## CONSUMER MOTIVATION WHEN CHOOSING DRINKS POSITIONED AS HEALTHY

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Given the growing prevalence of nutrition-related diseases (obesity, type 2 diabetes mellitus) in the Russian Federation, medical community and producers of functional and specialized products have been increasingly focused on the category of soft drinks positioned as healthy. This study aimed to identify the key drivers of consumers' choices of soft drinks marketed as healthy. The sample consisted of urban residents (Moscow) aged 18 and above. In June–July 2025, we invited 144 respondents to fill out an online survey and analyzed relevant regulatory documents published in 2023–2025. Five leading drivers of choice were identified: taste (80%), ingredients and naturalness (71%), price (53%), functional effect (51%), and purchase convenience (38%). It was found that the gravity of the price factor is inversely correlated with the respondents' income level ($\chi^2 = 15.3$; $p = 0.0047$). The results of this study confirm that beverage choices are largely driven by hedonic motivations and subsequently rationalized through health-related justifications. Successful integration of functional beverages into consumer practices requires adaptation to the system of consumer rituals and taste expectations.

**Keywords:** functional beverages; consumer choice; healthy diet; sweeteners; purchase drivers; soft drinks; beverage market

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**Compliance with ethical standards:** the study was conducted in accordance with the ethical standards of the Declaration of Helsinki (Fortaleza, 2013). All participants provided voluntary informed consent to participate anonymously in the online survey.

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## МОТИВЫ ПОТРЕБИТЕЛЬСКОГО ВЫБОРА НАПИТКОВ, ПОЗИЦИОНИРУЕМЫХ КАК ПОЛЕЗНЫЕ ДЛЯ ЗДОРОВЬЯ

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В условиях роста распространенности алиментарно-зависимых заболеваний (ожирение, сахарный диабет 2-го типа) в Российской Федерации внимание врачей и производителей функциональных и специализированных продуктов все чаще бывает сосредоточено на категории безалкогольных напитков, позиционируемых как полезные для здоровья. Целью исследования было выявить ключевые детерминанты потребительского выбора безалкогольных напитков, позиционируемых как полезные для здоровья среди городских жителей. В июне–июле 2025 г. методом онлайн-опроса 144 респондентов в сочетании с анализом нормативных документов за 2023–2025 гг. изучены предпочтения и мотивы покупки жителей г. Москвы в возрасте 18 лет и старше. Выявлены пять ведущих мотивов: вкус (80%), состав/натуральность (71%), цена (53%), функциональный эффект (51%), удобство покупки (38%). Установлено, что значимость ценового фактора обратно коррелирует с уровнем дохода респондентов ($\chi^2 = 15{,}3$; $p = 0{,}0047$). Результаты исследования подтверждают преобладание гедонистического фактора, рационализируемого здоровьесберегающей риторикой, при выборе напитков. Успешная интеграция функциональных напитков в потребительские практики требует адаптации к системе потребительских ритуалов и вкусовых ожиданий.

**Ключевые слова:** функциональные напитки, потребительский выбор, здоровое питание, сахарозаменители, мотивы покупки, безалкогольные напитки, рынок напитков

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Current dietary trends in Russia show high consumption of foods with added sugars and fats, along with a deficiency in dietary fiber, vitamins, and minerals [1–4]. In response to public health challenges, including the growing prevalence of obesity, type 2 diabetes mellitus, and metabolic syndrome, the government has tightened nutrition-related legislation: there have been introduced excise taxes on beverages with high added sugar content and strict labeling and advertising rules [5–7]. Against this background, a new market for functional beverages is emerging. In this category, competitive advantage is determined not only by taste but also by consumers' perception of health benefits.

According to epidemiological studies, a significant proportion of the population of the Russian Federation (RF) exceeds the daily sugar intake recommended by the WHO: no more than 10% of total caloric intake, with an optimal target of no more

than 5% [8]. The recommendations of the Ministry of Health of RF suggest a threshold of about 24 kg/year/person (≈ 65 g/day) [9], while the actual mean per capita sugar consumption is estimated at 30–40 kg/year. According to the Ministry of Health, the prevalence of obesity among adults is 24.6%, with higher rates among women, highlighting the urgency of addressing nutrition-related issues.

A diet high in calories but low in nutritional value leads to more overweight and obese individuals, a higher prevalence of cardiovascular diseases, and a shift in dietary patterns toward "fast energy" from simple carbohydrates. The key problem is the lack of a long-term dietary strategy in the population: people prefer to focus on short-term effects (such as weight loss, perceived improvements in health, and enhanced performance, focus, and concentration) rather than on systemic lifestyle changes.

### Trends in sugar content reduction and growth of the sugar substitute market

Starting from July 1, 2023, the RF introduced an excise tax on sugar-containing soft drinks: 7 rubles/liter for products with a sugar content of more than 5 g/100 ml (with some category-level exemptions). The tax is enshrined in Chapter 22 of the Tax Code of the Russian Federation; in 2025, the rate was increased to 10 rubles/l. This policy stimulated manufacturers to switch to sweeteners (sucralose, stevia, erythritol, and aspartame) [5, 6, 10]. However, sugar substitutes have a dual effect: on the one hand, they reduce calorific value of drinks and help to avoid blood glucose spikes, and on the other hand, such products support the preference for sweet foods, which prevents long-term changes in dietary patterns [11–13].

The global trend of reducing the consumption of free sugars has transformed the soft drinks market. In 2024, the sugar-free segment in Russia grew by 22.7% in volume and 49% in monetary value (according to Nielsen). Consumer reports show a growing readiness to pay about 15% more for natural composition and absence of artificial sweeteners [14, 15]. People are increasingly concerned about their health and therefore show interest in healthy drinks that align well with their health improvement goals [14, 16–19].

### Socio-demographic factors influencing the purchase of healthy food products

According to various studies, age and gender are the main characteristics that determine the choice of healthy food and drinks. Women are more likely to prefer healthy products; they buy them regularly, and report a more positive attitude towards such food [2, 20]. Older consumers tend to choose healthy foods and beverages more often than their younger counterparts; they are especially interested in those products that, according to manufacturers, reduce the risk of diseases [21, 22]. Young people are less likely to overpay for healthier food options.

Some studies report a positive relationship between the level of education and willingness to buy foods and beverages with a high content of biologically active substances [16, 23–25]. Another factor directly related to the consumption of functional foods and beverages is income [23, 26].

### Psychological factors influencing the choice of healthy food products

Research suggests that beyond demographic factors, the desire to "feel good" is a strong motivator in choosing healthy foods [14]. The perceived value of personal health is a strong predictor of purchasing behavior, especially in the context of eating out [27, 28]. Health-conscious consumers — for example, those who exercise regularly — are much more likely to purchase healthy drinks, even at the expense of taste.

The key drivers for consumers when choosing healthy drinks are health benefits (low sugar content, added vitamins, natural ingredients), taste (87% of consumers worldwide consider taste to be a decisive factor — FMCG Gurus, 2025), safety and trust in the product, and product attributes and marketing — brand reputation, packaging design, labeling, price sensitivity [26, 29, 30].

This study aimed to identify the key drivers of consumers' choices of soft drinks marketed as healthy among urban residents in Moscow.

## METHODS

### Database compilation

The online survey was conducted among Moscow residents from June to July 2025 via social media. The participants, 18 years of age or older, provided voluntary informed consent to fill out the questionnaire anonymously in Russian. The study included 144 respondents. Inclusion criteria: age 18 and over, residence in Moscow, voluntary consent. Exclusion criteria: age under 18, refusal to participate in the study.

The questionnaire consisted of four sections. Section 1 — socio-demographic characteristics of the respondents, employment and nature of work. Section 2 — information about the participants' dietary habits (preferred drinks in the morning, afternoon, and evening), key outlets where they buy beverages. Section 3 — questions about new functional drinks, the desired effect, as well as the key drivers for their purchase. Section 4 — functional drinks consumed during physical activity, types of drinks, frequency of consumption, and places of purchase.

### Statistical analysis

Statistical data processing was done in IBM SPSS Statistics v. 26 (IBM Corp.; USA). Pearson's chi-squared ($\chi^2$) test was used to compare frequencies in groups with different income levels. The differences were considered significant at $p < 0.05$. The data are presented as absolute and relative frequencies.

## RESULTS

### Socio-demographic characteristics of the sample

The sample comprised 144 people, 92 of whom were women (64%). Most of the participants were 18–24 years old (48% of the sample), the second largest age group — 25–34 years old (40%). By type of employment, the majority of respondents were students (27%), full-time office workers (25%) and employees on a hybrid schedule (23%). Up to 57% of respondents were employed in finance, law, and analytics, 13% in information technology, digital, and design, and 9% in retail and marketing. By income, the respondents were distributed relatively evenly: 11–12% in subgroups "up to 30 thousand rubles/month," "60–100 thousand rubles/month," "100–150 thousand rubles/month," "150–250 thousand rubles/month"; the subgroup with an income of more than 250 thousand rubles/month was 20% of the sample.

**Table 1.** Beverage consumption through the day ($n$ = 144)

| Beverage | Morning (before 10:00) | Daytime (10:00–16:00) | Evening (16:00–21:00) | Night (after 21:00) |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Water | 121 (84%) | 118 (82%) | 115 (80%) | 123 (85%) |
| Coffee | 81 (56%) | 81 (56%) | 19 (13%) | 4 (3%) |
| Tea | 54 (38%) | 80 (56%) | 91 (63%) | 49 (34%) |
| Herbal tea/herbal beverages | 19 (13%) | 28 (19%) | 61 (42%) | 41 (28%) |
| Soda/sugary drinks | 4 (3%) | 41 (28%) | 40 (28%) | 19 (13%) |
| Juices/smoothies | 17 (12%) | 28 (19%) | 21 (15%) | 6 (4%) |
| Milk/vegetable milk | 13 (9%) | 13 (9%) | 8 (6%) | 5 (3%) |
| Functional drinks (for focus, sleep, energy) | 2 (1%) | 6 (4%) | 2 (1%) | 0 |
| Energy drinks | 3 (2%) | 13 (9%) | 6 (4%) | 4 (3%) |
| Alcohol | 3 (2%) | 5 (3%) | 32 (22%) | 22 (15%) |
| Protein/sports drinks | 6 (4%) | 4 (3%) | 11 (8%) | 2 (1%) |
| Fermented drinks (kombucha, kefir, ayran) | 5 (3%) | 6 (4%) | 10 (7%) | 5 (3%) |
| Other | 2 (1%) | 1 (< 1%) | 1 (< 1%) | 5 (3%) |

Most participants — 74% — bought beverages in mid-tier supermarkets (Lenta, Magnit, Pyaterochka, Perekrestok). The second preferred outlet were delivery services Yandex Lavka and Samokat (59%), the third option — VkusVill (46%).

Table 1 summarizes the information on the drinks most frequently consumed during the day. Water is the preferred drink at any time of the day; coffee and tea consumption peaks in the morning and afternoon; carbonated sugary drinks and juices rise up in the afternoon and evening; alcohol is mainly consumed in the evening and at night.

### Analysis of functional drinks

The majority of the respondents categorized protein shakes (69%), isotonic and sports drinks (60%), and herbal teas (60%) as functional beverages. Only 26% of the participants regarded kombucha, fermented drinks, and enhanced soda with vitamins as functional. The most sought-after effects of functional drinks were reinforcement of concentration and attention (52.6%), sleep improvement (44.1%), "a quick boost" (43.4%), digestive support (42.8%), "something light and healthy" (41.4%).

As for the drivers of choice of functional drinks, taste comes first (80%), followed by composition (71%), and price (53%) (Table 2).

Price-wise, the respondents were ready to spend up to 300 rubles (24%), up to 150 rubles (20%), and up to 200 rubles (15%) on a beverage. The gravity of the price factor is significantly lower in the group with an income of more than 250 thousand rubles/month (20.7%) compared with groups with an income of 100–250 thousand rubles/month (66.7%) and less than 60 thousand rubles/month (53.8%) ($\chi^2$ = 17.8; $p$ = 0.0016).

The main negative factors when choosing a drink are unpleasant taste (68%), excessive promises of the manufacturer (46%), and price (45%). The price factor was most often noted by respondents with an income of less than 60 thousand rubles/month (74.4%) and much less often by those with an income of more than 250 thousand rubles/month (31.0%) ($\chi^2$ = 15.3; $p$ = 0.0047).

## DISCUSSION

This study revealed not only the current consumption patterns, but also deep contradictions that condition the functional beverages market in Russia. Data analysis paints a portrait of a modern urban consumer whose choice is shaped by desire to lead a healthy lifestyle, a high pace of life, and hedonistic needs.

The core of the sample (88%) consisted of respondents aged 18–34 years — the generation of millennials and zoomers, for whom being health-conscious is not a trendy affair but a part of life. Female participants formed the majority of the sample (64%), which aligns with global trends: women are the main driving force behind the demand for health and self-care products [2, 20]. These data are consistent with findings from foreign studies that report women being highly knowledgeable about healthy nutrition [20].

More than 50% of respondents work in highly skilled, well-paid professions, which produces two behavioural patterns: high awareness and scepticism (this audience scrutinizes ingredients, seeks evidence, and distrusts marketing claims) and value-oriented consumption (they prefer paying for proven quality, convenience and benefits rather than prioritizing low price). This explains why "price" (53% of respondents), despite its importance, is inferior to "taste" (80% of respondents)

**Table 2.** Drivers of choice of functional drinks ($n$ = 144)

| Driver | Number of positive responses |
|---|---|
| Tastiness | 115 (80%) |
| Composition (natural, proven effect) | 102 (71%) |
| Price | 76 (53%) |
| Effect | 73 (51%) |
| Sold at a convenient location | 55 (38%) |
| Brand confidence | 48 (33%) |
| Form factor (can, shot, powder) | 23 (16%) |
| Packaging | 22 (15%) |

and "composition" (71% of respondents). Similar patterns have been described in foreign studies on samples with a high level of education [16, 23–25].

An analysis of consumption by time of day demonstrates a pattern of rational energy management: morning and afternoon drinks (water, coffee, tea) are aimed at hydration and stimulation of cognitive function, while evening and night drinks (herbal teas, alcohol) are taken to recover and relax. Functional drinks (for concentration, energy, sleep) occupy a narrow niche, which indicates a deep gap between the supply and real consumer habits.

The difference in how consumers perceive the functionality of different categories of drinks deserves special attention. Protein mixes and isotonic drinks are organically integrated into the sports routine: their benefits are understandable to consumers, linked to a specific action, and do not require explanation. The situation with kombucha, prebiotic, and vitamin-enhanced beverages is completely different: despite these products being actively promoted in the media, the majority of respondents perceive them as something "useful in general," without associations with specific effects. The lack of clarity about the function deprives such drinks of value in the eyes of the buyer [17, 19].

Clearly describing the beverage's properties on the label is not enough to guarantee it a place in the customer's daily basket. It is necessary to offer the consumer a clear logic of use — when, why and in what situation to drink it. A product can take root if it starts to integrate into existing consumer habits or forms a new, socially accepted practice in which its benefits become obvious and tangible.

Our findings confirm that it is the taste that determines the initial purchase decision; dislike or lack thereof becomes the main reason for refusal. The composition of the product plays a different role: it does not encourage buying, but removes doubts; the consumer must make sure that the product is "not harmful" before choosing it. As for the distribution channels, most respondents mentioned chain stores and delivery services, which suggests that consumers value convenience: a functional drink should be easily accessible like any everyday product.

The increasing prevalence of alimentary-dependent diseases, along with the introduction of excise taxes on sugar-containing beverages, create a steady demand for expansion of the range of functional and low-calorie alternatives. The development of the healthy drinks market is no longer a job reserved exclusively for commercial companies — it becomes a task for the public healthcare system. In this context, understanding the drivers of consumer choice becomes a necessary basis for developing both product strategies and preventive measures.

The study's main limitation is the sample's lack of representativeness: it is dominated by young, highly educated residents of Moscow recruited through social networks, which biases the results toward an active online audience. In addition, consumption data are self-reported by the respondents and not verified by objective methods. For further research, it is planned to expand the sample.

## CONCLUSIONS

This study allows formulating the following conclusions.

1. The dominant driver for buying functional drinks is taste (80%). The naturalness and composition of the beverage are important for 71% of respondents, but this factor eliminates consumer doubts rather than prompts a choice.

2. The role of price decreases as the respondents' income increases ($p < 0.05$) — this should be taken into account when segmenting the target audience.

3. Kombucha, prebiotic lemonades with dietary fiber, and vitamin-enhanced sodas are inferior to sports drinks and isotonics in terms of consumer confidence. The reason is that the buyer does not have a clear idea of when and why to consume them.

4. The consolidation of functional drinks into consumer behavior is possible only if the product, besides having the claimed benefits, naturally fits the habits, values, and taste preferences of the target audience.

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