

Online Competitor Communication Analysis as a Methodological Tool for Marketing Management Decision-Making: A Case Study from Gastronomy E-Commerce*

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Abstract

This paper develops and demonstrates a six-step methodological procedure for analysing online competitor communication in a sector-specific e-commerce environment. The procedure is intended for marketing managers who need to transform observable online signals into structured evidence for competitor benchmarking and decision-making. The empirical application focuses on the Slovak gastronomy e-commerce market. Customer-oriented search simulation based on twelve query themes identified 15 competitors and 65 company-query occurrences. Four comparable websites—World Gastro & Office, Europapier, Gastrokuchyne.sk and METRO—were subsequently selected through purposive criteria and examined using a standardised SEO audit. The recorded indicators were organised in a case-by-indicator matrix and analysed through within-case profiling, descriptive cross-case F summary statistics and structured managerial interpretation. The overall SEO scores ranged from 54 to 60 points, with a mean of 57. The audited websites displayed different combinations of technical, semantic and trust-related strengths and weaknesses: METRO achieved the strongest reported speed result but the weakest metadata profile, while Europapier obtained the highest overall score but had the largest page size. The main contribution is a transparent and replicable framework that links customer search behaviour, competitor identification, audit measurement and managerial prioritisation. The method can support website optimisation, content planning and marketing resource allocation, particularly in small and medium-sized e-commerce businesses.

Keywords: online competitor analysis; SEO audit; competitor benchmarking; gastronomy e-commerce

Introduction

In digital markets, customers often encounter firms for the first time through search engines, snippets, product category pages, reviews and social media links. For e-commerce companies, online communication is therefore not limited to promotional messages created for campaigns; it also includes the way a website is technically accessible, semantically understandable, visible in search results and connected to other digital touchpoints (Bao et al., 2025; Ahmad et al., 2024). This is especially important in gastronomy e-commerce, where customers may search for products such as packaging materials, hygiene supplies, professional kitchen equipment or gastro tools using practical transactional queries.

Marketing managers frequently monitor competitors, yet this monitoring is often informal. They may compare prices, product categories or visual design, but they rarely use a structured method that links the customer search process with website visibility and communication quality. As a result, decisions about content, website improvement or budget allocation may be based on partial impressions rather than comparable evidence.

The purpose of this paper is to propose and demonstrate a methodological, general and replicable procedure for analysing online competitor communication. Also to demonstrate its application in a specific gastronomy e-

commerce case. The procedure uses search simulation, keyword-based competitor identification, purposive case selection, transparent cross-case interpretation and a standardized SEO audit as a practical case study method. The focus is not only on ranking websites, but on showing how online signals can be interpreted for marketing management decision-making.

The paper addresses the following research question: How can a structured case study procedure be used to analyse, collect, process and interpret online communication of competitors and transform SEO-related observations into managerial insights?

Theoretical background

Competitor analysis is a core activity of marketing management because it supports market positioning, resource allocation and the identification of strategic gaps. In online environments, competitor analysis increasingly depends on publicly observable digital traces: search result visibility, website snippets, keyword relevance, page structure, social media connections and linking patterns. These traces represent not only technical properties of a website but also the way a firm communicates its market offer to search engines and potential customers (Ahmad et al., 2024; Hmdy, 2021).

Search engine optimization (SEO) can be interpreted as a communication interface between a firm, a search engine and the user. Titles, meta descriptions and snippets communicate relevance before the user visits the website (Hmdy, 2021; Sezer Çirakoğlu and Koşaner, 2024). Website structure, internal links and category pages communicate product scope and information hierarchy as also supported by Mahmutovic (2024) and Aryani et al. (2023). Local and social signals communicate trust, reputation and accessibility in line with Bataineh et al. (2025) and Mladenović et al. (2023). For marketing managers, these elements can be used as measurable indicators of how competitors present themselves in the digital environment.

Existing SEO literature often separates technical SEO, content SEO and local or off-page SEO. Bataineh et al. (2025) and Kyzy and Ismailova (2024) link technical SEO with crawlability, loading speed, mobile readiness, technical accessibility and security. Content SEO focuses on titles, meta descriptions, keyword relevance, text structure and the alignment of content with search intent as discussed by Sezer Çirakoğlu and Koşaner (2024), Mahmutovic (2024) and Nagpal and Petersen (2021). Local and off-page SEO include social media presence, links, reviews, location-based information and authority signals which Mladenović et al. (2023), Roumeliotis et al. (2022). A managerial interpretation of these areas requires moving beyond isolated metrics toward structured benchmarking supported by SEOnastroj (2025) and the SEO effectiveness synthesis by Usmany et al. (2024).

From a broader perspective, the problem addressed by this study is rooted in the shift from isolated online promotion to continuous digital discoverability. Shankar et al. (2022) show that online food and hospitality-related markets are increasingly shaped by digital ordering and platform-based search behaviour, while Fubel et al. (2023) demonstrate that SERP features influence organic click-through behaviour beyond simple ranking positions. E-commerce firms are increasingly evaluated before the first direct contact takes place, because users form expectations from search rankings, SERP snippets, mobile loading experience, website architecture, reviews and visible trust cues. Ologunbe and Taiwo (2023) further emphasise that SEO and SEM contribute to brand visibility in e-commerce. In this sense, SEO is not only a traffic-acquisition technique but also a managerial mechanism through which the firm makes its offer findable, interpretable and comparable in the digital market.

The current development of SEO also shows a transition from narrow keyword optimisation toward a more integrated view of visibility. Search engines increasingly depend on mobile versions of websites for crawling, indexing and ranking, while page experience metrics such as loading performance, interactivity and visual stability are used as indicators of user experience quality (Google Search Central, 2025; Google Search Central, 2026). At the same time, the continued growth of online purchasing in Europe strengthens the practical importance of monitoring digital touchpoints, because a larger share of customer journeys begins with search or comparison activity before purchase as documented by Eurostat (2026).

For gastronomy e-commerce, these general trends create a funnel from the broad digital environment to a concrete managerial measurement problem. Businesses selling gastro supplies, packaging, hygiene products or equipment must be visible for transactional queries, but visibility depends on several mutually connected layers: technical accessibility, semantic clarity of content, structured product navigation and trust or authority signals. Bansal (2024), Ghattas et al. (2025), Roumeliotis and Tselikas (2023), and Matošević et al. (2021) support the use of website performance indicators, SEO audit outputs, keyword relevance, link architecture and benchmarking as observable proxies of digital communication quality.

Consequently, the present methodology translates the theoretical SEO dimensions into a practical audit framework. The first layer defines the relevant market and the managerial problem related to online competitor

visibility. The second layer identifies visible competitors from the customer perspective through search simulation based on selected transactional and product-related keywords. The third layer records the companies appearing repeatedly in the search results and uses their frequency of occurrence as an initial relevance indicator. The fourth layer filters comparable competitors according to sectoral relevance, Slovak-language website availability, e-commerce functionality and Slovak market orientation. The fifth layer evaluates the selected websites through a standardised audit of technical accessibility, semantic communication and trust-related signals. The sixth layer processes the recorded indicators through within-case profiling and descriptive cross-case comparison and interprets the identified strengths and weaknesses as managerial improvement priorities. This funnel logic links the general problem of online visibility with a replicable case-study procedure that can support marketing decisions rather than remain a purely technical SEO exercise.

Methodology

This study is designed as a methodological case study. Following Al Qur'an (2025), the empirical material is used to demonstrate the procedure rather than to produce statistically generalisable findings. The selected market is the Slovak gastronomy e-commerce environment, where several firms operate with comparable product portfolios and target both professional gastronomy establishments and end customers represented by *Gastrokuchyne.sk* (2026), *METRO* (2026), *Europapier* (2026) and *World Gastro & Office (WGO)* (2026).

The implementation assumption behind the method is that the analysed companies must have a publicly accessible website, an identifiable product or service scope, searchable content in the language of the target market and comparable online touchpoints. This assumption is supported by Wojtaszek et al. (2025) for document/language consistency, Martí-Testón et al. (2025) for active online communication presence, Ali et al. (2021) for online ordering functionality and Irawan et al. (2025) for national-market delimitation in e-commerce research. Without these prerequisites, indicators such as titles, snippets, loading performance, internal links or social signals cannot be interpreted consistently across cases or compared using a standard SEO audit tool such as *SEOnastroj* (2025) and audit approaches described by Roumeliotis and Tselikas (2023).

The method consists of six steps: (1) defining the market and managerial problem; (2) simulating customer search behaviour; (3) identifying relevant competitors; (4) selecting comparable cases using purposive criteria; (5) conducting a structured audit of online communication elements; and (6) processing and analysing the collected audit data. Each step is described below so that the procedure can be replicated in other e-commerce contexts in line with the methodological case-study protocol of Al Qur'an (2025), the standardised audit basis of *SEOnastroj* (2025), and the long-term SEO measurement logic of Erdmann et al. (2022).

Step 1: Defining the market and managerial problem

The analysed environment includes companies offering gastronomy supplies, equipment, packaging materials, hygiene and chemistry products, paper goods, office-gastro supplies and related consumables. From a managerial perspective, these companies compete not only through product assortment and price, but also through findability and the clarity of online presentation. The central managerial problem is how to identify which competitors are visible for relevant customer searches and which online communication elements support or weaken their market position. The results are shown in Table 1.

Step 2: Simulating customer search behaviour

Customer-oriented searches were conducted in Google.sk from 26 to 28 November 2024 using anonymous browser mode (incognito). The actual queries were entered in Slovak; English equivalents are reported below for international readability. Anonymous mode reduced the influence of cookies and previous browsing history, although it could not eliminate time- and location-related variation in search results. This procedure ensured maximum objectivity of the analysis. The queries combined generic and transactional intent, consistent with the keyword characteristics discussed by Nagpal and Petersen (2021). Nagpal and Petersen (2021) provide the theoretical support for keyword selection based on relevance and search intent, while Lewandowski et al. (2021) justify attention to how users encounter and interpret search-engine results.

The search simulation of the chosen companies consisted of using relevant keywords that a customer would naturally use when looking for suppliers for gastronomy operations. These keywords covered a wide range of products, materials, and services, including advisory services related to selecting suitable equipment. The selection of keywords should reflect what potential customers actually search for in order for the SEO analysis to be practically meaningful. Nagpal and Petersen (2021) recommend starting with terms that represent the products or services customers genuinely seek, cover different search intents (e.g., general keywords as well as long-tail keywords), and are relevant to the specific location and market segment (Slovakia). The twelve query themes were: *gastro supplies*; *gastro tools*; *office and gastro supplies*; *hygiene and chemistry*; *the cheapest gastro supplies*; *gastro assortment*; *gastro and office supplies company*; *delivery of gastro and office supplies*;

gastro supplies Slovakia; packaging materials for gastro; hygienic supplies for restaurants; and gastro supplies supplier.

The selected keywords cover the main product categories and combine both general and specific transactional phrases, reflecting the diverse stages of customer decision-making in the digital environment. As a result, the analysis captures real user behavior when searching for gastronomy equipment and supplies.

In both SEO research and practice, it is emphasized that keyword selection should be based on query relevance, specificity, competition, and user intent—precisely the factors addressed by simulating customer search behavior. Such a framework is described by Nagpal and Petersen (2021) in their peer-reviewed article on keyword selection strategies, in which the authors develop an empirical model for keyword selection based on search queries and organic click-through data.

Step 3: Identifying competitors

Companies appearing repeatedly for the selected keywords were recorded. The procedure followed a realistic customer logic: because most users rarely move far beyond the first search results, the first page was prioritised and the second page was used when the first page was dominated by advertisements, directories or insufficiently relevant results. This decision is supported by Lewandowski et al. (2021), who analyse the influence of SEO on Google result visibility and show why search-result position and presentation are important for online discoverability. Approximately fifty businesses were screened, while fifteen were initially listed as possible competitors. The frequency of appearance across keywords served as the first relevance signal. The full analysis of the competitor identification results can be seen in Table 2.

Step 4: Selecting comparable cases

Criterion-based purposive sampling was applied to ensure comparability. Companies had to operate in the gastronomy supply segment, maintain an active Slovak-language website, include functional e-commerce elements and target the Slovak market. These criteria reflect established screening logic in digital and e-commerce research: language and document consistency are supported by Wojtaszek et al. (2025), active online presence by Martí-Testón et al. (2025), e-commerce functionality by Ali et al. (2021), and national-market delimitation by Irawan et al. (2025). Four websites met the criteria and were selected for the demonstrative audit (sample N=4): WGO (2026), Europapier (2026), Gastrokuchyne.sk (2026) and METRO (2026). These cases differ in company size and digital maturity but remain comparable in relation to the analysed market. The aim was to ensure homogeneity of the case for analytical comparison, not statistical representativeness.

Step 5: Auditing online communication elements

The standardized audit was conducted on 23 February 2025 using SEOnastroj (2025), an online SEO audit tool. The tool provided standardized measurements that enabled comparison across websites. The main Slovak homepage URL of each company was submitted under the same procedure and the generated report was recorded as a measurement snapshot. Standardized audit tools are suitable for identifying source-code and performance factors in a comparable format, although their outputs remain tool-dependent (Roumeliotis et al., 2022; Roumeliotis and Tselikas, 2023).

For the purposes of this methodological article, the indicators were grouped into three communication-relevant dimensions: technical accessibility, content and semantic communication, and local/off-page communication signals. The grouping follows the SEO dimensions discussed by Bataineh et al. (2025), Kyzy and Ismailova (2024), Mladenović et al. (2023), Roumeliotis et al. (2022), Nagpal and Petersen (2021) and Usmany et al. (2024).

Technical accessibility included URL length, favicon, 404 page, page size, load time, speed score, domain availability and safe browsing. These indicators are supported by Bataineh et al. (2025) and Kyzy and Ismailova (2024). The results are shown in Table 3 of chosen companies. Content and semantic communication included title length, meta description length, snippet wording, frequent terms, indexed pages and backlinks. These indicators follow the content relevance perspective of Hmdy (2021), Sezer Çirakoğlu and Koşaner (2024), Mahmutovic (2024) and Nagpal and Petersen (2021). Local/off-page communication included social media presence and the number of links on the website, numbers of indexed pages and backlinks, the presence of Facebook, Instagram and Twitter/X profiles, and the number of internal and external links detected on the audited page. These signals are supported by Mladenović et al. (2023) and Roumeliotis et al. (2022). The results are shown in Table 4 for semantic and trust/off-page audit metrics of chosen companies. These groups reflect established audit dimensions covering page structure, performance, content and link structure (Kyzy and Ismailova, 2024; Roumeliotis et al., 2022; Roumeliotis and Tselikas, 2023). The interpretation focused on managerial meaning: whether the website is easy to access, whether it communicates its offer clearly in search results and whether it provides trust and authority signals. The results are shown in Table 5.

Step 6: Data processing and analysis

Each audit report was transcribed into a case-by-indicator matrix in which rows represented the four analysed websites and columns represented the recorded SEO indicators. Binary indicators, including favicon availability, custom 404 page, safe-browsing status and social-platform presence, were coded as 1 = present and 0 = absent for analytical purposes and were subsequently presented as Yes/No or Y/N in the results tables. Numerical indicators were retained in their original units, including characters, kilobytes, seconds, the 0–100 speed score and link counts. Title and meta-description lengths were recorded as numerical character counts, while snippet summaries and selected frequent terms were retained as textual outputs. The overall 0–100 SEO score was copied directly from SEOnastroj; it was not calculated, weighted or modified by the authors.

The analysis proceeded in two stages. First, a within-case profile was prepared for each website across the three analytical dimensions: technical accessibility, semantic communication and trust-related communication. Second, the four website profiles were compared descriptively. The arithmetic mean was calculated for the overall SEO score and page size, while the median was additionally calculated for page size because the values included substantial differences between cases. Minimum, maximum and range were reported for the overall SEO score. Counts and proportions were used for binary and categorical indicators, such as speed-score categories, metadata availability, safe-browsing status and social-media presence. The remaining indicators were compared directly across the four websites and interpreted in relation to website-specific strengths, weaknesses and managerial improvement priorities.

Inferential statistical tests were not applied because the purposive sample consisted of only four cases and the objective of the study was methodological demonstration rather than statistical generalisation. Tables 3 and 4 present the recorded audit values, while Table 5 translates combinations of indicators into managerial implications. Tool-specific anomalies, including unusually low page-size values and identical zero values for indexed pages and backlinks, were retained for transparency but interpreted cautiously because they were not independently validated (Al Qur'an, 2025; SEOnastroj, 2025; Roumeliotis and Tselikas, 2023).

Results

Table 1 provides a condensed overview of the transition from market observation to the final case sample. It is a process map: the first five rows describe how the cases and measurements were obtained, while the sixth row states how the recorded outputs were transformed into comparable evidence. Its purpose is not to describe the full data collection process, but to demonstrate the decision logic behind the construction of the analytical sample. By combining visibility in customer-oriented search results with comparability criteria, the table establishes the empirical basis for the subsequent audit and ensures that the analysed websites are evaluated within a coherent competitive context.

Table 1: Demonstrative sample selection and analysis logic

Step	Managerial question	Operational decision
Market delimitation	Which competitors are relevant?	Slovak gastronomy e-commerce firms offering supplies, packaging, hygiene and equipment.
Search simulation	How would customers find suppliers?	Anonymous Google.sk searches using transactional and product-related keywords.
Initial competitor list	Which firms appear repeatedly?	Firms appearing on first or second search result pages were recorded.
Purposive filtering	Which firms are comparable?	Sector fit, Slovak-language active website, e-commerce functionality and Slovak market targeting.
Standardised website audit	Which cases can be audited?	WGO, Europapier, Gastrokuchyne.sk and METRO.
Data processing and analysis	How are audit outputs converted into evidence?	Case-by-indicator matrix, explicit coding, within-case profiles and cross-case descriptive comparison.

Table 2 presents the results of the customer-oriented search simulation and shows which companies appeared for each of the twelve selected search-query themes. It connects the keyword-selection stage with the identification of visible competitors in the Slovak gastronomy e-commerce market. Each row records the search queries for which a particular company was identified on the first or, where necessary, the second page of Google.sk search results. Companies that did not appear for any of the selected queries were retained in the table to document the full screening process and to make the competitor-identification procedure transparent.

The search simulation identified 15 distinct companies and produced 65 company-query occurrences across the twelve query themes. WGO achieved the broadest search visibility, appearing for all twelve query themes. Gastrokuchyne.sk and Gastrotovar each appeared for eleven queries, followed by Majster Papier with seven and Gastrozone with six. Europapier appeared for five queries, while METRO was identified for three. Several companies showed only limited visibility, and Lamitec, Dimarko and Gastrobox did not appear for any of the selected queries. These results indicate substantial differences in search visibility among firms operating in the same market segment.

The frequency of appearance was used as an initial relevance indicator rather than as the sole selection criterion. The final audit sample was determined through the purposive filtering criteria described in the methodology, including sectoral comparability, an active Slovak-language website, e-commerce functionality and targeting of the Slovak market. On this basis, WGO, Europapier, Gastrokuchyne.sk and METRO were selected for the subsequent standardized SEO audit.

Table 2: Selection of Keywords and Companies

Companies	Keyword
Gastrokuchyne.sk	Gastro supplies, Gastro tools, Office and gastro supplies, Hygiene and chemistry, The cheapest gastro supplies, Gastro assortment, Gastro and office supplies company, Gastro supplies Slovakia, Packaging materials for gastro, Hygienic supplies for restaurants, Gastro supplies supplier
Europapier	Gastro supplies, Gastro tools, Office and gastro supplies, The cheapest gastro supplies, Delivery of gastro and office supplies
World Gastro & Office (WGO)	Gastro supplies, Gastro tools, Office and gastro supplies, Hygiene and chemistry, The cheapest gastro supplies, Gastro and office supplies company, Delivery of gastro and office supplies, Gastro supplies Slovakia, Packaging materials for gastro, Hygienic supplies for restaurants, Gastro supplies supplier
METRO	Gastro supplies, The cheapest gastro supplies, Gastro assortment, Hygienic supplies for restaurants
Lamitec	Office and gastro supplies, Gastro and office supplies company, Delivery of gastro and office supplies
Dimarko	The company did not appear for any of the selected keywords.
Eden Hygiena	The company did not appear for any of the selected keywords.
Gastrobox (Weopack)	Office and gastro supplies
Majster Papier	The company did not appear for any of the selected keywords.
Gastrotovar	Gastro supplies, Gastro tools, The cheapest gastro supplies, Gastro assortment, Gastro supplies Slovakia, Hygienic supplies for restaurants, Gastro supplies supplier
Gastrozone	Gastro supplies, Gastro tools, Office and gastro supplies, Hygiene and chemistry, The cheapest gastro supplies, Gastro assortment, Gastro and office supplies company, Gastro supplies Slovakia, Packaging materials for gastro, Hygienic supplies for restaurants, Gastro supplies supplier
Gastrohygiene.sk	Gastro supplies, Gastro tools, The cheapest gastro supplies, Gastro assortment, Gastro and office supplies company, Gastro supplies Slovakia
Gastrobal	Office and gastro supplies
Gastro - Haal	Gastro tools, Gastro assortment, Gastro supplies supplier
Torbia	Gastro tools, Gastro assortment
Cora gastro	Gastro supplies, The cheapest gastro supplies, Gastro supplies supplier

Tables 3 and 4 report the audit data before managerial interpretation. Table 3 captures the technical performance snapshot and the tool-derived overall score; Table 4 records the semantic and trust/off-page signals. Reporting these values separately prevents the composite score from obscuring different combinations of strengths and weaknesses.

Table 3: Technical audit metrics recorded on 23 February 2025

Website	URL (chars)	Page size (kB)	Load time (s)	Speed score	Favicon / 404 / safe	Overall score
WGO	3	316	0.78	0/100 (slow)	Yes / Yes / trustworthy	57
Europapier	10	1257	0.96	0/100 (slow)	Yes / Yes / trustworthy	60
Gastrokuchyne.sk	13	543	0.22	0/100 (slow)	Yes / Yes / trustworthy	54
METRO	5	4	0.07	87/100 (fast)	Yes / Yes / trustworthy	57

Note: Speed categories and the overall SEO score are outputs of SEOnastroj (2025); the overall score was not recomputed by the authors.

Table 4: Semantic and trust/off-page audit metrics

Website	Title / meta (chars)	Snippet / thematic signal	Frequent terms (selected)	Indexed / backlinks	Social FB/IG/X	Links on audited page
WGO	51 / 172	Office, gastro and packaging wholesale	buy, supplies, cookies, discount, office, hygiene	0 / 0	Y / Y / N	125
Europapier	76 / 149	Paper, packaging, hygiene and gastro	ecological, paper, gastro, packaging, supplies	0 / 0	Y / Y / N	0
Gastrokuchyne.sk	50 / 135	Gastro and professional restaurant equipment	view, gastro, in stock, cart, refrigeration	0 / 0	Y / Y / N	259
METRO	3 / 0	No meta-description signal in the report	only, team, experts, access	0 / 0	Y / Y / N	0

Note: Indexed pages, backlinks and link counts are tool-reported snapshot values. They were not independently validated through Search Console or another backlink database.

The overall scores had a mean of 57 points, a minimum of 54, a maximum of 60 and a range of 6 points. The mean page size was 530 kB and the median was 429.5 kB; the difference was driven mainly by Europapier (1,257 kB) and the very small METRO output (4 kB). Three of the four websites (75%) received a 0/100 slow speed result, while METRO received 87/100. All four reports detected a favicon, a custom 404 page and trustworthy safe-browsing status. Three websites contained substantive title and meta-description signals, whereas METRO had a three-character title and no meta description. All four linked to Facebook and Instagram and none to Twitter/X.

The audit returned zero indexed pages and zero backlinks for every website. Because identical zeros across all cases may reflect data-source or access limitations, these fields were retained for transparency but were not interpreted as proof that the websites were absent from search indexes or had no external links. Similarly, the numbers of links refer only to links detected on the audited page, not to the complete site architecture.

The demonstration confirms that the proposed method can reveal differences that are not visible from a superficial website comparison in Table 5. METRO showed the strongest technical speed profile, with an extremely small page size and high speed score. However, it lacked basic content optimisation, including a meaningful title and meta description. Europapier achieved the highest overall score because of strong semantic and content indicators, but its page size was substantially above the recommended value, which may reduce mobile performance. WGO showed a balanced profile with good page size and acceptable metadata, but its frequent terms included several irrelevant expressions. Gastrokuchyne.sk had rich linking but weaker technical and semantic performance. The interpretation of these audit outputs is based on the measurement logic of SEOnastroj (2025).

Table 5: Managerial interpretation derived from the recorded metrics

Website	Main strength	Main weakness	Managerial implication
Europapier	Clear semantic communication and strong metadata and score (60).	Large page size and slow speed score result.	Preserve content quality, but optimise technical performance and mobile loading.
WGO	Balanced technical foundation, metadata profile and suitable page size.	Irrelevant or generic (low-value) frequent terms weaken topical clarity.	Improve product category texts and remove low-value textual noise.
METRO	Excellent technical speed result and very small page size.	Almost no meaningful title, meta description or thematic content.	Add page-level metadata and content signals to support search relevance.
Gastrokuchyne.sk	High number of links and product-related terms.	Weak speed score and excessive navigational terms.	Improve semantic structure and reduce low-value repetitive elements.

The audit therefore illustrates an important managerial point: online communication performance is multi-dimensional. A technically fast website may still fail to communicate topical relevance, while a content-rich website may be weakened by technical inefficiency. Similarly, a large number of links does not automatically mean strong authority if the links do not contribute to search visibility or trust. This interpretation is consistent with Sezer Çirakoğlu and Koşaner (2024) on content quality, Bataineh et al. (2025) on user-experience-oriented SEO, Roumeliotis et al. (2022) on link and traffic indicators, and Usmany et al. (2024) on SEO effectiveness.

These results can be interpreted through three analytical frames derived from the literature: technical accessibility, semantic communication and trust-related communication. The technical frame explains whether the website can be accessed, loaded and processed efficiently. The semantic frame explains whether the website communicates a clear product offer to search engines and users. The trust-related frame captures whether social and link signals support credibility and navigation. The author allocation behind these frames is as follows: Bataineh et al. (2025), Kyzy and Ismailova (2024), Bansal (2024), Ghattas et al. (2025) and Xilogianni et al. (2022) support the technical frame; Hmdy (2021), Sezer Çirakoğlu and Koşaner (2024), Mahmutovic (2024), Nagpal and Petersen (2021) and Fubel et al. (2023) support the semantic frame; and Mladenović et al. (2023), Roumeliotis et al. (2022), Chen and Sénéchal (2023) and Xia and Ha (2023) support the trust-related frame. Together, the frames make it possible to transform SEO outputs into managerial categories rather than isolated technical scores.

The findings also show that the proposed framework is useful for identifying different improvement paths. Europapier requires primarily performance optimisation, METRO requires basic on-page and semantic optimisation, WGO requires refinement of topical relevance and product-category communication, and Gastrokuchyne.sk requires a combination of technical and semantic restructuring. In managerial terms, the same overall visibility problem therefore leads to different implementation priorities for each competitor.

Discussion

The proposed procedure is useful because it links the user search process with competitor intelligence. Instead of beginning with internal assumptions about competitors, the method starts with how potential customers search for products. This makes the competitor set more realistic and prevents managers from analysing the firms they already know.

For marketing management, the method supports at least four types of decisions. First, it supports market visibility assessment by identifying competitors that repeatedly appear for relevant search phrases. Second, it supports website improvement prioritisation by separating technical, semantic and trust-related problems. Third, it supports content planning by identifying gaps between product offer and search-result communication. Fourth, it supports benchmarking by allowing managers to compare their own website with competitors using the same criteria. These decision areas are supported by SEOnastroj (2025), Usmany et al. (2024) and Erdmann et al. (2022), who emphasise the role of measurable SEO indicators, performance comparison and long-term optimisation logic.

The case also shows that digital maturity is not identical with firm size. A large and well-known company may have strong infrastructure but weak search-result communication. Conversely, smaller or specialised firms may communicate their offer more clearly but lack authority signals or technical optimisation. This finding is important for SMEs, because it suggests that targeted improvements in metadata, page structure and content relevance can create competitive advantages even without large advertising budgets.

The proposed framework has several advantages. It begins with customer search behaviour rather than with a predefined internal competitor list, which increases the practical relevance of the analysed sample. It also combines quantitative audit outputs with qualitative managerial interpretation, enabling managers to distinguish between speed problems, content problems and trust-signal problems. Finally, it is inexpensive and replicable, which is important for SMEs that may not have access to advanced analytics departments. This advantage is consistent with Al Qur'an (2025) on case-study procedure, SEOnastroj (2025) as a practical audit tool, Usmany et al. (2024) and Erdmann et al. (2022) on SEO effectiveness and long-term strategy, Roumeliotis and Tselikas (2023) on audit software, and Civelek et al. (2020) on online marketing practices in Central European SMEs.

However, the framework also has disadvantages. It simplifies a complex search environment into a limited set of observable indicators and depends on the output logic of a selected SEO audit tool. It does not directly measure conversions, customer satisfaction, profitability or the long-term effect of SEO actions. Therefore, the limitations must be interpreted in light of Usmany et al. (2024) and Erdmann et al. (2022), who treat SEO as a measurable but long-term process, and in light of Ghattas et al. (2025) and Matošević et al. (2021), who show that website-performance and classification metrics require careful methodological interpretation. The method therefore should be understood as a diagnostic and benchmarking tool, not as a complete evaluation of marketing performance.

The implementation of the framework requires several practical conditions: stable access to the analysed websites, defined market-relevant keywords, consistent search settings, transparent purposive sampling criteria, a standardized audit tool, and managerial interpretation by people who understand both website structure and customer search intent. Nagpal and Petersen (2021) support the keyword-relevance requirement, Lewandowski et al. (2021) support the search-result logic, Al Qur'an (2025) supports transparent case-study procedure, SEOnastroj (2025) provides the audit-tool basis, Erdmann et al. (2022) supports repeated SEO measurement, and Google Search Central (2025, 2026) explains why technical and mobile indicators should be monitored over time. Repeated measurement is also recommended, because search results and website performance may change after algorithm updates, competitor activity, technical redesigns or seasonal demand shifts.

The limitations of the study are therefore methodological rather than incidental. The case study uses a small number of audited websites, focuses on one national market and relies on one SEO audit tool. One SEO audit tool also limits the interpretation, because different tools may calculate composite scores differently. The search simulation was conducted at a specific point in time; search results may change due to seasonality, algorithm updates, advertising activity or changes in competitors websites. These limitations correspond to Lewandowski et al. (2021) on variability in search results, Al Qur'an (2025) on the boundaries of case-study generalisation, SEOnastroj (2025) as a single audit-tool basis, Erdmann et al. (2022) on long-term SEO dynamics and Matošević et al. (2021) on the need for careful interpretation of SEO-related classification and measurement outputs. The purpose of the article is therefore methodological demonstration rather than population-level estimation.

The empirical findings are bounded by a small purposive sample ($N = 4$), one national and linguistic market, one audit date and one SEO tool. The audit was homepage-level and did not crawl all product and category pages. The extreme METRO page-size value and the common zero values for indexed pages and backlinks were not independently validated, which limits their substantive interpretation. Anonymous browsing reduced but did not eliminate personalisation and location effects. No inferential statistics or causal claims were appropriate, and the rankings should be read as a time-specific demonstration of the method rather than a representative assessment of the Slovak gastronomy sector.

Conclusion

This paper proposed a general six-step diagnostic procedure and demonstrated it in a specific Slovak gastronomy e-commerce case. The method identifies visible competitors, filters comparable cases, records standardized audit metrics, processes them in a case-by-indicator matrix and combines within-case with cross-case interpretation. The procedure is transferable; the observed company profiles and rankings are case- and time-bound.

This paper examined online competitor communication from a general SEO perspective and narrowed it to a methodological framework for gastronomy e-commerce. SEO was treated as an integrated system of technical, content, and local/off-page components. Technical SEO ensures crawlability, indexability, and usability; content SEO communicates relevance via titles, descriptions, snippets, metadata, headings, keywords, and product-category information; local/off-page SEO builds credibility through social, link, review, and authority signals. The application confirms that online competitor communication should not be reduced to one composite score. Technical accessibility, semantic communication and trust/off-page signals may point in different directions.

Reporting raw metrics alongside the interpretation makes these trade-offs visible and allows managers to understand why websites with similar scores require different actions.

Trends show these components cannot be managed separately. Mobile-first indexing, page experience indicators, richer SERP environments, online purchasing growth and the increasing role of analytics imply that firms should continuously monitor website indicators rather than treating SEO as a one-time activity. Monitoring page speed, metadata, indexability, backlinks, internal links, and trust signals is therefore essential for assessing whether the online offer is technically accessible, semantically clear, and managerially competitive.

Three analytical frames—technical accessibility, semantic communication, and trust-related signals—were applied through a stepwise case-study procedure: market delimitation, customer search simulation, competitor identification, purposive filtering, and standardized audit interpretation. Results showed Slovak gastronomy competitors differ in both SEO performance and types of weaknesses: some are technically strong but semantically weak, others communicate well but face performance or linking issues.

For the four selected websites, scores ranged from 54 to 60 points (mean = 57). METRO had the strongest speed result but the weakest metadata signal; Europapier communicated its thematic offer most clearly but had the largest page size; WGO showed a balanced profile with weaker topical clarity; and Gastrokuchyne.sk combined many detected links with weaker technical and semantic results. These findings describe the audited cases only.

The framework's main advantage is its practical usability: it helps managers identify competitors, benchmark indicators, and prioritize improvements according to the type of weakness and its practical traceability from customer query to managerial priority. Its main disadvantage is that it remains a diagnostic framework: it does not directly measure sales, customer loyalty, profitability or causal SEO effects over time. Therefore, it should be implemented alongside web analytics, repeated audits, conversion data and managerial evaluation of business objectives.

Implementation requires clearly defined market boundaries, relevant transactional keywords, comparable websites, active e-commerce functionality, access to a standardized audit tool, and internal capability to translate audit results into content, technical and communication actions. When these conditions are met, the framework can support website redesign, content planning, competitor benchmarking and SEO resource allocation in small and medium-sized e-commerce businesses. Future research should test the framework on larger samples, across different countries and with repeated measurements that connect SEO indicators to traffic, conversion and brand-performance outcomes.

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