

# Title Market Expansion of Protein-Based Dairy Products in Middle Eastern Countries: Opportunities, Challenges, and Competitive Strategies

**Ivan ANGELOV**

*Sofia University "St. Kliment Ohridski", Faculty of Economics and Business Administration,  
Sofia, Bulgaria  
ivanangel@feb.uni-sofia.bg*

**Karim ALAEDDINE**

*Sofia University "St. Kliment Ohridski", Faculty of Economics and Business Administration,  
Sofia, Bulgaria  
alaeddinekarim@gmail.com*

**Abstract.** *The global dairy industry has been changing dramatically since health, functionality, and performance-oriented nutrition have become the primary consumers' choices. One of these trends is that of protein-fortified dairy items, especially high-protein yoghurt, labneh and fermented milk beverages. The present paper follows a qualitative, exploratory design founded on secondary research to critically analyze the market growth of the products of protein-based dairy in the Middle East countries. The analysis will be based on peer-reviewed academic literature, doctoral research, and industry reports to combine perspectives of nutritional science, consumer behaviour, food technology and market strategy. The results show that the increase in the production of protein-based dairy is due to the increasing health awareness, change of lifestyle and the importation of the Western protein-based trends, which are promoted due to the cultural internalization of yoghurt and labneh in the local diet. The paper determines the main opportunities of culturally modified product lines, differentiated pricing strategies, and channeled distribution, and underlines the role of sensory quality, affordability, and confidence-building as a priority.*

**Keywords:** Protein-Based Dairy, High-Protein Yogurt, Middle East Dairy Market, Functional Foods, Consumer Behavior, Dairy Innovation, Competitive Strategy.

## Introduction

The global dairy industry is undergoing structural change due to shifting consumer priorities toward health, functionality, and performance-based nutrition. One of the most noticeable ones is the rapid growth of protein-rich milk products, especially yoghurts, labneh, and fermented milk drinks, designed to provide higher protein levels than normal (Figure 1). This change corresponds to broader dietary shifts in which protein has become a key nutritional factor for satiety, body weight, muscle retention, and metabolic health (Ortega et al., 2024; Giacone, 2024). Although protein fortification is a well-studied industry in Western markets, its strategic growth and market prospects in Middle Eastern countries are under-researched, notwithstanding the region's high dependence on its cultural products.



**Figure 1. Protein-Rich Milk Products**

Source: IFF, 2024.

The recent data show that consumers are shifting towards non-conventional dietary habits, and the Mediterranean diet towards more protein-focused food options, which are viewed as modern, functional, and consistent with active lifestyles (Vaccaro et al., 2024). In several areas, high-protein processed foods have been taking an increasing share of daily energy intake, raising concerns about their nutritional quality, processing intensity, and long-term health consequences (Ortega et al., 2024). In this regard, dairy products, thanks to their inherent protein quality, bioavailability, and cultural appropriateness, have become desirable protein fortifiers and, in this case, outcompete most plant-based or synthetic alternatives in terms of consumer confidence and sensory profile (Saad et al., 2025).

This change is especially important in the Middle Eastern markets. Conventional fermented dairy products like yoghurt and labneh are nutritious foods consumed by all ages and socioeconomic groups (Mefleh et al., 2022). Recent retail research indicates that the range of labneh and yoghurt products is becoming increasingly diversified, with high-protein variants positioned in the market as targeted at consumers with health-conscious and fitness-oriented intentions (Bhaskaracharya et al., 2024). Nonetheless, even as products enter the market, commercial policies, competition, and structural issues defining the protein-based dairy segment in the region are not adequately examined in the scholarly literature.

In addition, the protein-enriched dairy innovation path is not without constraints. Fortification of proteins presents intricate formulation challenges, such as destabilization of texture, flavour, and shelf-life, which directly impact consumer response and buying habits (IFF, 2025). These technical barriers are aggravated by changing consumer views of processed high-protein foods, which are undergoing greater scrutiny regarding their healthfulness, ingredient disclosure, and conformity with conventional eating behaviours (Giacone, 2024; Vaccaro et al., 2024). The current literature has not provided a comprehensive insight into how protein-enriched dairy products can be strategically positioned and scaled in culturally dairy-based Middle Eastern markets and has focused mainly on technological formulation (Saad et al., 2025) or plant-based alternatives.

Thus, the research gap identified and reflected in this study is a critical review of the market growth of protein-based dairy products in Middle Eastern countries, with particular emphasis on

the competitive landscape, demand factors, and countermeasures to trends developed in the United States and Europe. This study would add new knowledge to the field of research by incorporating the nutritional, cultural, technological, and market dimensions of global protein trends localization and their adaptation in the Middle East, providing value to the academic community and industry players as they enter the next stage of dairy innovation.

## Literature review

The booming growth of protein-enhanced dairy items like high-protein yoghurt, fortified fermented dairy, and specialty dairy foods is indicative of broader changes in consumer diets (Coman-Miko, 2024), in which protein is increasingly seen as a symbol of health, performance, and functional nutrition. In the past, dairy products were mainly appreciated based on the content of micronutrients: calcium, vitamin D, and overall macronutrients, but recent studies indicate that there has been a major shift to protein concentration and usefulness (Ortega et al., 2024). Multiple studies show that this protein emphasis is not solely associated with physiological aspects, including muscle synthesis and satiety, but also with lifestyle and cultural movements that are not confined to conventional dietary behaviours, particularly in markets shaped by Western nutrition paradigms (Vaccaro et al., 2024; Petkova-Gourbalova, 2019).

One of the main themes of the scholarly debate is the dual functionality of the protein in dairy: serving as a nutritional enhancement and a consumer-preference stimulant. Ortega et al. (2024) claimed that high-protein processed foods do affect nutritional status. They may offer health benefits when included in balanced diets, especially among populations aiming to gain weight or enhance athletic performance. This is consistent with findings that yoghurt and other fermented dairy products may serve as a significant source of bioavailable protein, which might help build muscle mass, control weight, and promote metabolic wellness due to their amino acid composition and probiotic constituents (Ortega et al., 2024). By contrast, Giacone (2024) emphasized that high-protein food preferences are also likely to reflect a broader set of socio-behavioural factors, such as the desire to achieve particular body images or dietary fads that do not necessarily align with cultural eating patterns. This argues that physiological advantages are not the only factors that define the consumers' demand for protein-enriched dairy, as there is a conceptual shift in views of diet and health ideals.

The literature on traditional dairy products and innovation is no different. Mefleh et al. (2022) reported the long history of fermented milk in southern Mediterranean cuisine and that many of these dairy products, including labneh and strained yoghurts, already have inherent nutritional value, but were only recently subjected to protein fortification and technological advancements. Their paper highlights that traditional approaches to fermentation improve protein concentration and digestibility, but in most cases, producers fail in raising protein levels without affecting texture, flavour, or microbial viability. Nutritional enhancement and sensory quality are two areas well established in the food science research literature, where the strategies of fortification ought to maintain a balance between the functional advantages and the sensory expectations of the consumer. Indicatively, Saad et al. (2025) agreed that yogurt containing protein and probiotics has potential useful properties, yet to develop these products the desired texture and taste are consumer friendly, thus, they must be carefully processed and the ingredients of the product selected.

In the framework of the development of plant-based strained yoghurt, technological issues of using alternative protein sources. This study covers plant proteins; however, because of its discussion of formulation challenges (e.g., desirable viscosity, mouthfeel, and fermentation dynamics), the investigation is like other high-protein dairy products when it comes to developing

high-protein products. It means that the enrichment of protein, irrespective of the source, requires very careful consideration of the interactions between ingredients and processing factors to meet the nutritional and sensory standards.

The adoption of dairy proteins on the consumer side also shows oscillating trends. Vaccaro et al. (2024) emphasized that the increase in the preference for high-protein foods is usually accompanied by a drop in compliance with traditional diets, including the Mediterranean diet, where protein intake from high-protein foods was traditionally more moderate and balanced. This movement means moving away from traditional consumption habits and adopting Westernized dietary ideologies that glorify the consumption of large quantities of protein, which may not necessarily align with current eating habits within markets such as the Middle East. This kind of divergence indicates a significant weakness, as the high-protein phenomenon has been popularized in Western markets. Yet the level of cultural and behavioural transferability to other markets has yet to be addressed.

Bhaskaracharya et al. (2024) specifically examined labneh products in retail settings, where the number of high-protein formulations is increasing on the shelves, but there are still discrepancies in consumer awareness and distinction of protein claims. This indicates a significant conflict: producers perceive the opportunity in protein enrichment because it holds functional advantages and market appeal, but consumers may not universally appreciate or comprehend such assertions, particularly in those regions where conventional dairy products are firmly entrenched in dietary culture.

When assessing literature together, one can distinguish a gap: the current body of research has strong points that encompass nutritional benefits, consumer attitudes, and technological limitations of dairy enriched with proteins, but there is little academic work that would incorporate the above aspects with regional market dynamics, especially in the Middle East. Works such as Mefleh et al. (2022) and Bhaskaracharya et al. (2024) offer regional information but fail to relate to broader trends that began in Western markets or to evaluate competitive strategies that may help expand the market.

Regarding the internationalization perspective, the growth of protein-based dairy products in Middle East markets can be viewed through the framework of the theory of adaptation versus standardization (Levitt, 1983). In contrast to the partially homogenized protein-based positioning approaches that have been adopted in the Western markets, companies that venture into the culturally entrenched dairy markets are likely to succeed when they interchange product characteristics, communication tactics, and distribution patterns with the local consumption patterns. Moreover, according to the Uppsala model of internationalization, companies enter the international arena at slow stages whilst coping with uncertainty and learning (Johanson and Vahlne, 2009).

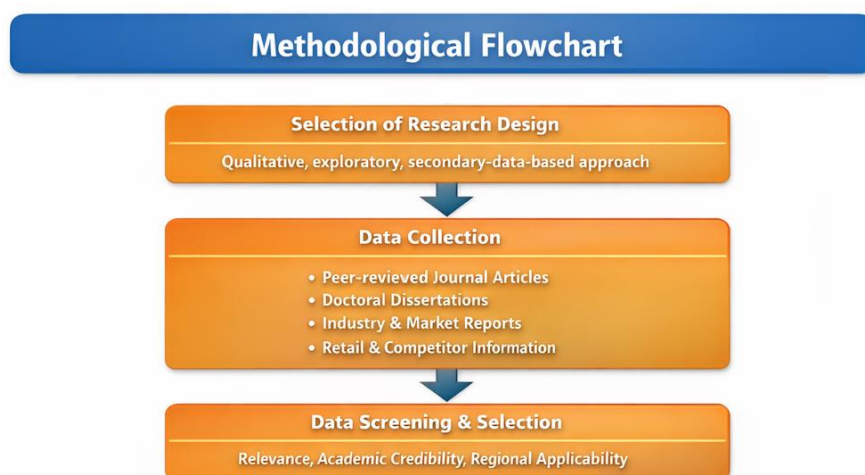
## Methodology

This paper assumes a systematic conceptual review approach and secondary analysis of market data. The aim is not to empirically test hypotheses, but to synthesize in a systematic way, academic and industry knowledge that is pertinent to the internationalization of protein-based dairy products. The literature was selected according to the specification of explicit inclusion criteria: (1) peer-reviewed journal articles published during 2020-25 that discuss high-protein foods, dairy innovation, or consumer behavior; (2) doctoral dissertations that have clear methodological transparency; (3) industry reports of established market research organizations that offer quantitative projections of market size and market growth. Sources were eliminated based on

transparency of methods, promotion-based sources, or lack a direct focus on functional dairy or regional market dynamics.

The analytical process was based on a thematic synthesis plan. The identified sources were coded based on four analytical dimensions, namely (a) nutritional-functional drivers, (b) consumer perception and cultural adaptation, (c) technological and formulation constraints, and (d) international market expansion dynamics. This coding allowed systematic comparison between the studies and minimized the probability of narrative selectivity. Where feasible, three-way market reports of the industry were matched through comparison of the projections on CAGR, geographic coverage, and definitional scope of the fortified or protein-based dairy category. Disagreements between sources were being handled analytically and not descriptively.

To evaluate the impact of the trends that have been established in the United States and European markets, including protein-forward positioning of products and weight-management claims, in the product development and strategic decision-making processes in the Middle Eastern dairy markets, a comparison has been implemented (Vaccaro et al., 2024). Special focus was directed on establishing the gaps between technological feasibility and consumer perception, as well as market execution.



**Figure 1. Methodological Flowchart**

Source: Author – Ideogram.

Although this methodology can provide an in-depth and critical interpretation of the expansion of the protein-based dairy market, it has its limitations. The use of secondary data might negate the recent changes within the market or company specifications, and the difference in market definition between sources can have an impact on comparability. The application of various, peer-reviewed and industry-proven sources, however, increases the validity of the outcomes and offers a solid background for analyzing opportunities, challenges, and competitive advantages in the Middle Eastern protein-based dairy industry.

## Results and discussions

### *Market Overview*

The growth of dairy markets in the Middle East is symptomatic of more general changes in diets, such as the increased demand for functional and fortified dairy consumables, like high-protein yoghurts and other value-added formulations. It is necessary to know the size, dynamics and growth

hotspots of this landscape to determine the potential of the protein-fortified dairy in the food system that is changing in the region.

### ***Scope and Country Focus***

The market in the Middle East dairy is a wide range of economies, yet the core target population of protein-enriched dairy products is the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) countries (Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates (UAE), Kuwait, Qatar, Oman and Bahrain) because of the comparatively high per capita income, developed retail systems, and changing demographics towards health and wellness. Outside the GCC, other markets like Egypt and Jordan are part of the wider Middle East and North Africa (MENA) region and play a role in aggregate dairy consumption patterns, although with decelerated premiumization since they respond to price. The protein-dairy segment is a niche of the more general dairy market in which the products have added nutritional claims, e.g. increased protein content, probiotic fortification or added micronutrients, to attract health-conscious consumers. These products are normally marketed as value-added products to traditional dairy products.

### ***Market Size and Growth Indicators***

There is a consistent trend towards strong growth in the Middle East dairy market to which secondary sources have been pointed out, but the estimates are different and depend on the geographic area and industrial classification. One of the analyses forecasts the Middle East and Africa dairy market to be USD 44.82 billion in 2026, with a compound annual growth rate (CAGR) of 4.64% to hit approximately USD 56.23 billion in 2031 (ResearchAndMarkets, 2026). This wide market incorporates all dairy items, including milk, cheese, yoghurt, and butter, since the people of the region still depend heavily on dairy as a foodstuff.

This is signified by a smaller but high-growth niche because of a narrower focus on fortified dairy products, a proxy of protein-enriched dairy. The Middle East fortified dairy market was valued at approximately USD 2.25 billion in 2024 and is projected to reach USD 3.35 billion by 2033, reflecting a CAGR of around 4.6% over the forecast period (Grand View Research, 2025). In the given sub-segment, yoghurt also took almost half of the revenue share (almost 48) in 2024, highlighting the role of the category in the overall growth of fortified dairy.

These statistics indicate that the dairy market is a stratified structure: the overall dairy market is large and widespread because of the necessity to consume basic needs, whereas the fortified/protein-dairy market is a value-added niche with faster growth, high-end pricing and functional differentiation. The difference in the size of the market provided by different sources can be explained by the variations in the coverage (e.g., including Africa as a part of the Middle East, not the Middle East only), time periods and definitions, yet the general tendency of the growth is similar.

Another related market analysis indicates that the dairy market of the Middle East might expand to USD 28.38 billion by 2032, with a 2024 USD 18.53 billion base and a CAGR of approximately 5.49, which shows that the market is here to stay (Verified Market Research, 2025). Even though this estimate has slight variations in terms of absolute values because geographic delimitation is narrow, it supports the message that dairy is one of the most important food sectors. It is worth adding that the market sizes and growth rates reported by the author change depending on geographic aggregation (Middle East vs. Middle East and Africa), the type of product (total dairy vs. fortified dairy), and the forecasting methodology. Proprietary estimation models are frequently used in commercial market reports, and this constrains the transparency of sampling

frames and data weighting. These numbers ought, therefore, to be understood as direction values and not as exact figures. Triangulation of various reports will minimize the bias of single sources, but structural limitations of secondary market data include methodological opaqueness.

### ***Demand Hotspots & Why***

Saudi Arabia is the biggest single dairy market in the Middle East and a key contributor to the fortified dairy development. The traditional and value-added dairy consumption has a stable base due to its population size, increased urbanization and high domestic dairy production. The importance of Saudi Arabia and its capabilities to innovate in the protein segment is supported by its leading position in the fortified dairy segment in 2024, with some 26.65 per cent of the total revenue in the region (Grand View Research, 2025). Local players like Almarai, Al Safi Danone can use expansive distribution channels to launch diversified dairy formats, which can serve to stir the consumer interest towards newer product propositions.

Another hot spot is the UAE. The strengthened dairy market in the UAE is expected to expand with one of the highest CAGRs in the region (~5.7%), as the country has high per capita income levels, a diverse set of expatriates and a developed retail ecosystem, which implies that consumers are interested in dairy products of a health-oriented and convenience-oriented nature (Grand View Research, 2025). Highly developed retailing channels used by the UAE, such as hypermarkets, supermarkets and internet grocery services, help product diffusion and testing at a high rate.

The smaller yet wealthy markets like Qatar and Kuwait also demonstrate demand for high-quality dairy products, including high-protein formulations. These markets have high purchasing power and increased health awareness among consumers who are willing to buy high-quality and functional food.

By contrast, other markets such as Egypt and Jordan, though large in terms of population, would have more price-sensitive consumption behaviour and sluggish adoption of high-end fortified dairy products. Nonetheless, increased urbanization and growing modern retail chains in such economies offer protein-dairy formats incremental opportunities in the long run. In the Middle East, the industries that have been identified as common drivers of the dairy market growth are increasing health awareness, urban retail modernization, and population changes. This high growth outlook of fortified dairy shows that consumers are slowly adopting functional food discourses, though penetration is low due to the sophistication and the level of income in different markets.

### ***Why the Shift Happening***

The health and lifestyle pressure, the impartation of trends in Western food, coupled with the strong cultural fit between high-protein dairy items and the local culture all contribute to the change away from dairy products based on proteins and more towards dairy products based on fats in the Middle East. The cultural fit here is based on existing high per capita consumption of fermented dairy products (e.g., yogurt and labneh), integration of fermented dairy items into daily meals across age groups, and the fact that these items are associated with homemade foods and not imported dietary supplements. Such an embeddedness lowers the cognitive resistance to protein enhancement in contrast to completely new functional categories. One of the main factors is increasing the connection between protein consumption and physical performance, healthy ageing, and weight control. According to Kimura, Moriyasu and Makizako (2021), there is a positive correlation between the regular use of high-protein foods and physical performance and functional capacity, which indicates that protein is slowly becoming a daily eating need instead of a sports supplement.

Pourabbas et al. (2021) found that high-protein dairy milk present during resistance training led to greater lean mass and strength in trained young males, and Huschtscha et al. (2021) reported the same functional advantages in older adults in active exercise when protein intake went together with progressive exercise. Nevertheless, such results also suggest that the benefits of proteins are situational, and depend on the activity level and the quality of the diet in general

The introduction of the Greek yogurt, skyr, and ready-to-drink protein dairy to the US and the EU has influenced consumer expectations around the world. Claims on the front-of-pack are important in turning the scientific results into a purchase behavior, and Coman-Miko (2024) has demonstrated that the visible labelling of protein in yogurt is a significant factor in influencing its preferences. Nonetheless, the withdrawal by Liu, Wen and Su (2022) points out that not every protein-benefit assertion is based on sound evidence implying that the perceived health value can be the driving force behind adoption regardless of whether the results are proven. Lastly, acceptance is enabled by the fact that the culture of the Middle East is well acquainted with yogurt and labneh. High-protein variants are viewed as a modernized version of the current staples, instead of a potential replacement of traditional diets. The fact that the UAE is experiencing a shift in dietary habits supports the perception that the protein-rich dairy is a result of evolutionary adaptation to the modern lifestyle in accordance with the traditional eating habits.

### ***Market Expansion Opportunities and Challenges***

The three interdependent leverages of portfolio design, segmentation and pricing, and channel strategy define the opportunities of expanding protein-based dairy products in the Middle Eastern markets. Nevertheless, as is evident in literature; to achieve the realization of these opportunities, it is necessary to balance performance-oriented propositions with consumer trust, sensory quality, and affordability.

Portfolios wise, it is most probable that innovation will scale when it is congruent with the current consumption patterns. The high protein labneh is a particularly good opportunity because strained dairy foods are already integrated into the daily diet. In this case, innovation does not entail altering the product, but enhancing nutrition messages and packaging, including single-serve snack cups or family packs to take every day. Likewise, drinkable high-protein yoghurt is aimed at convenience-based situations and conforms to the facts that show that dairy protein consumption is associated with increases in lean mass and functional performance (Pourabbas et al., 2021; Huschtscha et al., 2021). In addition to yoghurt, there are dual-claims (high protein and low sugar or low fat) that can support metabolic health issues that are featured in the diabetes protein literature and reinforce the weight-management discourse. The concept of product opportunity does not just focus on conventional dairy products; it is possible to use milk-based high-protein products to make low-fat ice cream, indicating that it is possible to offer healthy indulgence. Pricing and segmentation strategies should know the consumer of the protein is not a homogeneous one. High-quality products can be offered to gym-goers and performance-oriented customers who react to the functional nutrition stories. Nevertheless, a pure premium strategy would pose a threat of limited market penetration. An inter-price value protein strategy could expand the market by positioning protein as a health feature in general, but not a dedicated supplement, as the growing body of evidence suggests that protein consumption is becoming standardized in everyday diets (Kimura, Moriyasu and Makizako, 2021). Although research in the fitness contexts demonstrates positive hypertrophy effects of high-protein supplementation, the results need to be carefully applied to a real-life situation of dairy intake.

Channel strategy decisively prevails in trial and repeats purchase. Hypermarkets and convenience stores continue to be important in first-time exposure as a result of visibility and impulse access, and e-commerce is complementary to niche premium products, multipack, and loyal consumers of high-protein products. Effective channel-wide signal on nutrition also increases effectiveness, with simplified claims having a huge impact on the preferences of high-protein yoghurt (Coman-Miko, 2024). Though these opportunities exist, there are still huge challenges. Enrichment with proteins can also negatively affect the sensory properties, causing chalkiness, high viscosity, and syneresis unless the formulations are well optimized (IFF, 2025). The studies of functional yoghurts validate the hypothesis that the added protein and probiotic levels increase the sensitivity of processing and the stability of functional yoghurts (Saad, El-Awady and Darwish, 2025). Scalability is further limited by cost pressures related to high-quality protein ingredients, cold-chain dependence, especially in price-sensitive segments. Lastly, regulatory inconsistency and increased consumer suspicion of the processing intensity complicate the process of health-claim standardization and trust-building, which strengthens the argument to have transparent and culturally credible positioning (Ortega et al., 2024; Coman-Miko, 2024).

### ***Competitive strategies for winning in the Middle East***

The market entry judgements, product design, positioning, and implementation of protein-based dairy products in the Middle East are more likely to succeed when aligned with the region's structural and cultural realities to ensure success. One of the key strategic decisions is between domestic production and importing products. Importing allows quick testing in the market and brand introduction, but it exposes it to cold-chain risks, higher logistical costs, and reduced freshness. Local manufacturing, on the other hand, improves speed-to-market, cost efficiency, and product adaptation, but can be capital-intensive and requires securing input. Food security and reduced reliance on imports are additional priorities in the regional policy, strengthening the long-term case for localization. The Joint venture with local players in the dairy sector is a viable solution, as it combines international brand or technology with national distribution coverage and local acceptance.

Product strategy must focus on culturally native formats and an upgrading story. Since yoghurt and labneh are already integrated into daily nutrition, high-protein versions can be presented as a better alternative to more ordinary daily products rather than as new functional foods (Mefleh et al., 2022; Bhaskaracharya et al., 2024). Localized flavours, such as date, honey, saffron, or cardamom in food, make it less clinical in perception and increase its popularity. Protein-plus propositions or protein with probiotics are also innovative opportunities, as the use of fermented dairy is already acceptable. Nevertheless, the success of the product, in the end, is determined by sensory performance: the research of formulations has consistently demonstrated that the texture of the product, mouthfeel, and stability are better motivators of repeat purchase than headline protein content (IFF, 2025; Saad, El-Awady and Darwish, 2025).

Segmented positioning must be used in branding. Evidence-based performance messaging can be used by drawing upon the evidence of dairy protein benefits to strength and functional output (Pourabbas et al., 2021; Huschtscha et al., 2021), whereas weight-management claims should be carefully framed in the context of the controversy surrounding the provision of processed foods (Ortega et al., 2024). With family-oriented positioning, the focus on lower sugar and everyday nutrition provides larger volume growth (Figure 3). Go-to-market implementation must be incorporated with sampling, targeted influencer collaboration, good retail presence, and e-commerce bundles, which are backed by packaging technologies that protect quality and shelf life.



Figure 3. Strategic Map

Source: Author – Ideogram.

### **Managerial Implications**

As a result of the outcomes of the analysis, some managerial implications can be identified. To begin with, companies pursuing Middle Eastern market entry ought to focus on adaptive approaches rather than complete standardization, especially when it comes to culturally ingrained products, like yogurt and labneh. Second, the alliances with the local manufacturers can mitigate the institutional risk and foreign liability. Third, brands must position their products as a combination of functional protein statements and culturally appealing formats and sensory anticipations. Lastly, pricing should be based on income stratification in the area so as not to be overly dependent on the high-end segments. Such implications are based on the relationship between technological feasibility, consumer perception, and institutional context expressed in the above sections. They are to be seen as strategy alternatives and not as prescriptive rules.

### **Conclusion**

The dairy products based on protein have a good growth potential in the Middle Eastern countries since dairy has already become a culturally core product and it is consumed by many people, making the behavioural obstacles to adoption less significant. The category is experiencing growth based on lifestyle changes towards functional foods and the growing consumer preference for high-protein and wellness-related dairy products, and a regional trend toward value-added dairy products. Nonetheless, sustainable scaling requires three metrics of success, namely (1) affordability and dependability of supply, (2) high-enduring sensory performance (texture and stability), and (3) believable and compliant messages that instill trust. In the future, it is expected that competition will increase in the context of hybrid claims (high protein + low sugar and/or probiotics), increased labneh innovation as a culturally based protein platform, and the further development of RTD protein dairy in line with the convenience-based and performance-based use-cases. Nevertheless, companies that incorporate product engineering, local formats, retail performance, and open communication can attain a better competitive position in markets that are more label sensitive.

*This work was supported by the project Twinning2Green Transition Leadership (No. BG16RFPR002-1.009-0002), funded by PRIDST.*

### **References**

- Bhaskaracharya, R. K., Alnuaimi, F. S. R., Aldarmaki, S. R. J., Abdulazeez, A., & Ayyash, M. (2024). Labneh: A retail market analysis and selected product characterization. *Foods*, 13(21), 3461. <https://doi.org/10.3390/foods13213461>
- Coman-Miko, M. (2024). *Effect of front-of-package nutrition labelling: A conjoint analysis of consumer preferences for high-protein yogurts* (Master's thesis, Universidade Catolica Portuguesa, Portugal).
- Grand View Research. (2025). *Middle East fortified dairy products market size, share and trends analysis report, 2033*. <https://www.grandviewresearch.com/industry-analysis/middle-east-fortified-dairy-products-market-report>
- Huschtscha, Z., Parr, A., Porter, J., & Costa, R. J. S. (2021). The effects of a high-protein dairy milk beverage with or without progressive resistance training on fat-free mass, skeletal muscle strength and power, and functional performance in healthy active older adults: A

- 12-week randomized controlled trial. *Frontiers in Nutrition*, 8, 644865. <https://doi.org/10.3389/fnut.2021.644865>
- Johanson, J., & Vahlne, J.-E. (2009). The Uppsala internationalization process model revisited: From liability of foreignness to liability of outsidership. *Journal of International Business Studies*, 40(9), 1411–1431. <https://doi.org/10.1057/jibs.2009.24>
- Kimura, M., Moriyasu, A., & Makizako, H. (2021). Positive association between high protein food intake frequency and physical performance and higher-level functional capacity in daily life. *Nutrients*, 14(1), 72. <https://doi.org/10.3390/nu14010072>
- Levitt, T. (1983). The globalization of markets. *Harvard Business Review*, 61(3), 92–102.
- Mefleh, M., Darwish, A. M. G., Mudgil, P., Maqsood, S., & Boukid, F. (2022). Traditional fermented dairy products in southern Mediterranean countries: From tradition to innovation. *Fermentation*, 8(12), 743. <https://doi.org/10.3390/fermentation8120743>
- Ortega, R. M., Arribas-López, N., Salas-González, M. D., Aparicio, A., González-Rodríguez, L. G., Bermejo, L. M., Loria-Kohen, V., & colleagues. (2024). High-protein processed foods: Impact on diet, nutritional status, and possible effects on health. *Nutrients*, 16(11), 1697. <https://doi.org/10.3390/nu16111697>
- Petkova-Gourbalova (2019). Leadership – contemporary development trends: The Bulgarian example, Sofia University St. Kliment Ohridski.
- Pourabbas, M., Bagheri, R., Hooshmand Moghadam, B., Willoughby, D. S., Candow, D. G., Elliott, B. T., & Dutheil, F. (2021). Strategic ingestion of high-protein dairy milk during a resistance training program increases lean mass, strength, and power in trained young males. *Nutrients*, 13(3), 948. <https://doi.org/10.3390/nu13030948>
- ResearchAndMarkets. (2026). *Middle East and Africa dairy market: Size, share, growth trends and forecast to 2031*. <https://www.researchandmarkets.com/report/middle-east-dairy-products-market>
- Saad, N. M., El-Awady, A. A., & Darwish, M. S. (2025). The promise and challenges of functional yogurt with probiotics. *Journal of Food and Dairy Sciences*, 16(5), 87–96.
- Vaccaro, C. M., Guarino, G., Danza, F., Fraulino, A., & Bracale, R. (2024). Changing food choices: The option for high-protein foods and the move away from the Mediterranean diet. *Eating and Weight Disorders*, 29(1), 39.