

Extended Abstract

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Paper	New product development activity during the Covid-19 pandemic in the UK
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Abstract	<i>200 words max</i>
<p>The introduction of new products is a permanent and important part of the functioning of food supply chains and their companies. It has been pointed out that companies that hope to simply exist must now introduce new products at an increasing rate to enhance their competitive posture or even to survive. The new products that are launched at a point in time can be considered as representing firms' expectations of what consumers want in terms of different product attributes such as: health, environment, flavours. The Covid-19 pandemic disrupted the operation of supply chains, and the purpose of this paper is to explore what was the reaction of firms (if any) due to the pandemic. This was done using Mintel's Global New Product Development (GNPD) data for the UK, for the period 2018-20 and considering 155 food and drink groups. Each group was described in terms of the attributes (i.e., marketing claims) of its products. Same groups in different years were compared using measures of similarity between profiles (the profile being represented by the attributes that were present in a category). The results indicate that the most popular attributes within the products launched after March 2020 were those related to health and nutrition; however, comparison with previous trends indicate that firms may not have change their path when launching new products.</p>	
Keywords	New product development, Covid-19, UK
JEL Code	M2 Business Economics
Introduction	<i>100 – 250 words</i>
<p>The introduction of new products is a permanent and important part of the functioning of food supply chains and their companies. It has been pointed out that companies that hope to simply exist must now introduce new products at an increasing rate to enhance their competitive posture or even to survive. The new products that are launched at a point in time can be considered as representing firms' expectations of what consumers want in terms of different products and their attributes such as: health, environment, flavours. As it is documented in the literature, the Covid-19 pandemic disrupted the operation of supply chains in different ways such as sudden changes in the demand or affecting the labour force. The purpose of this paper is to explore what was the reaction of firms (if any) due to the pandemic in their launching of new products. Of particular interest is whether they focused on launching products with improved health and nutritional characteristics.</p>	

Methodology *100 – 250 words*

The analysis was carried out using Mintel’s Global New Product Development (GNPD), which is a database that records the launching of new products at the retail level. The data include information about the firm launching the product, the sector and subsector, the type of launching (e.g., it was a new product, a re-launching, new packaging). The data used was for the UK, for the period 2018-20 and considered 155 food and drink groups and 95 attributes (i.e., marketing claims). Each food group was described in terms of the attributes of its products (for each group the percentage of products containing a particular attribute was computed). Then, same groups in different years were compared using measures of similarity between profiles (the profile being represented by the attributes that were present in a category). The indicators used were correlation indicators such as those use in psychology to compare the characteristics of two individuals (e.g., Fisher correlation, Cattell Rp coefficient) and an analysis of the dynamics of the attributes (i.e., how many attributes are eliminated, maintained, and added from one period to the next).

Results *100 – 250 words*

The new product development continued during the lockdown with firms trying to capture the attention of consumers. The preliminary results show that for about 70 per cent of the product categories the similarities of the profiles in 2019 and 2020 were very high (e.g., correlation coefficients above 90 per cent). The analysis of the dynamics of attributes indicated that when comparing 2019 and 2020 (considering the period March to December), health and nutrition attributes where the ones with the higher movements (attributes that left, remain and new), followed by ethical products (e.g., environmental packaging).

Discussion and Conclusion *100 – 250 words*

The results indicate that the new product launched during the COVID-19 period lockdown in 2020 kept growing as firms were trying to capture the attention of consumers; this happened despite the disruptions on food supply chains due to the pandemic. The most popular attributes within the products launched after March 2020 were the health and nutrition attributes, showing that firms may have been reacting to consumers interest during the lockdown. However, it should be noted that this trend was a continuation from previous paths and not a change due to the pandemic.