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Health trends and consumer marketing: how health trends shape
consumer behavior

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Abstract

During the last years health and wellness trends are increasingly influencing consumer behaviour within the food and beverage industry. Consumers are becoming more aware and concerned of the effects that their diet has on their long-term health, sparking the interest of companies to respond to the changing behaviours derived from this shift. At the same time, food and beverage purchasing decisions remains a multi-dimensional and complex process influenced by many factors including individual choices, social and economic circumstances and broader environmental factors.

The purpose of this study is to explore how companies in the food and beverage industry perceive and respond to the evolving health trends. The current academic study focuses on the ways organizations identify emerging health trends, evaluate their strategic importance and decide whether to act upon them.

For this study a qualitative research approach was adopted for the purpose of which data was collected through in-depth semi-structured interviews with managers working in the food and beverage industry and was analysed using thematic analysis.

The findings were focused on how health trends influence on consumer behaviour is captured by companies. They indicate that health trends are connected with broader lifestyle, wellbeing and socioeconomic considerations rather than solely changing consumer preferences. The most important themes emerging from the interviews were related to overall health and well-being, prevention, functional nutrition, intention-behaviour gap, trends' globalization through social media, the challenges companies face to respond to health trends and the role of companies as trend setter and educators.

The study contributes to the better understanding of contemporary health trends through the lens of the businesses, providing insights from the perspective of industry professionals and by highlighting implications for both managerial practice and future research.

Keywords

Health trends; Consumer behaviour; Health-conscious consumption; Dietary choices; Consumer awareness

Περίληψη

Κατά τα τελευταία χρόνια, οι τάσεις που σχετίζονται με την υγεία και την ευεξία επηρεάζουν ολοένα και περισσότερο τη συμπεριφορά των καταναλωτών στην αγορά τροφίμων και ποτών. Οι καταναλωτές ενημερώνονται και ευαισθητοποιούνται ολοένα και περισσότερο σχετικά με τις μακροπρόθεσμες επιδράσεις των διατροφικών τους επιλογών στην υγεία τους, γεγονός που ωθεί τις επιχειρήσεις να ανταποκριθούν στις συνεχώς εξελισσόμενες συμπεριφορές και προσδοκίες που προκύπτουν από αυτή τη μεταβολή.

Παράλληλα, οι αγοραστικές αποφάσεις των καταναλωτών στις κατηγορίες των τροφίμων και ποτών αποτελούν μια σύνθετη και πολυδιάστατη διαδικασία, η οποία επηρεάζεται από πολλούς παράγοντες, όπως οι ατομικές επιλογές, οι κοινωνικές και οικονομικές συνθήκες, καθώς και ευρύτεροι περιβαλλοντικοί παράγοντες.

Σκοπός της παρούσας μελέτης είναι να διερευνήσει τον τρόπο με τον οποίο οι εταιρείες που δραστηριοποιούνται στον τομέα των τροφίμων και ποτών αντιλαμβάνονται και ανταποκρίνονται στις εξελισσόμενες τάσεις υγείας στην αγορά. Η έρευνα εστιάζει στον τρόπο με τον οποίο οι οργανισμοί εντοπίζουν τις επικρατέστερες και αναδυόμενες τάσεις υγείας, αξιολογούν τη στρατηγική τους σημασία και αποφασίζουν εάν και με ποιον τρόπο θα ανταποκριθούν σε αυτές.

Για την πραγματοποίηση της έρευνας ακολουθήθηκε ποιοτική ερευνητική προσέγγιση. Τα δεδομένα συλλέχθηκαν μέσω εις βάθος ημιδομημένων συνεντεύξεων (semi-structured interviews) με στελέχη εταιρειών που εργάζονται στη βιομηχανία τροφίμων και ποτών και αναλύθηκαν με τη μέθοδο της θεματικής ανάλυσης.

Τα ευρήματα επικεντρώθηκαν στον τρόπο με τον οποίο η επίδραση των τάσεων υγείας στην καταναλωτική συμπεριφορά γίνεται αντιληπτή από τις εταιρείες. Αναδεικνύουν ότι οι τάσεις υγείας δεν αφορούν απλώς αλλαγές στις καταναλωτικές προτιμήσεις, αλλά συνδέονται με ευρύτερους παράγοντες που αφορούν τον τρόπο ζωής, αλλά και το ευρύτερο κοινωνικοοικονομικό πλαίσιο μέσα στο οποίο οι καταναλωτές καλούνται να πάρουν αποφάσεις. Τα σημαντικότερα θέματα που αναδείχθηκαν από τις συνεντεύξεις ήταν η μακροπρόθεσμη υγεία και ευεξία, η πρόληψη, η λειτουργική διατροφή, το χάσμα μεταξύ πρόθεσης και πραγματικής συμπεριφοράς, η διάδοση των τάσεων μέσω των μέσων κοινωνικής δικτύωσης, οι προκλήσεις που αντιμετωπίζουν οι επιχειρήσεις στην

προσπάθειά τους να ανταποκριθούν στις τάσεις υγείας και ο ρόλος των επιχειρήσεων στη ανάπτυξη των τάσεων υγείας αλλά και στη εκπαίδευση των καταναλωτών.

Η μελέτη συμβάλλει στην καλύτερη κατανόηση των σύγχρονων τάσεων υγείας μέσα από το πρίσμα των επιχειρήσεων, παρέχοντας χρήσιμες γνώσεις από την οπτική των επαγγελματιών του κλάδου και αναδεικνύοντας προεκτάσεις τόσο για τη διοικητική πρακτική όσο και για τη μελλοντική έρευνα.

Λέξεις – Κλειδιά

Health trends; Consumer behaviour; Health-conscious consumption; Dietary choices; Consumer awareness

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List of Abbreviations & Acronyms

HBM: Health Belief Model.....	19
TPB: Theory of Planned Behaviour.....	21
DOI: Diffusion of Innovations Theory.....	26
K.O.L.s: Key Opinion Leaders.....	49

1. Introduction

1.1 Background and significance of the study

During the last years, health - related trends have had a very significant influence in the food and beverages industry, which can be seen as deeper and broader transformations in consumer purchasing choices. Increasing consumer awareness of the relationship between diet and overall health and longevity has contributed to the growing demand for products perceived as healthier (Chen et al., 2024), some of which can be low-sugar, protein enriched, functional (such as prebiotic-enriched or polyphenolic products) and plant-based alternatives. The above shifts are often referred to as “health trends” describing evolving patterns in consumer behaviour and preferences oriented towards long-term health and wellbeing.

This shift is closely linked to a wide spectrum of changes, including structural and technological ones. Digital environments, particularly social media platforms are becoming more influential, increasing exposure of populations to widely available health-related information (Singh & Glinska-Newes, 2022), playing a pivotal role in perceptions and expectations formation regarding nutritional choices. At the same time, global challenges such as increased frequency of diseases related to lifestyle and constantly changing daily habits have highlighted more than ever before the importance of prevention of these diseases. As a result, healthier food and beverage consumption has emerged as a trend that is spreading among populations, reflecting individuals’ pursuit of improved health and quality of life (Chen et al., 2024).

However, as consumer behaviour is complex and multi-dimensional, it cannot be explained solely by the above mentioned increased awareness. Food choices are influenced by a wide range of interacting factors, some of which are socioeconomic status, cultural norms, social pressures, food environments and corporate marketing practices. Literature shows that consumption patterns are shaped by an interaction of these factors, highlighting that food purchasing decisions and health-related habits are embedded within broader social and economic structures (Story et al., 2008; Pechey & Monsivais, 2016). Consequently, although demand for healthier products is growing, the translation of this

demand into consistent behavioural and habitual changes has not yet been possible throughout populations.

1.2 Health-Related Consumption Challenges

Several challenges related to increasing healthy food consumption have been identified in current literature. One of the most referred to is the gap between consumers' intentions and their actual behaviour. Although many consumers, when asked, express positive attitudes towards healthy eating, their purchasing decisions are often influenced by contradicting priorities. Food environment related factors such as affordability and accessibility and personal preference factors such as taste and convenience, continue to play a key role in shaping consumption patterns. As we can observe in current literature, even when consumers adopt more mindful eating behaviours, economic pressures resulting from macroenvironment shifts (e.g. COVID-19, Ukraine war) such as rising food prices can significantly increase price sensitivity and limit healthier choices (Grunert et al., 2023).

In addition, access to healthy food options is not equally distributed across populations. Socioeconomic inequalities such as differences in income, education and access to food and beverage products that promote well-being, strongly influence relevant purchasing choices. Food consumption patterns are considered as closely linked to socioeconomic status, with lower socioeconomic groups often facing greater barriers to accessing healthy food options (Darmon & Drewnowski, 2008). These findings suggest that health trends do not uniformly affect all consumers; instead, they reflect the differences in behaviours among social groups.

Apart from socioeconomic inequalities, other factors such as culture, tradition, social norms and even knowledge gaps, continue to constrain the adoption of healthier and more sustainable diets. Therefore, adaptation of healthier and more sustainable consumption patterns requires addressing multiple levels of influence, including economic (e.g. income, food prices), social (e.g. family influences, social circles) and individual factors (e.g. knowledge, values, skills)(Kenny et al., 2023). This highlights the need to explore beyond individual-level choices and consider the wider system within which consumer behaviour takes place.

1.3 The role of companies in Health Trends

The challenges briefly discussed above reveal the complexity of health-related consumer behaviour. Apart from these, however, there is also one more factor that can play a significant role in health trends formation: the role of companies within the food and beverage industry. While a big part of the existing literature focuses on consumers' attitudes, there has been comparatively much less attention on how companies shape and respond to health trends. Operating in an increasingly dynamic and competitive environment, companies must continuously use the available sources of information and monitor evolving consumer preferences. These observations are translated into strategic decisions, including new product development, reformulation and adaptations of or completely new communication strategies.

Companies should not be seen as passive responders to evolving consumer preferences. They actively contribute to shaping consumption patterns through portfolio adjustments, pricing strategies, corporate communication and shopper & consumer targeted activations through the use of health-related claims. The term “commercial determinants of health” has been used in the existing literature to describe the conflict between corporate profit maximization efforts and public health. One of its latest definitions is “strategies and approaches used by the private sector to promote products and choices that are detrimental to health” (Kickbusch et al., 2016). This perspective emphasises the need to further study how health trends and therefore populations' health is shaped by corporate practices, as well as how significant this influence is.

At the same time, companies, responding to the need of keeping up with the market evolutions, face multiple challenges and constraints when adjusting to health trends. These can include regulatory requirements, production and technological limitations, cost considerations and the need to maintain product appeal and commercial viability. Consequently, organisational decisions often need to balance health-related objectives with broader business priorities. As a result, understanding how companies navigate these turbulences is essential for developing a more comprehensive understanding of how contemporary health trends influence and reshape food and nutrition industry.

1.4 Research objectives

While existing literature has extensively explored consumer perspectives on health-oriented consumption, less attention has been given to the managerial and organizational processes underlying corporate responses to the emerging health trends. Based on the growing importance of health trends within the contemporary food industry, the present study explores how food and beverage companies perceive the influence of health trends on consumer behaviour and how they respond to the evolving health-related consumer expectations. Through the perspective of corporate professionals, it further explores how companies identify and evaluate health trends, how these trends influence strategic decisions related to product development and marketing and what challenges organizations face when attempting to respond to changing consumer demands associated with health and wellness.

To address these objectives, the study adopts a qualitative research approach. Semi-structured interviews with managers involved in strategic decision-making within the food and beverage industry were conducted.

The main objectives of the study are:

- to explore how managers perceive the influence of health trends on consumer behaviour and purchasing decisions,
- to examine how companies identify the influence of health trends on consumer behaviour and monitor emerging health trends,
- to explore the criteria used to evaluate their strategic relevance,
- to investigate how health trends influence product development and marketing strategies,
- and to analyze the main challenges companies face when responding to the evolving health-related consumer expectations.

The following chapters of this dissertation are structured as follows. Chapter 2 presents the literature review and theoretical background, leading to the development of a conceptual framework. Chapter 3 outlines the research methodology. Chapter 4 presents the empirical

findings, while Chapter 5 discusses the results and provides conclusions and implications for future research.

2. Literature review

2.1 Health trends overview

2.1.1 What are health trends?

Over the last years, consumers have become increasingly interested in researching the products they consume; more specifically food and beverages are among the categories receiving continuously growing attention. Increased consumer awareness has made the relationship between food and health of key importance, orienting consumer behaviors and product development towards health-promoting choices. Moreover, more attention has been given to nutritional value, ingredients and potential impact on health and wellbeing (Wang, 2024). Consumers are becoming increasingly health conscious with relevant considerations significantly influencing purchase intentions and food choices; recent evidence confirms the above for a variety of product categories including organic products, foods, pharmaceuticals, water and air purification services. (Yun et al., 2020, Li & Shan. 2025).

The developments discussed above have contributed to the emergence of contemporary health trends, which can be understood as shifts in consumer attitudes and behaviours toward prioritizing health and wellbeing. These shifts can be observed from their depiction in health consciousness, mindful consumption of food, increasing attention to nutritional value and stronger preferences for healthier products, (Escobar-Farfán et al., 2025; Saintila et al., 2025). These trends do not seem to be temporary; they rather reflect deeper structural changes in consumer lifestyles and values and appear to have an influence on both individual consumption patterns and broader market dynamics.

Although existing literature provides strong evidence of growing and consistent influence of health consciousness on food purchasing intention, this does not mean that these changes are valid and permanently established across populations. Consumer behaviour may significantly vary according to socioeconomic and psychological factors, cultural influences and situational constraints. Moreover, while health considerations are increasingly integrated into decision-making processes, they often coexist with competing

factors such as price, convenience and sensory preferences (Duarte et al., 2021, Saintila et al. 2025).

As discussed above, health trends are closely linked to broader changes in how individuals understand the role of food in their daily lives but one very important matter is how these trends are translated and depicted in health-related products and even more importantly how they are communicated. Health claims represent one of the most dominant ways through which health trends are utilized in the consumer market. Health claims can be understood as statements that suggest or imply a relationship between a food product, or one of its components and health outcomes. Such claims are frequently used on food packaging, labels and marketing materials (both tangible and intangible) to inform consumers about the potential health benefits associated with the consumption of specific food or beverage products. The European Food Safety Authority (EFSA) defines health claims as any statement on labels, advertising, or other marketing communications indicating that health benefits may result from consuming a particular food. Examples include claims suggesting that a product may help strengthen the body's natural defences or support cognitive performance (European Food Safety Authority, 2024).

Beyond regulatory definitions, health claims are also examined by academic literature as a communication tool either on the product packaging or in any other means of consumer communication to signal the potential health benefits of food products. Health claims can therefore be regarded as informational indicators highlighting the link between the consumption of a product and its possible health-related outcomes. Although many studies have shown small to moderate increase in perceived product healthiness, their presence does not always guarantee increased consumer attraction to the product (Lähteenmäki, 2013) and therefore cannot promise influence of consumers to finally purchase the product. As nutritional education and consumer awareness continue to increase, health claims have become an important mechanism through which food manufacturing companies aim to strengthen their products communication.

Summarizing, health trends can be recognized as an evolution in preferences and patterns of consumption that reflect increasing consumer interest and awareness of the relationship between diet and wellbeing. Although the individual attitudes influence seems to be strong, broader socioeconomic factors and market dynamics also play a key role in

shaping health trends. In this sense, health trends emerge from the interaction between consumers and the broader environments in which they exist.

2.1.2 Social and Environmental Evolutions Driving Health Trends

As also discussed in the previous section, health-related behaviours are shaped by a range of interrelated social, economic, environmental and technological evolutions that influence lifestyle behaviours and consumption patterns (Short & Mollborn, 2015). All these developments, combined with vastly increased availability of health-related information sources, have significantly influenced how individuals perceive health and wellbeing, contributing to the emergence of contemporary health trends. Current literature in health – related behaviour and consumption patterns identifies several key drivers of these trends, which are presented below.

Lifestyle and behavioural factors

Lifestyle - driven behaviours are one of the most important determinants of health and wellbeing within populations. Critical behaviours such as healthy diet, physical activity, reduced smoking and alcohol consumption contribute to shaping population health outcomes (Golestani, 2021). Those behaviors evolve over time (Finger et al., 2019), suggesting that health – related behaviours within populations can evolve gradually as a response to broader societal and public health developments.

These changes should not be understood purely as the result of individual choice. Health – related behaviours are influenced by multiple factors, including public health initiatives, cultural norms and policy environments (Short & Mollborn, 2015). Shifts in these behaviours can therefore occur at the population level and contribute to broader population health outcomes.

Socioeconomic and environmental factors

Apart from individual lifestyle behaviours, broader socioeconomic and environmental conditions are also a critical factor in health trends development and influence. Health-related behaviours should not be regarded as the result of individual choices; according to existing literature, they are also strongly impacted by social structures, economic conditions and cultural norms.

Some of the structural conditions acting as determinants of health behaviours can be: income, education, living environment and government policies are very important factors in shaping people's health behaviours and affect populations' ability to adopt to healthier lifestyles (Prättälä & Puska, 2012).

One of the most dominant health determinants found in the literature is social inequalities. Social inequalities have been very widely researched and have been found to significantly contribute to the development of health behaviours. Uneven distribution of access to food resources, education, income and health facilities seem to result in unequal health behaviours within a population. Smoking, diet, alcohol consumption and physical inactivity vary significantly across socioeconomic groups, with inequalities persisting or even widening over time (Darmon & Drewnowski, 2008; Golestani et al., 2021; Ogunlayi et al., 2023). This indicates that health behaviours are shaped not only by temporary changes but also by underlying social inequalities.

Environmental concerns are also becoming an increasingly important factor in determining health-related decision-making. Consumers more and more associate personal wellbeing with sustainability and responsible consumption (Li & Shan, 2025). This highlights the evolving role of environmental awareness as a factor influencing health-related behaviours.

Technological and informational factors

Technological developments have also played a significant role in shaping contemporary health trends by expanding access to health-related information and by acting as a means of rapid spread of information concerning contemporary health trends. The widespread availability of digital platforms, online health resources and social media has made information about nutrition, disease prevention and healthy lifestyles increasingly accessible to the public.

Research examining digital health literacy suggests that individuals with greater ability to access and interpret online health information are more likely to adopt healthier lifestyle behaviours and engage in health-promoting practices (Çetin & Gümüş, 2023). This highlights the importance of development of the necessary digital skills that will enable

individuals to make informed health-related decisions. In parallel, digital environments also reflect shifts in public interest in health-related topics (Kim et al., 2025).

The above findings can be linked with the social inequalities presented earlier. Since digital health literacy can make an individual practice more health-oriented behaviours, the lack of digital skills or access to the internet and digital platforms can be a significant constraint.

Based on the above, technological developments influence health trends in two interconnected ways: by enabling individuals to access and interpret health information and by shaping population-level awareness of health issues.

Consumer awareness and market dynamics

The last factor that was identified in the literature lies in the increasing consumer awareness. People are more interested in the impact of diet on long-term health and well-being and this has played a crucial role in shaping health trends. Consumer awareness is further enhanced by the vastly and rapidly increasing availability of health-related information. Along with information availability public concern regarding lifestyle-related diseases has started growing and consumers have become more conscious of the nutritional characteristics of the foods they consume. This growing awareness combined with sedentary lifestyles and nutritionally poor diets has been linked to increased demand for products perceived as healthier alternatives (Duarte et al., 2021) Increasing interest in healthier food choices could encourage food manufacturing companies to adapt product formulations and marketing strategies to respond to evolving consumer expectations. At the same time, as a response to emerging health trends, the use of nutrition and health claims has become increasingly common as companies attempt to communicate the potential health benefits of their products either on the packages or on any other means of communication with the consumers.

All of the above factors, taken together, can illustrate how consumer awareness and macroenvironment dynamics interact and contribute to shaping contemporary health trends. As consumers become increasingly attentive to the relationship between food and their health, consumption patterns influence both product adaptations or innovations and marketing practices within the food and beverage industry.

While the above factors provide a conceptual understanding of how health trends emerge, below empirical research insights are gathered, shedding light on how these trends are reflected in observable behavioural changes and consumption patterns.

2.1.3 Empirical Evidence on Health Trends

In this section we focus on empirical research related to health trends. Current literature provides important insights into how health trends are reflected in observable behavioural patterns as well as the drivers of consumption changes across populations. Existing studies consistently demonstrate that health trends are reflected in measurable shifts in lifestyle behaviours and consumer preferences, which leads to a broader shift in actual purchasing decisions.

Behavioural Trends and Socioeconomic Inequalities in Health Behaviours

Behavioural and socioeconomic - related studies on health behaviours evolution have been gathered in this sub-chapter despite being differentiated at the factors defining health trends evolution section. Findings of empirical literature suggest behavioural and socioeconomic changes are interrelated and should not be understood as standalone factors.

Longitudinal studies conducted at the population level provide evidence that health-related behaviours are changing over time. Research suggests that the prevalence of healthier lifestyles has increased overtime. More specifically in Finger et al. (2019) study areas of improvement such as physical activity and alcohol consumption are identified. However, it is highlighted that behaviours and factors influencing health-behaviour improvements vary across populations. Empirical findings of this study show that positive behavioural changes in the years that the research was conducted are unevenly distributed: gender, age and educational level differentiate the levels of improvement among respective population groups. Men and women with higher educational levels have improve significantly more in their health-related behaviours than the rest sample of the study.

This pattern is further reinforced by the next study presented here conducted by Ogunlayi et al. (2023) examining how health inequalities have changed over time in England through analysis of health behaviours. According to the study, although risk behaviours such as smoking and physical inactivity have declined overall, socioeconomic inequalities

in these behaviours persist or even widen, particularly among different education and income groups.

The above findings are further strengthened by more evidence that health behaviours are strongly differentiated among social and demographic groups, rather than being evenly distributed across populations. Study conducted in Iran examined lifestyle risk factors suggesting that behaviours such as diet quality, smoking and physical activity vary significantly across socioeconomic groups. More specifically healthier behaviours are observed as more prevalent among individuals with higher socioeconomic status and education (Golestani et al., 2021).

The above discussed findings refer to researches that took place in Europe and Asia. In accordance to what was referred in previous chapters, those studies confirm that health behaviours should not be understood solely as the outcome of individual choice, but should be approached as socially patterned processes. Summarizing, the above findings suggest that health – related behaviours evolve positively over time with these improvements not equally distributed in society, as relevant conditions heavily influence the ability to make healthier choices and positively change habits.

Consumer behaviour and the intention–behaviour gap

One of the most dominant topics of current literature concerning health-related behaviours is the “intention – behaviour gap”. This gap refers to the contradiction between intention (what consumers intend to buy or consume) and final purchasing decision (what consumers actually buy or consume). Research shows that consumers increasingly value health-related attributes and are positively influenced by nutrition and health claims, while at the same time they tend to verify them through nutrition labels. (Duarte et al., 2021). However, taste and price remain the dominant determinants of food choice, with many consumers continuing to prefer traditional options rather than light / zero ones (healthier options), although they tend to express increasing interest towards healthier food choices. The above suggests that consumers think healthy products are better but are not always included in their repertoire.

The above is further reinforced by the study conducted by Saintila et al. (2025), indirectly referring to the intention-behaviour gap. According to the findings of this study, health

consciousness and front of pack labels strengthen the intention to buy healthy food products but on the other side sensory appeal remains a significantly dominant factor to increase unhealthy food purchase intention. The above implies that, although consumers might have the intention to not buy unhealthy foods, their perceived better than the healthier choices' sensory characteristics will probably lead them towards the unhealthy food choices. Moreover, it is understood that health awareness on its own may not be enough to change food choices.

Importantly this gap is not solely behavioural and personal – choice related. It is also shaped by structural constraints, as individuals with limited financial resources or restricted access to healthier options may be unable to act upon their health-related preferences. Therefore, we observe a link with socio-economic inequalities highlighting the multi-dimensionality of health trends.

Information technology and digital environments

Technological developments have also been linked to health trends in empirical research, particularly through their impact on access to information. Research on digital health literacy conducted in Turkey indicates that individuals with higher ability to search, evaluate and use online health information are more likely to engage in health-promoting behaviours (Çetin and Gümüş, 2023). This highlights the significance of developing the necessary skills in enabling individuals to make informed decisions.

At the same time, digital data from people's Google searches provide evidence of increasing interest in health-related topics. More specifically, seasonal patterns and long-term increases have been observed in topics related to ageing, hygiene and wellbeing (Kim et al., 2025). Again in this case we can observe a link with unequal distribution of health-related behaviours among populations; for people to be able to make relevant health-related searches there is one absolute prerequisite: access to the internet and relevant navigation skills.

As digital platforms increasingly influence consumer awareness and engagement with health-related topics, an important question emerges regarding how companies identify and interpret the ways digital environments and technology influence consumer behaviour and how the companies themselves can intervene in this process.

Dietary trends and sustainability considerations

One more topic observed in current literature is the growing importance of sustainability. Studies indicate that consumers are getting increasingly interested in sustainable diets. It is also revealed that most people associate sustainability with healthier and nutrient-dense diets revealing an oversimplification of the concept of sustainable diets. People therefore seem to have quite limited understanding of environmental impact of their dietary choices. (Kenny et al., 2023). Low awareness is a major barrier in adopting environmentally – sustainable purchasing habits.

Moreover, health consciousness and environmental awareness have been found to significantly influence intentions to buy green-packaged organic foods, with consumers increasingly connecting personal health, environmental sustainability and responsible consumption (Li & Shan 2025).

The above findings suggest that sustainability is an emerging component of health trends. It seems that it contributes to shaping consumer perceptions and intentions, but its translation into consistent behavioural change remains uneven and socially dependent.

Empirical studies synthesis

Summarizing, currently available empirical literature provides strong support for the existence of health trends as observable behavioural shifts. Across different contexts and methodologies, studies consistently show:

- Gradually increasing interest to improve health-related behaviours over time.
- Increasing awareness of health and nutrition.
- Growing influence of digital information environments.
- Influence of environmental and sustainability considerations in health-related behaviours.

Simultaneously, empirical literature also highlights several limitations and challenges associated with health trends:

- Persistent socioeconomic inequalities which are observable over time and influence individuals' ability to adopt healthier behaviours. These inequalities

result in the unevenly distributed health-related behaviours improvements within populations.

- The intention–behaviour gap, where consumers express positive attitudes towards healthy and sustainable products, but do not finally practice the behaviours they express positive attitude to.
- The continued dominance of habitual, practical and sensory factors, such as price, taste and convenience, which often outweigh health and sustainability considerations in real-world decision-making.

Therefore, health trends should be understood as socially dependent processes, where improvements in awareness and behaviour exist together with persistent structural inequalities.

For better comprehension of the empirical research, the main aspects of the studies that were discussed above are gathered in Table 1.

2.1.4 Dominant Health Trends in the Food and Beverage Industry

Building on the factors and empirical studies discussed in 2.1.2 and 2.1.3, the emergence of contemporary health trends in the food and beverage industry can be regarded as a result of shifts in consumer behaviour, technological advancements and improvements in health literacy, broader market dynamics and socioeconomic changes. These trends illustrate how increasing health awareness, technological literacy and skills development, access to health -related information and evolving market changes translate into observable behavioural shifts in food consumption. As shown by empirical research and rest of the currently available literature, these trends are interconnected and altogether can indicate a transition towards more health-oriented and better informed consumption practices.

Table 1: Summary of empirical research related to health trends.

Study	Context	Key Findings	Main Contribution to Health Trends Research
Finger et al. (2019)	Longitudinal population study in Germany	- Improvements observed in physical activity and alcohol consumption. - Health improvements were unevenly distributed across socioeconomic groups.	Health-related behaviours improve over time but socioeconomic inequalities influence the extent of improvement.
Ogunlayi et al. (2023)	Health inequalities in England	- Smoking and physical inactivity declined overall, but inequalities across education and income groups persisted or widened.	Health behaviour improvements are not equally distributed within populations.
Golestani et al. (2021)	Lifestyle risk factors in Iran	- Diet quality, smoking and physical activity varied significantly across socioeconomic groups. - Healthier behaviours were associated with higher education and income levels.	Socioeconomic status strongly influences adoption of healthier behaviours.
Duarte et al. (2021)	Food choices and nutrition claims	- Consumers value health-related attributes and nutrition information. - Although they regard health-claims important, taste and price remain the most significant decision factors.	Evidence of the intention–behaviour gap in food consumption.
Saintila et al. (2025)	Food purchasing intentions	- Health consciousness reduces intention towards unhealthy foods - Sensory appeal remains a dominant purchasing driver.	Health awareness alone may not be sufficient to change behaviour.
Çetin & Gümüş (2023)	Digital health literacy	Individuals with higher digital health literacy are more likely to engage in health-promoting behaviours.	Access to information and digital skills support healthier choices.
Kim et al. (2025)	Google search analysis	Increasing public interest in ageing, hygiene and wellbeing topics was observed over time.	Digital environments contribute to growing health awareness.
Kenny et al. (2023)	Sustainability and diets	Consumers increasingly associate sustainability with healthy eating but often have limited understanding of environmental impacts.	Sustainability has started to become part of health-related consumption patterns - but more education is needed.
Li & Shan (2025)	Green-packaged organic foods	Health consciousness and environmental awareness positively influence purchase intentions.	Health and sustainability considerations increasingly interact in consumer decision-making.

Health-conscious consumption and functional foods and beverages

One of the most dominant health trends that has emerged within the last years is health-conscious consumption: prioritizing healthiness and overall wellbeing is increasingly becoming integrated into people’s everyday life. Consumers are getting increasingly

interested in products that promote well-being and long-term health. This shift reflects a transition from passive consumption patterns to more informed and proactive dietary choices. This indicates that consumers, before purchasing food and beverages, tend to evaluate products based on their nutritional value, ingredient composition and perceived health benefits.

According to existing literature, consumers are becoming more engaged in monitoring their dietary choices and are more likely to prioritize products that will have a beneficial effect on their health (Mohsin, 2023). More specifically, as people connect diet with their health, the shift towards nutrient – dense foods, plant based diets, no-sugar and protein enriched alternative products has encouraged individuals to adopt a more preventive approach to health compared to the past decades. Food seems to play the role of a means to maintain wellbeing and not only satisfy basic nutritional needs.

Complementary to the above empirical evidence, industry reports indicate that this behavioural shift is also reflected in broader market developments. A Euromonitor International report (Shridhar, 2019) suggests that consumers are increasingly willing to manage their own health which contributes to the greater demand for products that support physical and mental wellbeing. This includes increased interest in balanced diets, personalised nutrition and products that support overall lifestyle improvements.

Functional foods and beverages can be regarded as a manifestation of the broader shift towards health-conscious consumption. These products provide additional health benefits which go beyond basic nutritional needs and which cannot usually be found in mainstream foods. Additionally, these benefits are often associated with improving specific bodily functions, such as digestion, skin health, immunity, or energy levels.

Research suggests that consumers are becoming more prone to incorporating such products into their daily routines, particularly as they seek ways to improve their health. More specifically, as Alalwan (2025) suggests, people are increasingly getting informed leveraging their access to data and reviews and are increasingly incorporating functional beverages in their lives.

The food and beverage industry, at the same time, is responding to these emerging needs by developing products with added nutritional value and health-enhancing ingredients.

This trend reflects a broader shift towards using food not only for nourishment but also as a tool for maintaining and improving health.

Some examples of currently existing products that fall under the health conscious consumption category are: high-protein yogurts, probiotic yogurts and kefir drinks, vitamin- and mineral-enriched beverages, kombucha drinks, fermented products (kimchi, sauerkraut), plant-based dairy alternatives. The aforementioned products promote overall health and can contribute to a healthier lifestyle, if incorporated in populations' repertoire on a regular basis.

Clean-label and natural products

Another health trend emerging in the food industry is the growing demand for clean-label and natural products. Clean-label products are food and beverages made with short, easily understandable and simple ingredients. These products have emerged as a response to the growing consumer awareness and the need for products perceived as natural, minimally processed and free from artificial additives.

According to Stewart et al. (2026) study consumers “desire fewer and more natural ingredients”. This suggests that health perceptions are not only linked to nutritional value but also to the level of processing and the perceived quality of ingredients. Moreover, ultra processed foods have been under scientists' and healthcare experts' microscope during the last decades. More specifically, some categories of ultra processed foods have been linked with very serious diseases and higher mortality rates (Lane et al., 2024).

As consumers are informed about recent research and have access to more reviews of the products they consume, they tend to be oriented towards products whose ingredients lists are familiar to them and preferably also used in their least processed form.

Some examples of these products are: preservative – free products (e.g. nitrate free turkey slices), drinks with no artificial sweeteners, 100% natural products such as cold-pressed juices and palm-oil-free products.

Sustainable and holistic consumption

Apart from the actual food and beverages that are consumed, health trends are also increasingly linked to broader considerations of sustainability and overall wellbeing. As

awareness is rapidly increasing, consumers tend to consider not only the health impact of food and beverages they consume but also their overall environmental impact.

As Li & Shan (2025) research suggests, environmental awareness has been found to be connected with the intention to purchase green-packaged organic foods. Further research shows that many consumers, despite having important knowledge gaps, associate healthy eating with sustainability (Kenny et al., 2023). Complementary to the above findings, industry reports indicate a growing tendency to adopt a more holistic approach to wellbeing, where diet is combined with other lifestyle factors such as physical activity and mental health (Shridhar, 2019). These developments reflect a shift towards a more comprehensive understanding of health.

Examples of sustainable and holistic consumption include: plant-based alternatives (due to their lower environmental impact, organic foods, reusable or refillable packaging products, ethical sourcing products, such as fair trade cacao and chocolate.

Low-alcohol and alternative beverages

Evolving perceptions of health have also influenced alcohol consumption, whose reduction or complete elimination is another emerging health trend observed in the literature. There is a growing trend towards reducing alcohol intake and seeking alternative beverage options that are perceived as healthier.

Research indicates that consumers are increasingly interested in low-alcohol and alcohol-free products, leading to the development of alternatives such as dealcoholized wines (Fuentes-Fernández & del Campo-Villares, 2025). This trend reflects a broader movement towards alcohol moderation and healthier lifestyle choices, especially among younger consumers.

Summary of trends literacy improvement

The dominant health trends discussed above reveal a shift towards more health-oriented and conscious consumption patterns. While consumers are becoming more informed and proactive in their purchasing and consumption decisions, the food and beverage industry is adapting by offering products that align with these expectations. These trends demonstrate that health is becoming a central factor in shaping both consumer behaviour and market developments.

2.2 Theoretical background

2.2.1 Health Belief Model

Health belief model (HBM) is one of the most widely used theoretical frameworks to explain health-related behaviors and predict health -related behaviours with a special focus on individual beliefs. The model was initially developed in the early 1950s by U.S. psychologists and its purpose was to explain the unwillingness of people to engage in health – preventive actions (e.g. having an X-ray as a precautionary measure to diagnose tuberculosis upon its early symptoms). HBM is mainly based on people’s perceptions of susceptibility to health issues, severity of these issues, benefits of taking preventive action and respective barriers. The model has been widely used to describe decision-making processes; it emphasizes personal perceptions on each one of the model’ s constructs which are described below (Champion & Skinner, 2008).

The model’s key constructs determine the likelihood of one’s engagement in a health-related behavior (e.g. a woman who will proactively have a mammogram to prevent breast cancer). They are:

- perceived susceptibility, which is the perceived likelihood of experiencing a health issue,
- perceived severity, which refers to the seriousness of the problem; susceptibility and severity combined together are referred in the literature as perceived threat (Champion & Skinner, 2008),
- perceived benefits, which are the expected advantages deriving from behavioral change.
- perceived barriers, which refer to the obstacles that may hinder such action.

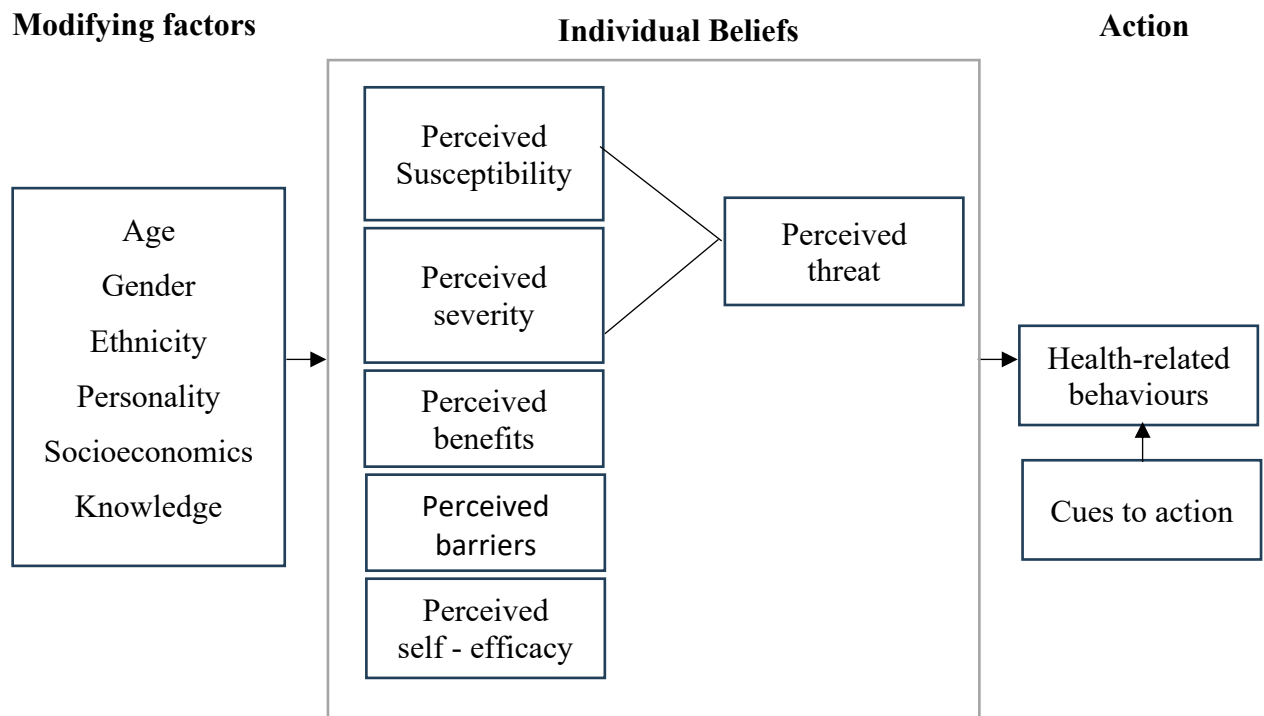
The model was also enriched with two more constructs:

- cues to action, which are stimuli that trigger individuals to engage in specific health-related actions and
- self -efficacy, which is the confidence in a person’s ability to engage in the behavior discussed (Champion & Skinner, 2008).

For better comprehension of the HBM, a diagram proposed by Champion and Skinner (2008) is included below. Importantly the development of individual beliefs is influenced

by some modifying factors that, as we have also seen in the literature, are significant influencers of food and beverage choices.

Figure 1: Health belief model constructs and modifying factors (adapted from Champion & Skinner, 2008)



Health belief model has been connected to food related behaviour and dietary habits in the literature. A study conducted in Indonesia analyzed food and beverage consumption behaviours through two online food delivery applications and found that HBM can provide a useful framework in describing how people interact with online ordering environments (Mahmudiono et al. 2022). The results highlighted that people are increasingly exposed to environments with calorie-dense and nutrient-poor food choices with high sugar and salt content. High scores were found for perceived susceptibility, perceived severity and perceived barriers, suggesting that these constructs were the most relevant in explaining food-related decisions within online food delivery environments.

HBM was also applied by an additional research conducted by Dicu et al. (2024), focusing on emotional food cravings. Based on the Health Belief Model as a theoretical framework, the study examined how emotional food cravings, together with psychological factors such as food preoccupation and bulimic tendencies, influence eating behaviour. Illustrating the

multidimensional nature of eating behaviour (and therefore the respective purchasing decisions), the findings highlight that food-related decision-making is shaped by a complex interaction of health beliefs and psychological factors.

Despite the fact that the above studies do not directly refer to health trends, they indicate how individual health-related perceptions can shape food-related decision-making. These studies suggest that both cognitive beliefs and psychological factors influence food-related behaviour, which, when observed at a larger scale, contribute to the formation of health trends.

As discussed above, the Health Belief Model provides a useful theoretical framework for understanding how individual perceptions influence health-related decisions and can also be extended to food-related decisions. The model explains how individuals' perceptions of susceptibility, severity, benefits and barriers influence health-related decisions.

Additionally, empirical studies like the ones presented above demonstrate how these perceptions are reflected in actual food-related behaviours and attitudes, linking HBM with behaviour related to food and general nutrition.

Although the Health Belief Model provides valuable insight into the role of individual perceptions, it has received some criticism within the years. Its main disadvantage is its primary focus on cognitive factors and the lack of inclusion of social pressures or behavioural intentions. For this reason, additional theoretical perspectives are required to better understand how consumers form intentions and make decisions in a broader social context. The Theory of Planned Behaviour is therefore introduced in the following section as a complementary framework.

2.2.2 Theory of planned behaviour

Theory of planned behaviour (TPB) (Ajzen, 1991) is one of the most widely applied theoretical frameworks for explaining human behaviour. TPB focuses on decision making and behavioural intention. More specifically it suggests that behaviour is primarily a result of an individual's intention to perform an action; intention reflects an individual's willingness to engage in this behaviour and is shaped by the 3 key determinants of the model: attitude, social norms and perceived behavioral control.

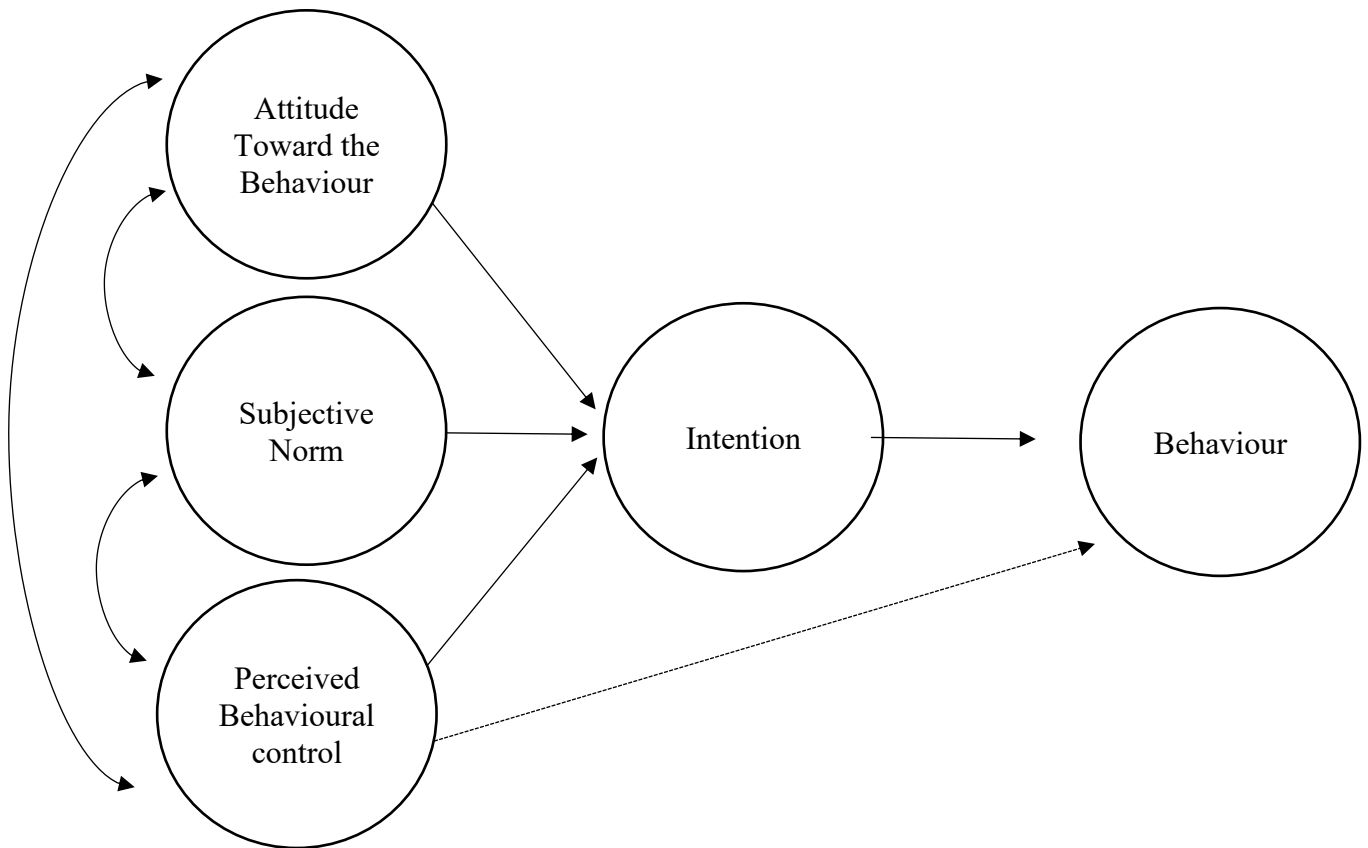
Attitudes refer to an individual's evaluation of a behaviour, based on beliefs about its expected benefits or risks. If the individual expects to get benefits by engaging in a behaviour, their orientation towards this behaviour is positive and vice versa. Health trends may emerge when a substantial and increasing number of individuals believe a behaviour is beneficial. That belief forms positive attitudes that lead to stronger intentions and widespread adoption. Based on the above, the emergence and diffusion of health trends reflect large-scale shifts in population attitudes.

Subjective norms refer to the perceived social pressure to perform or not a particular behaviour, based on individuals' beliefs about whether significant others, such as friends, family, or other influential people in an individual's social circle, approve or also engage in that behaviour. In the context of health trends, behaviours are more likely to be adopted when they are perceived as socially desirable or widely practiced. For example, the increasing visibility of fitness culture, or consumption of functional foods on social media can create a perception that these behaviours are normative, thereby encouraging individuals to adopt them.

Perceived behavioural control refers to an individual's perception of their ability to engage in a behaviour. More specifically people evaluate their resources, opportunities and potential barriers when they are deciding whether to adopt a behaviour. In relation to health trends, behaviours that are seen as accessible and achievable (for example healthy home-cooked meals or health-conscious food choices) are more likely to be adopted and sustained. In contrast, behaviours perceived as difficult or requiring a lot of resources (for example the consumption of a functional product with a very high cost) may be negatively evaluated and therefore less possible to be adopted.

For better comprehension of the model a diagram including its key constructs is presented below, highlighting how the constructs form the intention and finally the behaviour in which the individuals are engaged. The diagram is proposed by Ajzen (1991).

Figure 2. Theory of Planned Behaviour (adapted from Ajzen, 1991)



As presented in the above diagram, TPB key determinants are interconnected and linked with each other. Thus, in the case of health trends, it can be suggested that health-related behaviours are a result of individual choices (attitude towards the behaviour) but also of broader factors related with the environments the individuals exist (social pressures and perceived control).

Summarizing, the Theory of Planned Behavior provides a theoretical framework for explaining the emergence and diffusion of health trends, as, through its key constructs, it can explain how relevant behavioural intentions and finally actual behaviour are shaped. However, the model does not account for the complexity and multi-dimensionality of health trends presented above, as it does not include other structural and environmental factors (e.g. socioeconomic inequalities, policies or influences deriving from corporate marketing activities). This limitation can be better understood given evidence in existing literature which implies that that health behaviours, apart from personal choice, are also

shaped by wider social and environmental contexts (e.g. policies). For example, Adams et al. (2016) suggest that interventions to improve diet and reduce obesity are more effective when made at population level when they include less individual actions vs. when they need high levels of individual action. Therefore, although TPB offers valuable insight into the psychological mechanisms that contribute to health trends formation, it should be considered together with other broader factors.

The Theory of Planned Behaviour can also be regarded as a complementary extension of the Health Belief Model discussed in the previous section. While the HBM focuses primarily on individual perceptions related to health risks and benefits assuming rationality in individuals' evaluations, it does not explicitly account for the role social influences or the formation of behavioural intentions. TPB incorporates subjective norms and perceived behavioural control and provides a broader framework that captures both individual and social factors leading to the adoption of a behaviour. On the other hand TPB does not include the perceived threat and susceptibility that are highly relevant when exploring health-related behaviours. Including both theories is crucial when studying food-related health trends, where decisions, as widely discussed in literature, are influenced not only by personal beliefs but also by social expectations and practical constraints.

Moreover recent literature suggests that health behaviours may also be influenced by sociostructural factors, habits and other non-conscious processes (Hagger and Hamilton, 2025). Although TPB can provide a robust theoretical basis to explain health-related behaviour, there are additional factors that are not fully captured by the model and could further improve the understanding of the complex health-related decision making process.

Apart from health related behaviours in general, empirical research has supported the applicability of TPB to food - related behaviour. Attitudes, subjective norms and perceived behavioural control were found to significantly influence individuals' intention to adopt a vegetarian diet, with attitude emerging as the strongest predictor (Alkhaldy, 2025).

Attitude emerged as the strongest predictor among the 3 key determinants, suggesting that individuals are more likely to adopt a dietary-related behaviour when they perceive that they will benefit from it. Additionally, meta-analysis of 42 prior conducted studies further confirms the validity of the TPB framework across different contexts. The 3 TPB determinants were found to significantly influence sustainable food consumption across

countries, with attitude emerging as the most influential factor (Shen et al., 2022). The above findings highlight the key role of individual evaluation in shaping dietary intentions, while also confirming the relevance of social influence.

Despite its wide and successful application in consumer behaviour prediction, TPB has frequently been subjected to critical evaluation, particularly in the context of food-related behaviours. One of the most identified limitations is the gap between intention and actual behaviour. Consumers often initially express positive attitudes and even the intentions to purchase sustainable food products, yet often these intentions do not become actual purchasing behaviour (Vermeir & Verbeke, 2008). This “intention–behaviour gap” suggests that additional factors, such as situational constraints, habits or even availability issues, may influence decision-making beyond what is captured by the model.

The Theory of Planned Behaviour becomes particularly relevant when examining contemporary health trends in the food and beverage industry. Trends such as plant-based diets, functional foods and clean-label products, can be understood as the cumulative outcome of individual decision-making processes explained by the TPB framework. For example, the increasing adoption of plant-based diets reflects positive attitudes of individual consumers towards health and sustainability. Similarly, the rise of functional foods can be linked to consumers’ individual beliefs about health benefits and their perceived ability to incorporate such products into their meals on a regular basis. In this sense, health trends do not emerge independently, but are shaped by the collective influence of individual attitudes, social norms and perceived behavioural control.

On the other hand, the TPB suggests that health-related behaviour is, at an important extend, rational and planned, which may not fully reflect actual food consumption patterns. Eating behaviour is often influenced by habits, emotions and situational factors that are not explicitly addressed within the model. Additionally, broader environmental influences, such as marketing strategies, product availability or cultural norms may further shape consumer behaviour. These limitations suggest that while TPB provides a valuable framework for understanding health-related decision-making, it should be used taking into account these limitations and perhaps also in combination with other theoretical approaches to achieve a more comprehensive analysis.

Both theories discussed above (HBM and TPB) examine the factors that influence individuals towards health-related behaviours, none of them fully explains how these behaviours spread across a wider population. The Diffusion of Innovations theory complements this perspective by examining how health-related behaviours and innovations are adopted and become widespread over time.

2.2.3 Diffusion of innovations theory

While both Health Belief Model and Theory of Planned Behaviour discussed above have been widely used to explain and predict individual behaviors, none of them accounts for how behaviours are spread across a population. In the context of health trends it is important that trend formation derives from a large number of people adopting a behaviour or changing a habit. The Diffusion of Innovations (DOI) theory provides a useful framework for addressing the above limitations by explaining how product innovations or new behaviours are adopted and disseminated within a social system over time.

The Diffusion of Innovations theory was originally developed by Rogers (2003) and provides a useful framework to understand the spread of information and the adoption of an innovation. It describes diffusion as the process through which an innovation is communicated through channels over time and adopted among members of a social system. Innovation refers not only to technological advancements and new product developments, but also to new behaviours or consumption patterns or even new practices. In the context of the food and beverage industry, innovations may include plant-based diets, functional foods, organic products, or even a new holistic view of food consumption as a means to improve overall mental and physical health. Diffusion, therefore, explains how these innovations move from initial adoption by a small group of individuals to broader acceptance across the population.

A key component of the DOI framework is the classification of individuals into progressive adopter groups, which are categorized having as the main criterion the time it takes and the willingness they have to adopt a given innovation or behaviour. Categories include innovators, early adopters, early majority, late majority and laggards. Innovators and early adopters play a particularly important role in the emergence of health trends, as they are more willing to experiment with new health-related products and behaviours before they become widespread and known to the broader populations, such as plant-based

diets, functional foods, or clean-label products. These individuals often act as opinion leaders, influencing the attitudes and behaviours of others within their social environment and therefore play a critical role in the diffusion of an innovation. Therefore health trends do not appear simultaneously across the population, but develop progressively, beginning with a small group of highly innovative consumers before expanding to the wider market. Empirical research further supports this process suggesting that innovation adoption (focusing on organic food) is not driven by innovativeness alone, but also by consumer knowledge and attitudes, which mediate the relationship between innovativeness and adoption behaviour (Li et al., 2021). This suggests that the diffusion of health trends could depend on one side on the influence of early adopters and on the other side on the ability of consumers to understand and evaluate the perceived benefits of an innovation. As a result, the adoption of health-related behaviours can be understood as the outcome of both social diffusion and individual cognitive evaluation processes.

In addition to adopter categories, DOI theory highlights five key attributes of innovations that influence their rate of adoption, including relative advantage, compatibility, complexity, trialability and observability (Rogers, 2003). These attributes can be relevant in explaining why certain health trends emerge more rapidly than others. For example, within the DOI framework products perceived to offer clear health benefits, such as functional foods, are more likely to be adopted due to their perceived relative advantage. Similarly, trends that are more compatible with existing lifestyles and dietary habits, such as high-protein alternatives to already existing products, demonstrate higher compatibility and are therefore more likely to be accepted. On the other hand, innovations perceived as complex, unfamiliar or inconsistent with established habits may face resistance, even if they offer potential benefits.

Empirical research supports the importance of the five DOI attributes in innovation adoption. It further suggests that perception of innovation attributes may vary according to sociodemographic characteristics, such as gender, age, education level, which shape how individuals perceive and respond to innovations (Zondo & Ndoro, 2023). This highlights that the diffusion of health trends does not happen uniformly across the population. It also further emphasizes the role of the socio-economic characteristics of a population in health trends emergence and shaping as referred in 2.1.2 chapter of this paper.

Further empirical research highlights the importance of perception on consumer acceptance of food innovations. Albertsen et al. (2020) study indicates that consumers evaluate new food products based on perceived benefits and risks, significantly influencing their willingness to adopt them. More specifically, relative advantage is found to be one of the strongest attributes influencing innovation-related perception. This evaluation process can be relevant to health trends, as consumers often associate new health-related innovations with both positive outcomes, such as improved wellbeing and potential concerns, such as artificial ingredients or the risk of trying something totally new. As a result, the diffusion of health trends is not a linear process, but can be slowed down or accelerated depending on how consumers interpret the positive and negative outcomes of a given innovation. The success of a health trend is therefore closely linked to consumer perception, highlighting the importance of building trust, communication and product positioning in the adoption process.

In addition to perception, the adoption of health-related products is also shaped by broader social and lifestyle factors. Research on organic food consumption highlights the importance of health consciousness and social influences in shaping consumer behaviour (Nathan et al., 2021). These findings suggest that the adoption of health-related innovations is not solely driven by the characteristics of the innovation itself, but also by the social environment in which consumers operate. In this sense, the development of health trends can be understood as a socially embedded process, where behaviours are reinforced and gradually spread through shared values and lifestyle patterns across the population.

The findings discussed above highlight that health trends diffusion among populations is a dynamic process shaped by the interaction of individual behaviour and social influence. This process is driven by a combination of innovators / early adopters, communication, perceived benefits and contextual factors, which influence how new products and behaviours are welcomed by the population. It is therefore important to understand that health trends are not only the result of changing preferences, but reflect broader patterns of behavioural diffusion, where individual decisions are encouraged and spread through social networks and market structures.

Despite its strengths, the Diffusion of Innovations theory has certain limitations. While it effectively explains how innovations spread, it places less emphasis on the underlying psychological motivations that drive individual behaviour, which are better captured by models such as the Theory of Planned Behaviour. Moreover, it does not fully address the role of other external factors, such as companies, institutions and marketing strategies, which can significantly influence how health-related innovations are introduced and spread through the population. In the context of the food related health trends, these factors play a key role in shaping consumer awareness and acceptance of new products and behaviours, suggesting that the diffusion of health trends cannot be understood solely from a consumer perspective.

For better comprehension of the theoretical frameworks discussed, Table 2 presents a comparison of their main characteristics and their relevance to health trends. This overview highlights how each theory contributes to explaining different aspects of health-related consumer behaviour.

Table 2. Comparison of Theoretical Frameworks and Their Relevance to Health Trends
(Author's elaboration of existing theories)

Theory	Main Focus	Key Variables	Relevance to Health Trends	Strengths	Limitations
Health Belief Model (HBM)	Individual health beliefs	Perceived susceptibility, severity, benefits, barriers	Explains why consumers become more health-conscious and motivated to adopt healthier behaviours	Strong in explaining health awareness and prevention behaviour	Does not consider social influence or how behaviours spread
Theory of Planned Behaviour (TPB)	Intention towards a behaviour	Attitudes, subjective norms, perceived behavioural control	Explains how consumers form intentions to adopt health-related behaviours such as healthy eating or product choices	Incorporates social influence and perceived control; strong predictive power	Does not explain how behaviours spread across populations or become trends. Does not include perceived threat covered by HBM (relevant to health trends)
Diffusion of Innovations (DOI)	Adoption and spread of innovations	Adopter categories and innovation attributes (relative advantage, compatibility, complexity, trialability, observability)	Explains how health-related behaviours and innovations (e.g. plant-based diets, functional foods) spread and become trends over time	Explains trend emergence and market-level adoption	Limited focus on individual psychological motivations

2.3 Conceptual Framework of Health Trends

Building on the empirical and theoretical evidence presented above, this study proposes a conceptual framework in order to combine the theoretical and empirical insights presented in the previous sections. The conceptual framework presented (Figure 3) illustrates the factors behind health trends emergence and the health trends' influence on consumer behaviour and company response.

Health trends are understood as patterns functioning in population level that evolve through the interaction of multiple drivers. As discussed in previous chapters, these factors interact and shape how individuals perceive health and wellbeing and contribute to observable shifts in consumption patterns.

Empirical evidence suggests that these drivers are not equally distributed across populations. Factors including socioeconomic conditions, such as income, education and access to resources, can significantly influence individuals' ability to adopt healthier behaviours, resulting in socially differentiated patterns of consumption.

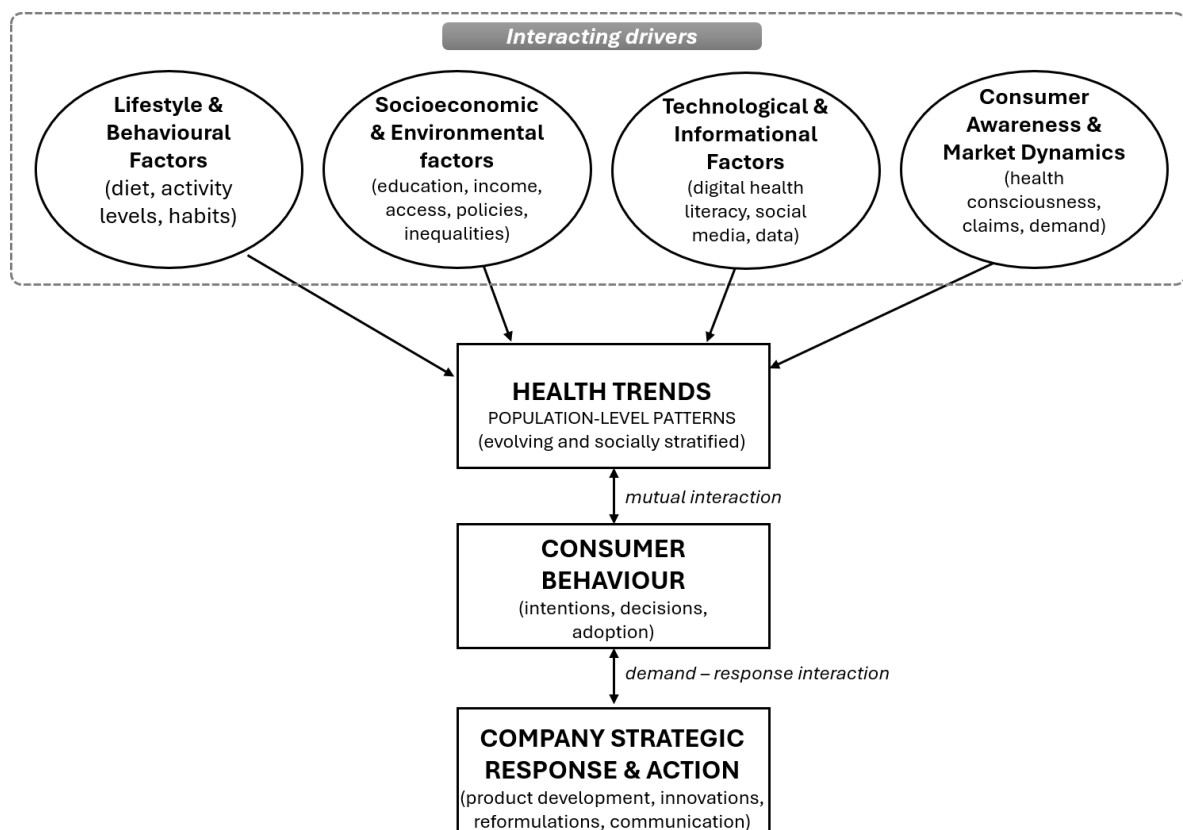
As a result of the above interactive factors health trends emerge and reflect both increasing health awareness and persistent inequalities in the adoption of healthier lifestyles. The health trends, in turn, influence consumer behaviour by shaping and changing preferences, purchase intentions and food-related decision-making. Importantly this relationship should be understood as bi-directional. Consumer behaviour also contributes to reinforcing and accelerating the acceptance and diffusion of health trends, particularly when respective changes in behaviours become widely spread.

Furthermore, the framework incorporates the role of companies as the key strategic actors. Companies respond to emerging health trends through product development, reformulation, innovation and communication strategies. At the same time, company actions influence consumer behaviour by shaping new product developments, availability, pricing and marketing messages, creating a dynamic demand–response interaction. The role of companies in this framework should not be regarded as passive receptors and responders. Companies also significantly influence market dynamics and play an important role in shaping health trends. Therefore it should be highlighted that companies

play a dual role: they act as health trend developers and setters and as responders to relevant consumer behaviour.

The conceptual framework synthesizes the main factors described in the literature review as shaping health-related behaviours and are closely connected with the emergence of health trends. As health trends evolve through a dynamic process, interaction between behavioural, structural, technological and market forces is continuous. This integrated perspective highlights that health trends cannot be fully understood without considering all the parts that take place in their formation: structural and social factors, individual choices, consumer behaviour and the strategic role of companies.

Figure 3. Conceptual framework of Health Trends



2.4 Research gap

As discussed in the literature review section above, there is an extensive body of research on health- and food-related consumer behaviour. Existing research provides valuable insights into the drivers of health trends. Moreover, theoretical frameworks such as the Health Belief Model (HBM), the Theory of Planned Behaviour (TPB) and the Diffusion of

Innovations (DOI) theory offer strong foundations for understanding how individuals form intentions towards a behaviour and adopt new behaviours. Together, the influencing factors and the theoretical frameworks discussed above provide a deep understanding of how health-related consumption patterns emerge at the individual level and gradually develop into broader societal trends.

Despite the extensive literature, some important limitations remain. Studies examine how health – related information is perceived and interpreted by individuals and how healthier or more sustainable products are perceived, as well as how decisions are made based on perceived benefits, risks and social influences. While this approach addresses many dimensions of health trends emergence, it tends to conceptualize them primarily as the outcome of consumer decisions and behaviour. As a result, limited research can be found in the literature around how these trends are interpreted, adopted and integrated into policies within the food and beverage industry focusing on the companies' perspective.

More specifically, lack of research exploring how companies respond to emerging health trends in practice has been identified. Although existing academic literature suggests that companies are required to adapt to changing consumer preferences through product development and communication strategies (Vicol, 2025), little research has examined how they identify, interpret, evaluate and respond to health trends.

The theoretical frameworks discussed above also have their main focus on consumer behaviour evolutions and adjustments. Diffusion of Innovations theory does highlight the importance of social systems and communication in the spread of new products or behaviours, which can imply the role of businesses in this procedure, but it does not fully and explicitly capture the role of organisations as strategic actors within this process. Similarly, HBM and TPB focus primarily on individual cognition and behaviour. This suggests that existing theoretical approaches, while useful, do not sufficiently account for the interaction between consumer behaviour and company strategy in shaping health trends.

The above discussed limitation highlight the need for a more integrated perspective accounting for the interaction between consumer behaviour and company response in the development and diffusion of health trends. This study aims to address this gap by

examining how professionals within the food and beverage industry perceive, interpret and respond to evolving health trends. By adopting a qualitative approach based on semi-structured interviews, the research attempts to provide deeper insight into how health trends are translated into business practices, contributing to a more comprehensive understanding of their formation and impact.

Based on the above Research Gap the following Research Questions are proposed:

1. How do companies in the food and beverages industry perceive health trends, their influence on consumer behaviour and how do they respond to these developments?
2. What factors influence companies' decisions to adopt and develop health-related products and strategies?
3. How are health trends translated into new product development, innovations and communication strategies?
4. What are the challenges that companies face in the process of responding to health trends?

3. Methodology

3.1 Research Design

The current study adopts a qualitative research design to explore how companies in the food and beverage industry perceive the influence of health trends in consumer behaviour and how they respond to them. As the nature of the research gap is exploratory, a qualitative approach is considered most appropriate, as it provides in-depth insights into the complex organizational processes, managerial perspectives and decision-making mechanisms that shape corporate responses to the emerging health trends.

Qualitative research is particularly suitable for exploring complex phenomena that have not been widely researched in the past and gaining insight into participants' perspectives and experiences (Creswell & Creswell, 2017). As health trends involve interconnectedness between consumer behaviour, broader environmental influences and organisational strategies, a qualitative approach can enable the researcher to capture rich and accurate insights that would be difficult to obtain through quantitative methods which generally focus on measuring patterns and relationships rather than exploring processes and perceptions.

3.2 Data Collection Method: Semi-Structured Interviews

Data were collected through semi-structured interviews with company managers who are important decision-makers in corporate strategy, product development, or marketing communication.

Semi-structured interviews were selected as they allow for a balance between structure and flexibility; they enable the researcher to explore predefined topics related to research questions, while also probing deeper into participants' responses. This method is particularly suitable for exploring perceptions and opinions, while simultaneously allowing for diversity of views and focus on points that the interviewees consider the most important (Kallio et al., 2016). Semi-structured interviews allowed for consistency in the topics discussed with each participant and through the follow-up questions it also allowed for further detail on the views of the interviewees. This approach is especially appropriate when investigating complex organizational processes and managerial perspectives.

The interviews were conducted using an interview guide, which was developed based on the literature review, the conceptual framework presented in Chapter 2 and the research questions of this study. The interview questions were structured to explore the key areas that emerged from the literature review and were linked with the research objectives, including:

- health trends identification and response
- decision factors used to determine if a health trend should be addressed
- procedures through which health trends are translated into new products and / or communication practices
- challenges that companies face during the above procedures

At the same time, the semi-structured format allowed participants to introduce additional insights and examples based on their professional experience. From the researcher's perspective, the semi-structured format allowed for adjustment to the variety of the participants' backgrounds and experience, further elaboration in the topics emerging from the discussion and in-depth understanding.

The interview guide can be found in Appendix A.

3.3 Sampling and Participants

A purposive sampling strategy was adopted, as the selection of participants was based on their relevance to the research objectives. Participants were identified and approached according to their experience and involvement in strategic business decisions. In addition to their managerial roles, participants were selected to ensure diversity of perspectives across various food and beverage categories and different business functions. This approach resulted in a sample including experienced professionals from the following product categories: sweet and salty snacks, dairy products, medical nutrition and functional foods. This diversity was considered necessary to capture a holistic view of the research topic and a broad perspective regarding the identification and strategic evaluation of health trends. Access to the participants was facilitated through existing contacts and referrals within the researcher's professional network.

Due to the exploratory nature of the study and its focus on the deep understanding of the managerial perspectives, the sample size was considered appropriate. The main objective was to obtain detailed insights regarding company views and procedures rather than statistical representation. Following the completion of six interviews, recurring patterns were identified in the participants' responses, which provided sufficient information to address the research objectives and respond to the research questions.

The final sample therefore consisted of 6 managers working in the food and beverage industry and have direct involvement in:

- Corporate strategy
- Product development
- Marketing and brand management

Overall sampling approach is considered appropriate for a qualitative research, where the goal is not statistical generalization but rather depth of insight and relevance of expertise from the participants' side. Although the sample size is relatively small, it is considered sufficient for a qualitative research, particularly in exploratory studies focusing on managerial perspectives where depth of information is of key importance.

Despite the fact that the selected sample provided deep insights from industry professionals, some limitations should be acknowledged. The findings represent the views

and perceptions of a small number of participants mainly with marketing and commercial managerial background within the food and beverages industry. The results are therefore to be regarded as context-specific insights from the companies' perspective and should not be generalized to the broader market or be considered as representative of consumers' views.

3.4 Data Collection Procedure

Interviews were conducted within May 2026 either face-to-face or via Microsoft Teams online communication platform depending on participant availability and location. All interviews took place in Athens, Attica and each interview lasted approximately 40 to 60 minutes. Participants were contacted in advance and interviews were scheduled at convenient dates and times for both researcher and interviewees.

Prior to the interviews, participants were informed about the purpose of the study and assured of the confidentiality of their responses. With participants' consent, interviews were audio-recorded to ensure accuracy and completeness of the data.

Following the interviews, recordings were transcribed through Microsoft Teams and carefully reviewed by the researcher, action which allowed for detailed analysis of the responses. These transcripts formed the basis of the thematic analysis and enabled a detailed synthesis of the participants' views.

3.5 Data Analysis

The collected data were analyzed using thematic analysis, which is widely used in qualitative research to identify, analyze and interpret patterns. Thematic analysis provides a flexible and systematic approach to analyzing qualitative data (Braun & Clarke, 2006) and is particularly suitable for studies like the current one aiming to dive deep into the views of interviewees on a specific subject. As the method enables the identification of recurring patterns across participants' responses and the emergence of key themes from the interview data, it was considered appropriate for the current study.

The analysis was based on the 6-phases approach outlined by Braun and Clarke (2006):

1. Familiarization with the data: following the interviews, all transcripts were carefully read by the researcher to ensure deep comprehension of the participants' responses. The main

ideas and key points of each participant were noted down in an excel spreadsheet enabling a preliminary identification of the emerging codes and themes.

2. Generation of initial codes: following familiarization with the interview transcripts, relevant segments in the form of quotes were recorded forming a coding table in an excel spreadsheet. Each extract was assigned a descriptive code summarizing the main view or perception of the respective participant. The coding process was conducted manually by the researcher aiming to identify recurring patterns related to health trends and the way companies perceive and respond to them, making strategic decisions. The coding table developed in this phase was the basis for the generation of the main themes in the following phases.
3. Generation of initial themes: similar or related codes were grouped into preliminary broader themes with each one representing an observed pattern across participants' responses. Initial themes were developed guided by the interview questions and the first recurring ideas identified in the previous phase.
4. Themes review: the initial themes were reviewed and refined aiming to ensure their distinctiveness and relevance to the research objectives. Where necessary, overlapping themes were merged into a broader one creating a list of themes with clear boundaries.
5. Themes naming and definition: each theme was assigned a description and definition depicting the ideas covered and its relevance to the research objectives and questions.
6. Production of the report: in the last stage findings were interpreted and synthesized, linking the identified themes to the research questions. The Results and Discussion chapters were informed by this procedure.

For better comprehension of the coding and themes generation procedure, part of the respective table is included in Appendix B and the themes and sub-themes that emerged from the analysis are included in Appendix C.

3.6 Ethical Considerations

Ethical considerations were carefully addressed throughout the research process. Participants were informed about:

- The purpose of the study

- Their voluntary participation
- Their right to withdraw at any time

Confidentiality and anonymity were ensured by:

- Not disclosing participants' names or company identities
- Storing data securely
- Using responses only for academic purposes

All participants provided informed consent prior to participation. Moreover all participants provided their consent to the interviews being recorded and transcribed.

4. Interviews Findings

4.1 Profile of the interview participants

The qualitative research involved six semi-structured interviews with professionals employed in the food and beverage industry in Greece. The participants were selected based on their professional experience, decision making authority and active involvement in marketing, brand management, commercial strategy, category management and product-related decision-making processes within FMCG and / or nutrition organizations. Most of the participants are currently employed, or have previously been employed, in companies that also operate manufacturing facilities in Greece. The sample included professionals from a variety of food and beverage categories (both nutrition and indulgence – oriented). This allowed the research to capture diverse perspectives regarding health trends, consumer behaviour, innovation and strategic company responses across different segments of the industry.

The background of the participants is displayed in Table 3 below. For confidentiality reasons, their names have been replaced by Participant 1, 2, 3, 4, 5 and 6 accordingly, with each number representing the order with which the participants were interviewed.

The following sections present the main themes that emerged from the thematic analysis of the interviews.

Table 3. Interview participants background summary

Participant #	Current Position	Previous experience
P1	Marketing Manager in International Markets - Sweet Snacks and Bread substitutes	Marketing Manager on healthcare nutrition
P2	Marketing Manager Greece & Cyprus - Salty Snacks, Beverages and Cereals	Brand manager in sportswear and nutrition
P3	Senior Brand Manager - Medical Nutrition and Supplements	Market Acceleration Manager on medical nutrition
P4	Senior Brand Manager - Sweet and Salty Snacks	Senior Brand Manager in beverages category
P5	Marketing Manager Greece - Sweet Snacks (indulgent category)	Senior Brand Manager in salty snacks and dairy categories
P6	Commercial - Demand Acceleration Lead - Salty Snacks, Beverages, Cereals	Category Manager, Trade Marketing Manager and Insights Manager in Snacks and Household Chemicals categories

4.2 Health Trends as Lifestyle Transformations: switch to overall health and wellbeing

One of the strongest themes emerging from the interviews was the perception that health trends are increasingly connected to substantial transformations in lifestyle, wellbeing and prevention rather than temporary shifts in preferences driven by a short – term fashion trend. Most participants consistently described a significant shift in consumer attitudes towards healthiness, highlighting that consumers are becoming more conscious not only about nutrition itself, but also about overall wellbeing, self-care, prevention, mental balance and quality of life. Three participants highlighted that health consciousness is accompanied by increased levels of nutritional education, as people are more willing to search and learn how changes in their lifestyle (e.g. more exercise, stress management, gut health) can improve their quality of life.

Apart from the holistic and deeper view of health and health-related trends, a relevant topic that was also raised by most participants was the evolving consumer awareness. Some of the most frequently mentioned aspects that show increasing consumer education about packaged food and beverages were: growing importance of food labels, the increased attention that mostly young people tend to pay to nutrition facts and ingredients and greater interest to the composition of the products consumed.

Several participants also emphasized that the COVID-19 pandemic acted as an important turning point; influenced by the need for overall health and wellbeing people have started searching more and more what is good for their health and this is also depicted in their food-related behaviours and purchasing decisions. More specifically, according to Participant 3, consumers have become significantly more focused on prevention and long-term wellbeing after the pandemic and they increasingly recognize the relationship between nutrition and health outcomes. Similarly, Participant 5 explained that health trends are now connected with a more holistic perception of wellbeing, including mental health, yoga, sleep quality and healthier lifestyle habits overall.

Expanding on this holistic and preventive view of health improvement, participants also repeatedly referred to the idea that well-being increasingly goes beyond weight management and is perceived by individuals as part of a broader lifestyle transformation with positive impacts on general physical and mental condition. Participant 4 specifically highlighted that consumers increasingly associate healthier choices with a balanced and successful lifestyle, while Participant 5 noted that younger consumers are becoming more aware of “what they put into their body,” reflecting a broader shift towards health consciousness and monitoring of the products that are consumed.

Another important finding related to this theme concerns the depth and long-term nature of health-related changes which tend to become long-term structural transformations rather than temporary trends. Several interviewees argued that consumers increasingly connect nutrition with prevention and long-term quality of life, particularly regarding issues such as sugar reduction, ingredient transparency, clean-label products and functional nutrition. As Participant 6 explained, certain health-related categories, such as lactose-free and gluten-free products, are no longer perceived as niche trends but as stable and long-lasting market developments.

At the same time, participants also emphasized on factors beyond personal choices that affect their ability to adopt a healthier lifestyle. These factors are socioeconomic and cultural and some of the most frequently mentioned were economic limitations, inflationary pressures and affordability concerns and they were repeatedly mentioned as important barriers. Participant 1 explained that although many consumers recognise the value of healthier or organic products, they are not always willing or financially able to pay the additional cost associated with them. Participant 6 also highlighted that local cultural habits and traditional consumption patterns (e.g. Greek people are more versed towards sweet taste) can also influence the adoption of health trends within different markets.

Summarizing, participants viewed increasing focus on health not as a temporary trend but as an element becoming increasingly integrated in consumers' lifestyles and long-term wellbeing aspirations, reflected in deeper changes of consumer priorities. However, these transformations are at the same time shaped and constrained by other social, cultural and economic circumstances that affect consumers' ability to fully adopt healthier behaviours.

4.3 Functional Nutrition and Prevention

Another major theme emerging from the interviews was the growing importance of functional nutrition and preventive-health-oriented products within the food and beverage industry. Building on the previous theme, participants explained that the broader shift towards health and wellbeing is increasingly translated into demand for specific product attributes and functional benefits, including artificial ingredients reduction, protein enrichment, clean-label formulations, immunity support, fortified products, lactose-free and palm-oil free alternatives and products perceived as supporting healthier lifestyles overall.

One of the most consistently discussed trends across interviews was the increasing demand for products with reduced or no added sugar. All participants repeatedly described sugar reduction as one of the most important and long-lasting health trends currently shaping consumer preferences and company strategies. Participant 1 specifically referred to sugar reduction as “the number one health trend in the food industry,” while several participants explained that consumers have become significantly more aware of the

negative impact of sugar consumption on long-term health and wellbeing. Moreover, reduced or no sugar trend was also frequently described as a trend that “is here to stay”.

At the same time, participants highlighted the rapid growth of protein-related products across multiple food categories. Protein is no longer perceived as a niche trend associated only with sports nutrition; it has evolved into a broader mainstream health trend influencing snacks, dairy products, cereals, beverages and functional foods. Participant 5 described protein as “a huge trend” increasingly associated with healthy muscle mass, weight management and healthier eating patterns. Participant 3 highlighted that consumers are actively seeking products supporting muscle maintenance, strength and overall nutritional balance.

Several interviewees also referred to the growing importance of clean-label products. Consumers were described as becoming increasingly interested in product composition, ingredient lists, additives, preservatives and the perceived “naturalness” of food products. According to Participant 1, trends around products “without” certain ingredients, such as preservatives, palm oil, saturated fats or additives, have become increasingly important in recent years, particularly among parents purchasing products for their children. Similarly, Participant 5 explained that consumers increasingly prefer products perceived as more natural and less processed. As perceived by the interviewees, consumers are expressing increasing interest in products with few and simple ingredients, like the ones that are used for home cooking.

Additionally, several participants discussed the influence of emerging pharmaceutical and healthcare-related developments on food-related health trends. Participant 5 specifically referred to the growing impact of GLP-1 weight-loss medication trends and changing consumer attitudes towards appetite control, satiety and weight management. Participant 3, from a medical perspective, referred to this trend as emerging but needing control and monitoring, as it can also be accompanied by unwanted side effects (muscle mass loss, etc). Nutrition, healthcare and wellbeing were therefore described as increasingly interconnected areas.

At the same time, participants emphasized that the successful development of functional and health-oriented products requires more than simply following market trends. Scientific

credibility, regulatory compliance, product effectiveness and consumer trust were repeatedly described as critical success factors.

Summarizing, the above findings suggest that functional nutrition and preventive-health positioning have become central topics of concern for both consumer expectations and organizational innovation strategies. Rather than representing isolated product trends, these developments appear to reflect broader shifts towards health-conscious and functionality-driven consumption patterns.

4.4 The Intention–Behaviour Gap in Health-Oriented Consumption

One other significant theme emerging from the interviews was the conflict between consumers' initial intention to make healthier purchases driven by the growing health consciousness and their final purchasing behaviour. Several participants mentioned that, when asked, consumers tend to express positive opinions about healthier food and beverage choices, but this intention is not always translated into actual consumer behaviour.

As referred to by many participants, especially for the more indulgent categories (sweet or salty snacks) taste remains the number one criterion of choice. Consumers are less willing to compromise taste when it comes to categories from which they expect to have appealing sensory attributes (taste, smell, texture, etc). Specifically, Participant 4 explicitly referred to taste dominance as the “clearest no 1 factor”, further explaining that healthy alternatives struggle and very often fail to meet the expectations of the consumers, implying that, after trial, re-purchase is not frequent enough to make a healthy product successful compared to its traditional alternative. To emphasize this even more, Participant 5 referred to taste as an “absolutely critical characteristic”. Taste seems to be also more significant as a criterion for the less functional categories compared to heavily functional products, as commented by Participant 3. Based on the above, it seems that consumers are indeed interested to and express positive thoughts about healthy products, but the latter only succeed when the sensory indulgence is maintained.

One other factor contributing to the emergence of the discussed intention-behaviour gap is the price, which also seems to significantly influence final purchasing decision. Healthier, functional or organic products are often more expensive compared to the traditional ones.

As several interviewees explained, although organic or functional products are increasingly recognized as healthier, their premium pricing can limit consumers' ability to consistently add them in their repertoire. Inflation pressure has had an impact on population's purchasing power, also having a negative impact on health trends spread and making price a critical decision factor. Participant 1 specifically highlighted that many consumers understand the benefits of healthier alternatives (e.g. organic foods) but are unwilling or financially unable to justify their additional cost. These findings suggest that health-oriented consumption is not equally accessible across populations, as healthier consumption patterns can be partially but significantly influenced by socioeconomic conditions.

The next important factor that emerged was the convenience and habitual consumption patterns. As modern lifestyles are becoming fast-paced, consumers seem to have limited time and energy to prioritize healthy consumption. Convenience has become a significant purchasing criterion. As mentioned by Participant 6, after COVID we have fully returned to our previous hectic lifestyle, which is a barrier in making healthy choices that support well-being, as people are more versed towards convenient choices. Similarly, other interviewees emphasized that healthier intentions are often difficult to maintain consistently in practice, particularly when healthier options are perceived as requiring additional effort, preparation time, or behavioural change. According to the above, food-related decision making is not solely driven by health considerations but is also heavily influenced by available time, necessary effort, current routine and day-to-day practicalities.

One more important finding that emerged from the interviews is the increasing interest in balance rather than restriction. Participants consistently suggested that most consumers are not aiming to completely eliminate indulgent products from their diets, but prefer to achieve a successful combination of enjoyment and healthier living. Health-oriented consumption does not need to be a strict dieting behaviour, as consumers are perceived by most participants unwilling to sacrifice indulgence. Healthy consumption was described as an attempt to make "better" or more balanced everyday choices. According to Participant 2, consumers increasingly seek healthier options "without sacrificing taste," highlighting the importance of maintaining familiarity and enjoyment within healthier product

propositions. The above findings suggest that contemporary health trends are increasingly characterized by balance rather than restriction or exclusion of indulgent product categories, making companies opt to offer products that respond to this need.

Summarizing, participants clearly described a gap between consumers' health-related consumption intentions and their actual purchasing behaviour. Some of the most important factors outweighing healthiness in their final choices were taste preference, financial barriers, habits and convenience.

4.5 The role of social media and globalization in health trends diffusion

The next significant theme that emerged from the interviews was the contribution of communication and influence through social media and the spread of information through global markets to the diffusion of health trends among populations. Several interviewees highlighted digital environments as accelerators of health trends. Consumers are now increasingly exposed to health advice, wellness and fitness content and trends as well as healthy lifestyle messaging.

Social media seems to be among the most influential factors and was explicitly mentioned by the interviewees as having a key role in shaping and monitoring health trends. More specifically digital platforms like Tik Tok were referred to as a “real demand generator”, suggesting that communication through this channel can have a significantly positive impact on a product's sales and market share. Social media are also regarded as platforms that “create vast awareness”, “have huge impact” and “mirror consumer behaviour”.

Consumers are extensively use social media and are believed to be influenced by: Instagram / Tik Tok influencers, content creators or even fitness and wellness personalities. Products are becoming viral through these platforms, which seem to have the power to spark rapid trend amplification.

Globalization and International market influence was also highlighted as a health trend accelerator. Larger markets were referred to as early indicators for the next health trends to be observed locally. Specifically companies functioning in the Greek market are monitoring trends from foreign countries, with US being the most frequently mentioned market among interviewees. According to participants' responses, companies in Greece monitor these markets, identify emerging trends early and evaluate the possibility that

these trends may diffuse later. This allows not only for early trend identification but also for timely assessment of their potential relevance to the Greek market.

As large international markets are perceived as health trend incubators, it appears that social media further amplify global diffusion of health trends. Consumers in the Greek market are exposed to the same products, influencers, diet and nutrition narratives as all international consumers. Protein enrichment, plant based diets, clean label, GLP – 1 and functional beverages / dairy products were some of the most frequently discussed health trends driven by international influences. As respective health trends emerge and spread, Greek consumers, influenced by social media, increasingly expect healthier options, ingredient transparency and functional benefits from the foods they purchase.

Globalization though does not mean that local adaptations are completely eliminated. More specifically, Participant 6 commented on the Greek consumer taste preferences as a possible barrier to the success of sugar free products mentioning that “Greek people love sweet taste”. The same participant also associated a certain product’s failure (ready-to-make oatmeal in individual sachets) to the Greek market not being mature enough to embrace this product at the time it was launched.

Summarizing, it is perceived that the spread of health trends is being accelerated by the digital and globally interconnected environments. As consumer awareness is vastly accelerated by digital platforms, populations tend to expect healthier and cleaner options availability which poses significant pressure on companies to adjust. However, local habits and preferences continue to influence the extent to which companies respond to health trends through innovations and communication.

4.6 Organizational Barriers and Strategic Company Adaptation

Another important theme emerging from the interviews was the barriers that companies face when adapting their strategies and portfolios to respond to a health trend. Following market trends can be challenging in various ways, including the uncertainty of how successfully the trends will be established in the markets, how long they will last as well as the risks that must be taken to make the necessary strategy adaptations. As revealed by the interviewees “you can never know from the start”, “market might not be ready”, “there is significant risk: if a company jumps into a health trend too early, it might invest in a

trend that will shortly fade away”, “only time and results can prove success”. Almost all participants expressed concerns on the consumer response to a new healthier product, formula or a relevant communication campaign, which, as they pointed out, makes rigorous strategic assessment necessary, in order to ensure long-term viability.

Even when a trend is growing, companies should focus on evaluating whether an adaptation to capture a health trend fits their strategy, communication plan and product portfolio. As referred by almost all interviewees, quantitative research, statistics and data from other markets are widely leveraged to navigate such market shifts. As frequently mentioned, “companies observe what happens in other markets” and “rely on qualitative and quantitative research, sales KPIs, growth rates and consumer response rates”. At the same time, “current brand positioning fit” was also referred to as a significant decision factor.

One other important decision factor that links directly with company strategy and was referred by 3 out of the 6 participants is market potential evaluation of a health trend. Decision makers often need to answer the question “does this innovation have the critical mass potential that it takes to become a success?”. A relevant example on this was described by Participant 1. The launch of an organic infant formula was postponed, as the existing premium and high-purity product line was believed to already address consumer needs. Management determined that an 'organic' claim would offer insignificant added value to consumers. That assessment was later validated when the product was launched but subsequently delisted from the market within a few months as it did not give incremental sales to the company.

Apart from market potential and scalability many concerns were also focused on the internal environment of the companies. One of the most frequently raised was the resources availability that a company needs to ensure and financial impact that needs to bear. Resource constraints, operational barriers and production limitations should meticulously be taken into account when a company decides whether or not to pivot towards an emerging health trend. Participant 1 explicitly referred to costs, plant capacity and R&D capability, whereas several participants mentioned “return on investment, financial pressures, profitability” and “budgets” as of paramount importance during the evaluation procedure.

Regulatory and legal concerns were also a critical barrier discussed by all participants. Despite their pivotal role in the companies' innovation strategy, marketing departments do not freely decide to develop and communicate new products. As concluded by the interviews, very strict limitations and controlling procedures are followed within companies not only for the products themselves but also for what exactly is communicated on their packaging. Compliance and regulatory functions were described as internal gatekeepers that monitor corporate activities to ensure full adherence to legal frameworks.

Strategic timing of companies' responses to emerging health trends was highlighted as another important issue during the interviews. The important strategic dilemma between a) acting before competition to capture the early adopters and b) waiting- and- see approach to ensure that a health trend will be established for long and make a significant impact in the market was presented to the participants in the form of a question. The responses were mixed, with the interviewees stating that both options include risk, as the markets demand from companies (especially if they hold a leading position) to be the first-movers in innovation, especially when it comes to health and well being. The above implies that companies should choose between the risk to either invest too early in trends that will prove to be short-lived or react too slowly to important market shifts.

As indicated by the above discussed findings, responding to health trends is a multidimensional strategic process. Businesses require to balance consumer expectations, operational barriers, organizational financial health and legal constraints to reach the optimal decisions that will ensure they respond to health trends in the best possible way.

4.7 Companies as Trend Setters and Educators

The final theme emerging from the interviews concerns the role of the companies in establishing trends and educating consumers. Companies were described by the interviewees as playing a key role in shaping health trends and encouraging their diffusion across the consumer market rather than passive trend followers. Marketing, communication, social media exposure were among the most frequently referred factors in the health trends accelerators list and they are all controlled by companies.

As several interviewees highlighted, mass communication plays a very important role in influencing consumers. Some of the most dominant ways through which companies

increase awareness around functional products, nutritional benefits and overall health and well being are digital platforms (social media and specifically Tik Tok were mentioned multiple times), advertising, brand messaging on the point of sale, packaging and media exposure. As reported by Participant 1, continuous exposure to certain messages can significantly influence perception, intention and potentially actual behaviour. This view is further strengthened by the emphasis given to the importance of consistent health-oriented messaging. More specifically, Participant 5 suggested that the companies themselves have the power to create needs in the first place through marketing activations.

Companies were also referred to as important educators, especially in the healthy and nutritious food and beverage categories. Apart from the product – oriented campaigns, corporate communication often targets to influence consumers positively towards entire product categories or even towards specific health problems. One example of this that was discussed during the interviews was the launch of a corporate-sponsored campaign about malnutrition in elderly people groups. The campaign was launched by a leading company in medical nutrition and aimed to raise awareness and share critical information regarding public health, including also a call-to-action, encouraging patients to address their symptoms and visit a doctor.

As consumer awareness and information availability increases, it is becoming important for companies to build credibility and gain the trust of the consumers. To achieve this, companies frequently rely on scientists, health care professionals, nutritionists and K.O.L.s (Key Opinion Leaders). As Participant 1 mentioned, K.O.L.s' influence is explicitly important and according to Participant 3 scientific legitimacy through collaboration with healthcare professionals plays a critical role in diffusing health trends and educating consumers. As also mentioned by Participant 3, medical nutrition is not only a commercial product but also a corporate social responsibility initiative.

Summarizing, concerning health trends companies were described to play a dual role. On one hand, they evaluate and respond to changing consumer preferences, while on the other hand they act as educators that raise consumer awareness about serious health issues through communication campaigns, healthcare professionals and K.O.L.s.

5. Discussion and Conclusions

5.1 Discussion of Findings

5.1.1 Discussion of Health Trends as lifestyle transformations

The findings of the present study reveal that health trends are increasingly understood as real lifestyle changes oriented towards better health and wellbeing. Interview participants consistently linked health trends with greater emphasis on self-care and broader wellbeing. The above findings are consistent with literature discussed earlier: Finger et al. (2019) study also supports overall improvement in some of the healthy lifestyle factors examined through a 21-year period. Current literature also suggests that consumers opt for health-friendly labeled products, also expressing the intention to pay more for them (Yun et al., 2020).

The above finding can also be linked with the Health Belief Model, mainly regarding the intention towards holistic well-being and disease prevention. Interviewees highlighted the increased consumer education and emphasis on the relationship between nutrition and health in the form of prevention, self-care and overall healthier lifestyle. Consumers increasingly understand and can better evaluate health benefits and risks. This can be connected directly with perceived susceptibility, perceived severity and perceived benefits, some of the key dimensions of the HBM.

At the same time, these findings also show consistency with the Theory of Planned Behaviour (TPB) and the limitations discussed. Consumers, as stated by the participants, show a positive attitude towards healthier lifestyle. Vast influence of media can also amplify social pressures. Although individuals do have the intention to adapt to a healthier lifestyle, barriers such as affordability and taste prioritization seem to prevent them from finally changing their behaviour and make healthier choices. Although TPB accounts for the role of perceived behavioural control, the findings suggest that there are broader socioeconomic constraints which are not included in the model.

Apart from the intention for improved well-being, findings of this study also revealed significant inequalities in the ability of individuals to adopt healthier habits. Participants consistently mentioned affordability constraints, taste preferences and established habits as possible barriers to healthier food choices. Current literature also confirms the above

findings, as both scoping and empirical research suggest that socioeconomic inequalities play an important role in the food -related behaviours of the populations, with income and education consistently identified as important determinants (Darmon & Drewnowski, 2008; Ogunlayi et al., 2023).

Taking the above into account, we see in practice the validity of the criticism towards the TPB. As we see in the above discussion, consumers express the intention to obtain a healthier lifestyle and change their food-related behaviour, but their ability is limited by factors not captured by the theoretical model. Therefore health trends should be considered as the outcome of the interaction between individual beliefs and social, cultural and economic conditions, shaping consumer preferences and final decisions.

5.1.2 Discussion of Functional nutrition and prevention

Another important finding was the emerging trend of functional and preventive role of food and beverages. Several interviewees mentioned that consumers pay attention to what they eat and drink and they increasingly choose no sugar, high protein, clean label and natural ingredients. Health oriented consumption was further emphasized by the reference to health trends promoting the consumption (or intake) of pharmaceutical products, with several references to the growing popularity of GLP-1 medications used by consumers for weight management and overall wellbeing. On the other hand, 2 out of 6 participants expressed concerns on the longevity of the GLP-1 trend, as it has started to be connected with several health issues.

We can observe significant consistency of the above findings with existing literature. Current studies suggest that apart from the fact that consumer awareness, even in very specialized functional products (e.g. phenolic beverages), has substantially grown, food and beverages are more and more seen as a means to support well-being, prevent disease and promote long-term health (Alalwan, 2025; Mohsin, 2023).

Functional nutrition and prevention can also be strongly linked with Health Belief Model, reflecting some of its key constructs with perceived susceptibility and perceived benefits being the most prevailing ones for connection. The growing popularity of functional products, as mentioned by participants and concluded by currently existing literature review, can imply functional products' connection with Diffusion of Innovations Theory,

explaining how trends spread across populations. More specifically, trends such as protein enrichment, exclusion of artificial ingredients or gut friendly products seem to have started from more health - and - fitness oriented people and diffused gradually to broader audiences, as they became aware of them and were persuaded for their benefits.

The growing popularity of GLP-1 medications provides an example of how innovations are diffused in populations. A prescription medicine, initially aimed to be taken by diabetic patients, gradually became a very popular product among people seeking weight-management support. This process reflects how an innovation gradually spreads from early adopters to a broader market segment, as populations get to know better the benefits of an innovation.

The above findings suggest that functional nutrition is increasingly positioned within consumers' preferences. As consumers appear to actively seek products addressing specific health benefits, the diffusion of such trends raises questions regarding their sustainability and their ability to provide long-term benefits to consumers.

5.1.3 Discussion of Intention – Behaviour gap

The study conducted highlights the existence of a gap between intention and actual behaviour. As mentioned by the participants, consumers are increasingly health-conscious and oriented towards the consumption of healthier foods and beverages but those positive attitudes and intentions are not always translated into actual purchasing behaviour of healthier products.

Those findings are supported by current literature, which suggests that consumers are positive towards more healthy and sustainable diets but do not always engage with behaviours compatible with this attitude (Kenny et al., 2023). Several factors have also been reported to overrun healthiness, which are taste, price, habits and social pressures. Health claims are also a factor that can positively influence consumers, but it is less significant than taste and price (Duarte et al., 2021).

The findings of this study can also be linked with the Theory of Planned Behaviour. As indicated in the interviews, consumers increasingly develop positive attitudes towards health-oriented behaviours. At the same time, as these behaviours are widely communicated through multiple channels (social media, health professionals, peers) social

pressure is applied. Despite their positive attitude though, consumers tend to sometimes make inconsistent final decisions and choose the traditional alternatives rather than the healthier ones. As participants mentioned, prioritization of taste preference, economic barriers and habitual choices are some of the factors contributing to this inconsistency. The findings therefore support the existence of intention-behaviour gap, suggesting that positive attitudes towards healthier choices are not sufficient to guarantee the respective purchase decisions.

One additional contribution of this study is that the participants did not perceive shift towards healthier behaviour as a simple choice among a variety of healthy and less healthy options. The process of consumer purchasing decisions was described as a continuous effort to balance between health priorities, taste preferences, affordability, habits and convenience. These findings highlight the multidimensionality of health – oriented food consumption, which should not be regarded as an individual choice but as a complex interaction of socioeconomic and behavioural factors.

5.1.4 Discussion of social media and globalization effect

The role of social media and globalization as accelerators of health trends was one of the most significant themes that emerged during the interviews. Participants repeatedly highlighted the power of social media platforms and digital environments in the rapid spread and globalization of health trends and health-oriented consumption patterns. The aforementioned finding strongly aligns with the Diffusion of Innovations Theory, which explains how new products or trends spread through populations. The relevance of DOI theory with the social media impact discussed lies in the evolution of health – oriented behaviours adoption from niche consumer groups to the broader population, with digital platforms being the main channel of communication and awareness.

While social media enable the rapid diffusion of health trends, they may also be responsible for the spread of inaccurate and scientifically unsupported health-related information. This suggests that their growing influence might create both opportunities and challenges to the companies operating in the food and beverage market.

Concerning globalization it was highlighted that, as consumers are exposed to health trends through Tik Tok, instagram and other social media, trends are very quickly spread, leaving a much shorter amount of time than before to the companies to adjust their

portfolios and strategies. The findings suggest that companies operate in an environment where health trends might emerge in one market and rapidly diffuse worldwide, influencing consumer preferences globally. This also highlights the need for rapid evaluation and adjustment to the needs that might emerge.

The above pressure to the businesses might also have a positive effect. Apart from their need to rapidly adjust to competition pressure, companies will also need to develop critical capabilities on which they might not have been so focused before. These capabilities include trends monitoring, forecasting, organizational agility, stronger cross-functional collaboration, risk management and fact-based decision making to respond to the rapidly changing environment.

The above findings suggest that social media and globalization are transforming the way health trends are spread across populations, creating both positive influences and challenges to the companies operating in the relevant sectors. Companies therefore need to continuously monitor, evaluate and potentially respond to the emerging trends on time and through evidence-based strategies.

5.1.5 Discussion of organizational barriers and strategic adaptation

As described in our findings section, when responding to health trends, organizations need to make several adaptations to overcome barriers from the internal and external environment. The most significant ones are risks associated with trend success uncertainty, strategy fit of necessary adaptations, market potential of a new health trend, regulatory and legal concerns and choice of the right response timing.

Although to the best of our knowledge the studies conducted on company response to health trends is limited, we can find some indirect relevance with existing literature. As Albertsen et al. (2020) suggest, consumers rely on perceived value to assess a food innovation, as their study confirms that perceived value is positively correlated with innovation-related perceptions. The above indicates that companies may need to adjust their communication strategies to not only spread awareness and promote a health-related innovation but also make extra effort and potentially expenses to convince consumers that innovation has positive effects. One more relevant aspect referred on Albertsen et al. (2020) study is the importance of trust in regulation as a factor influencing perception and acceptance of innovative food technologies and products. This highlights even further the

necessity for companies to be compliant with regulatory and legal principles. Therefore, the findings of the present study extend the existing literature suggesting that, to respond successfully to a health trend, companies need to focus and develop organizational capabilities (such as communication to educate and convince consumers), resources and compliance to respective regulations.

The above findings further confirm the limitations of Theory of Planned behaviour and Diffusion of Innovations models. Despite the fact that our findings showed how important in the diffusion of a trend companies' adaptations are (from strategy orientation changes to legal and regulatory compliance adjustments), none of the aforementioned models captures these organizational dimensions, leaving a significant determinant out of the analysis.

Finally, the findings concerning the challenges and company strategy adaptations can be directly linked with the conceptual model proposed in this study. In the framework it is explicitly mentioned that companies respond to health trends through innovation, reformulation, communication and product development, while dynamically adapting to emerging trends. This strongly supports strategic adaptation and multidimensional company response, as revealed by the participants of this study.

5.1.6 Discussion of companies as health trend setters and educators

The final theme presented in the findings chapter is how companies play a key role in shaping trends and educating consumers to incorporate healthier choices in their lives rather than being passive trend followers. The interviews suggest that companies can influence awareness through various channels, shape perceptions and educate consumers, contributing in health trends amplification. The discussed findings demonstrate the perceived communication power that companies have.

We can observe consistency of the above findings with current literature. Kickbusch et al. (2016) are discussing and emphasizing the influential power of companies in shaping consumer habits and encouraging them to buy the products that are more profitable. Main sources of corporate influence are, according to Kickbusch et al. (2016), marketing communications, policy advocacy, corporate social responsibility strategies and supply chain expansions.

On the other hand, Kickbusch et al.(2016) are adopting a more critical approach towards companies. Companies are described as organizations that deploy strategies detrimental to health. Moreover, they discuss that co-operation across all sectors is needed to fight against commercial determinants of health, which are regarded as promoting unhealthy behaviours, for companies to make greater profits at the expense of public health. The above arguments are in contrast to what was highlighted by several interviewees concerning companies making efforts to promote healthier consumption. More specifically, companies were described by interviewees as increasingly communicating the benefits of a healthier lifestyle, adjusting their strategies and product portfolios incorporating more natural and health-promoting ingredients and even in several occasions acting as educators and trend setters at the first place.

As implied by most interviewees, one of the main targets of an organization that is commercializing their products is profit. Almost all participants mentioned that financials is one of the most critical factors determining whether a company will respond to an emerging health trend. Moreover, Participant 6 mentioned that, when having to choose between a commercially successful product and a healthier product, they would target commercial success over healthiness. However, as mentioned by Participant 3, companies with medical nutrition products, apart from commercial success are perceived to also “contribute to public welfare”. At the same time participants emphasized that companies’ success in communicating health-oriented products lies to a significant extent on the trust that is built between the organizations and the consumers. For that reason healthcare professionals and scientific experts are onboarded.

Summarizing, the participants suggested that corporate environments have profit and financial sustainability as key factors guiding business decisions but are also increasingly oriented towards the promotion of a healthier lifestyle. According to the interviewees, commercialization is not their only target, as their communication strategies imply that, apart from increasing sales and profits, they are also trying to encourage people towards healthier food and beverage choices.

The findings of this study suggest that the role of companies as health trend setters and educators should be interpreted with caution. While in the interviews highlighted educational and public health initiatives were emphasized, profit and broader commercial

objectives remain a key factor shaping business decisions. It should therefore be taken into account that companies' focus on healthier products and health oriented communication may primarily target to achieve mainly profitability objectives while also contributing to public health improvement.

5.2 Theoretical and Managerial implications

The findings of this study shed light on the multidimensionality of how health trends influence consumer behaviour and how this influence is captured and addressed by companies.

Existing literature suggests that health trends should not be regarded as behavioural results driven by individual choices or rational consumer decision-making. They emerge as a result of a large variety of interconnected factors, the most critical of which are: consumer behaviour and habits, socioeconomic conditions, structural barriers, digital environments and organizational influences.

Findings of this study are also consistent with the theoretical frameworks presented.

Health Belief Model explains preventional consumer behavior, increasing health awareness and perceived benefits stemming from a more health oriented approach. However, according to the findings of this study, HBM does not capture companies' strategic role in shaping health trends.

Theory of Planned Behaviour contributes to explaining the formation of positive attitudes, social pressure as a result of broad communication through the increasingly influential channels (e.g. social media, experts) and positive intention. However, TPB does not fully include structural and socioeconomic barriers that could prevent consumers from engaging with healthier choices.

Lastly, Diffusion of Innovations theory includes how trends are spread and adopted to reach the critical mass. At this point it should be mentioned that DOI does not refer to corporate influence on the diffusion of trends leaving this very critical factor out of the picture.

Additionally to the above theories, our findings also suggest that company communication strategies and general market influence, social media effect amplification, globalization

and socioeconomic equalities should also be considered in the analysis of health trends and evolving consumer behaviours.

As revealed by the interviewees, it is now of critical importance for companies to react with speed and agility and monitor trends meticulously through fact-based procedures. More specifically, findings suggest that the challenge for companies to balance consumer wellbeing, commercial viability, operational excellence and scientific credibility is becoming more observable than ever.

Companies should develop products and communication strategies that ensure health is promoted without compromising indulgence while at the same time maintaining affordability and building a trusting relationship with their consumers.

The findings therefore suggest that health trends should be considered as the outcome of a dynamic interaction between consumers, companies and broader socioeconomic environment and they should not solely be addressed as shifts in consumer preferences.

5.3 Limitations of the study and future research recommendations

Despite valuable insights gained by this study, there are some limitations that should be acknowledged.

The study was based on a relatively small sample of six participants, all occupied within food and beverage industry in marketing or commercial roles. The small sample allowed for more depth and substantial discussion but due to its size it cannot be generalized to all industries or populations. Further limitations related to the sample are referred in the chapter 3.3.

The focus on FMCG industry was relevant to the topic of the study, but does not allow for extrapolation to other relative industries (e.g. healthcare or HORECA).

An additional limitation to be addressed is the focus of the study on companies operating in the Greek market. Literature discussed is originated internationally, but interviewees' background, despite almost all of them occupied in multi-national companies, is mainly from the Greek industry. This might make generalization to international food and beverage markets be regarded with caution.

Current research can be expanded and further enhanced by larger participant samples, combination of qualitative with quantitative research or international markets comparison. Moreover, longitudinal research on how health trends and the response of companies evolve through the time could further enlighten and elaborate on the discussed topics.

5.4 Conclusion

The aim of this study was to explore how companies in the food and beverage industry perceive, interpret and act upon the emerging health trends and how these health trends influence consumer behaviour.

The way companies perceive and respond to health trends is a very complex and multi-factor driven procedure. To capture and digest evolving market trends and changes in consumer behaviour, companies leverage a wide variety of information sources. The most significant ones are:

- Research and / or observations from international as well as local markets: US and other larger markets were the most mentioned by the participants, who described them as “health trend incubators” and “early indicators”.
- Observation of consumer behaviour in local markets: Through local research companies can also observe possible changes in consumer behaviour (healthier consumption habits, increasing demand of functional foods, increased awareness for food ingredients and functionalities).
- Social media platforms: TikTok was mentioned as the most influential digital source. More specifically social media were described as having great power to create demand for a specific product at the first place.
- Digital communication environments and influencers: Health-coaches, fitness influencers and relevant online groups and communities are a valuable source of companies to understand and prepare for the upcoming health trends.
- Observation of competitors and innovations: a valuable source for companies can also be the competitive environment and the new product developments that appear in the market. In this case, the dilemma of whether the company should immediately respond or observe results and make a more sophisticated decision often comes up.

Upon deciding whether to respond, companies proceed in various ways:

- Product innovation and reformulation: they adapt their portfolio to meet emerging consumer expectations. Some examples are, removing sugar, salt and preservatives from products, creating “clean label” products, using natural ingredients, enriching products with protein, calcium, fiber, probiotics.
- Communication strategy adaptation: Companies try to keep up with the most popular sources of consumer information. They leverage not only digital platforms referred above, but also scientific and healthcare experts as well as KOLs, with the latter being one of their most significant resources especially form functional and medical nutrition products.
- Internal adaptations: acceleration of product development, R&D optimization and cross functional collaboration excellence are some of the most critical ones for an organization to be able to rapidly respond to emerging health trends.
- Strategic evaluation and risk management: instead of immediately following trends, companies need to evaluate quickly the longevity and commercial potential of health trends through efficient use of the available sources of information.

Additionally this study highlighted that to respond to the emerging health trends and make relevant adaptations, companies should face significant challenges. Interviewees emphasized that organizations operate in rapidly evolving and highly uncertain markets and are asked to make adaptations stemming from the internal and external environment. Regulatory and legal compliance, cross-department collaboration, financial optimization, acceleration of internal processes are some of the key internal challenges. Moreover, companies should also balance healthiness and indulgence, affordability and high quality natural ingredients, while at the same time building trusting relationships with retailers and consumers. The above findings reveal that companies face multidimensional complexity in responding to emerging health trends.

Summarizing, the findings of this study suggest that health trends are not simple dietary preference changes, but a result of the interaction of social, behaviour and environmental factors. Organizations, apart from following health trends, play a pivotal role in shaping them while at the same time being asked to make structural internal and operational adaptations to keep up with the fast paced environment they function within. As health consciousness, consumer awareness and global interconnectedness evolve, the ability of companies to balance healthiness, scientific credibility, operational excellence and

financial viability will become imperative in order to continue growing in the food and beverages landscape.

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Appendix A: Semi-structured interview guide

1. Warm-up (2–3 minutes)

- Can you briefly describe your role and how it relates to product or marketing decisions?

2. Identifying Health Trends (related to Research Question 1)

- When you think about “health trends” in your category, which ones are currently most relevant and why?
- How do these trends typically first appear in your organization? (e.g., consumer data, retailers, competitors, internal insights)

Follow up questions:

- Do you rely more on data (e.g., sales, research) or intuition/experience?
- Are trends usually global? What other sources do you use to evaluate them?

3. Evaluating Trend Relevance for the organization (related to Research Question 2)

- What are the factors you evaluate to decide if the company should act upon a trend?

Follow up questions:

- How do you assess:
 - ✓ Commercial potential vs. hype?
 - ✓ Longevity vs. short-term trend?
 - ✓ Fit with your brand positioning?
- Are there cases where a trend is important for consumers but not viable for your brand?
- How important is it for you to catch upon a trend first in the market?

4. Translating Trends into Action (related to Research Question 3)

- Can you describe a recent example where a health trend influenced:
 - ✓ a product launch, reformulation, or
 - ✓ a marketing campaign?

Follow up questions:

- What changed specifically? (ingredients, claims, messaging, packaging)
- Who was involved internally? (marketing, R&D, regulatory)

- How long did it take from trend identification to execution?
- How did you evaluate success of the adjustment to catch up with the health trend?

5. Health Claims and communication

- Do you communicate health claims? How do you decide if you should do so?
- How do you decide the way of communication (media, on pack, in store)?

Follow up questions:

- What kind of claims are more effective?
- What kind of health claims do you find risky?
- How do you balance:
 - ✓ credibility vs attractiveness
 - ✓ regulation vs marketing creativity
- Have you ever avoided using a health claim? Why?

6. Consumer behaviour & Theory

- To what extent do you think consumers actually change behaviour due to health trends vs just express interest?
- What factors do you observe they use to decide on whether to adopt a new behaviour / new product / innovation?

Follow up questions:

- Do you observe an intention–behaviour gap in your category?
- What factors still dominate over health? (price, taste, convenience)

7. Constraints (internal & external) (related to Research Question 4)

- What are the main challenges when responding to health trends?

Follow up questions:

- Internal barriers: cost, R&D capability, brand fit
- External barriers: regulation (e.g., EFSA), retailer pressure, competition
- Consumer barriers: trust, scepticism, confusion

- What are the actions that the company takes to overcome the aforementioned barriers?

8. Exploring how health trends spread among populations

- In your experience, how do health trends move from niche to mainstream?
- Do you actively target: early adopters vs mass market?
- What signals indicate a trend is becoming mainstream?

9. Closing (strategic & long-term reflection)

- Looking ahead, which health trends do you think will have real long-term impact vs fade out?
- If you could change one thing in how your company responds to health trends, what would it be?

Appendix B: Table of indicative codes and Themes

Number	Participant	Transcript Extract	Initial Codes	Possible Theme	Interview Question	Final Themes
1	P1	«προϊόντα με μειωμένη ή χωρίς προσθήκη ζάχαρης»	Sugar reduction trend; low/no sugar demand; health-conscious consumption	Functional nutrition & preventive health	Major health trends	2. Functional Nutrition and Preventive Health
2	P1	«το νούμερο ένα health trend στην αγορά τροφίμων»	Long-term health trend; dominant market trend	Health trends as long-term lifestyle transformation	General health trends discussion	1. Health Trends as Lifestyle Transformations: switch to overall health and wellbeing
82	P2	«η απόλαυση εξακολουθεί να είναι εξαιρετικά σημαντική»	Taste priority; indulgence dominance	Health vs indulgence tension	General health trends discussion	3. The Intention–Behaviour Gap in Health-Oriented Consumption
83	P2	«το challenge είναι να προσφέρεις healthier επιλογές χωρίς να χάνεται η γεύση»	Health–taste balance; compromise consumption	Health vs indulgence tension	Intention–behaviour gap	3. The Intention–Behaviour Gap in Health-Oriented Consumption
148	P3	«χρειάζεται διαφοροποίηση και σημαντικά resources»	Resource requirements; differentiation strategy	Organizational barriers & strategic adaptation	How companies identify and evaluate trends	5. Organizational Barriers and Strategic Company Adaptation
150	P3	«οι εταιρείες αξιοποιούν αυτές τις ανησυχίες»	Commercialization of health concerns	Companies as trend shapers & educators	General health trends discussion	6. Companies as Trend Setters and Educators
158	P4	«dedicated ρόλος που μελετά trends»	Organizational trend monitoring; structured market intelligence	Organizational response & strategic adaptation	How companies identify and evaluate trends	5. Organizational Barriers and Strategic Company Adaptation

159	P4	«social media λειτουργούν σαν καθρέφτης της καταναλωτικής συμπεριφοράς»	Social media reflection of consumer behaviour	Social media & trend diffusion	Social media influence	4. Social Media, Globalization and Trend Diffusion
204	P5	«social media, body image και wellbeing culture»	Social-media-driven wellbeing; body image influence	Social media & trend diffusion	Social media influence	4. Social Media, Globalization and Trend Diffusion
205	P5	«σκέφτεται τι καύσιμα δίνει στον οργανισμό του»	Functional view of nutrition; body optimization	Functional nutrition & preventive health	Major health trends	2. Functional Nutrition and Preventive Health
246	P6	«functionality, wellbeing και προσωπική φροντίδα»	Functional wellbeing; self-care orientation	Health trends as lifestyle transformation	General health trends discussion	1. Health Trends as Lifestyle Transformations: switch to overall health and wellbeing
247	P6	«gluten-free και lactose-free έχουν έρθει για να μείνουν»	Long-term functional health trends	Functional nutrition & preventive health	Major health trends	2. Functional Nutrition and Preventive Health

Appendix C: Table of Themes and Sub-themes

1. Health Trends as Lifestyle Transformations: switch to overall health and wellbeing
Health as lifestyle transformation
Health consciousness & lifestyle transformation
Health trends as long-term lifestyle transformation
2. Functional Nutrition and Preventive Health
Functional nutrition & preventive health
3. The Intention–Behaviour Gap in Health-Oriented Consumption
Health vs indulgence tension
Intention–behaviour gap
4. Social Media, Globalization and Trend Diffusion
Social media & global trend diffusion
5. Organizational Barriers and Strategic Company Adaptation
Organizational barriers
Strategic uncertainty
Organizational response & strategic adaptation
6. Companies as Trend Setters and Educators
Companies as educators & trust-building
Companies as trend shapers
Health trend credibility & consumer trust

Author's Statement:

I hereby declare that, in accordance with article 8 of Law 1599/1986 and article 2.4.6 par. 3 of Law 1256/1982, this thesis/dissertation is solely a product of personal work and does not infringe any intellectual property rights of third parties and is not the product of a partial or total plagiarism, and the sources used are strictly limited to the bibliographic references.