment of a restaurant chain’s competitiveness, based on an integral indicator that incorporates both financial and non-financial performance metrics.

Therefore, the issue of competitiveness of the restaurant business entities is quite broad, in particular, the methodology and testing of reflectometry tools in the long-term perspective of this business industry, especially in foreign markets, which will be supplemented by practical insights from restaurant business entities, which is a promising direction for further scientific research, requires thorough and deep studying.

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ФОРМУВАННЯ ТА РЕАЛІЗАЦІЯ СТРАТЕГІЇ ПІДВИЩЕННЯ КОНКУРЕНТОСПРОМОЖНОСТІ СУБ'ЄКТА РЕСТОРАННОГО БІЗНЕСУ

Актуальність. У сучасних кризових умовах нестабільного, однак динамічного розвитку ринку ресторанних послуг проблема підвищення конкурентоспроможності суб'єктів ресторанного бізнесу набуває особливої актуальності. Ресторанна галузь є однією з найбільш чутливих до змін споживчих настроїв, сучасних тенденцій, економічних коливань та технологічних інновацій. Успіх на цьому ринку визначається здатністю компаній стрімко реагувати та адаптуватися до нових викликів, пропонувати унікальний продукт і забезпечувати високу якість обслуговування. В умовах пандемії, воєнних дій та подальших трансформацій споживчої поведінки саме конкурентоспроможність стає ключовим фактором виживання та розвитку суб'єктів ресторанного бізнесу. На особливу увагу заслуго-

вує дослідження стратегій підвищення конкурентоспроможності мережевих операторів ресторанного ринку, які володіють значними ресурсами та потенціалом для впровадження інновацій. Водночас масштаби діяльності і складність бізнес-процесів ставлять перед ними додаткові виклики в управлінні якістю послуг та ефективністю операцій. Тому розроблення науково обґрунтованих підходів до формування та реалізації стратегії підвищення конкурентоспроможності суб'єктів ресторанного бізнесу є актуальним і безперервним завданням сучасної економічної науки та практики менеджменту. **Мета і методи.** Мета статті полягає у дослідженні сутності та обґрунтуванні теоретичних положень, розробленні методичних підходів та практичних рекомендацій щодо формування стратегії підвищення конкурентоспроможності підприємств ресторанного бізнесу. Інтерпретована для дослідження наукова тематика обумовила використання загальноекономічних, аналітичних та статистичних методів, що дозволили визначити теоретичні підходи і побудувати гіпотетичний інструментарій дослідження, сформувавши відповідну систему стратегії підвищення конкурентоспроможності суб'єкта ресторанного бізнесу. **Результати.** Проаналізовано отримані результати, які полягають у розвитку теоретичних засад та розробленні практичних рекомендацій щодо формування стратегії підвищення конкурентоспроможності підприємств ресторанного бізнесу. Розглянуто та удосконалено визначення поняття «конкурентоспроможність суб'єкта ресторанного бізнесу» з урахуванням специфіки галузі і сучасних тенденцій розвитку ринку. Запропоновано методичний підхід до комплексної оцінки конкурентоспроможності мережі ресторанів на основі інтегрального показника, що враховує фінансові та нефінансові аспекти діяльності суб'єкта ресторанного бізнесу. Обґрунтовано доцільність застосування стратегії цифрової трансформації як оптимального напрямку підвищення конкурентоспроможності мережі ресторанів у сучасних умовах. Перспективами подальших досліджень є ґрунтовне опрацювання методології та апробація стратегії підвищення конкурентоспроможності суб'єкта ресторанного бізнесу, які доповняються практичними сучасними інсайтами цієї сфери і зовнішніми факторами. **Висновки та обговорення.** Проведене дослідження продемонструвало актуальність запропонованих заходів для підвищення конкурентоспроможності суб'єкта ресторанного бізнесу, розроблено стратегію для мережі ресторанів «!FEST», а також обґрунтовано вибір оптимального стратегічного підходу. Використані в дослідженні джерела підтверджують важливість формування та реалізації стратегії підвищення конкурентоспроможності суб'єкта ресторанного бізнесу.

Ключові слова: ресторан, ефективність, конкурентоспроможність, ресторанний бізнес, стратегія, управління якістю, розвиток підприємства.