

Long-term success factors of product innovations in the food industry

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ABSTRACT

This paper deals with the identification and delimitation of long-term success factors of innovative products in the food industry. The criteria applied are divided into identification factors, company factors and product characteristics. Individual studies and meta-studies that have already been carried out determine the scope of the investigation, which ultimately leads to a consciously chosen sorting out of precisely these factors. The identification factors first assess the product's ability to be considered an innovation. Novelty and novelty of the product itself as well as the development of new sales markets come into question. Using the best practice examples of Zotter chocolate and the porridge offer of 3bears, it can be shown that success factors of innovative products increasingly arise with the coverage of new or progressive elaboration of existing customer needs. Characteristics of the products is a previously non-existent or rare consumer offer. The necessary cause for the compulsion to innovate in capitalist market economies can be justified and located in terms of scientific theory in a very brief grounding by Kondratieff and with the elaboration and description of Schumpeter's theory of entrepreneurial innovation. In conclusion, five success factors can be identified in this way.

Keywords: Innovation, NewProd, success factors, food industry, best-price, product features

INTRODUCTION

The food market is facing profound economic and social challenges. Globally, almost ten billion people will have to be fed by 2050 (Bücking and Hengse 2016). The demand for food will increase by 70 per cent (ibid.). At the same time, more than 50,000 different products are already available, which defines the market as a consumer market under strong competition (Ternés, Towers and Jerusel 2015). The product life cycle is shortening to a few years, leading to an accelerated life cycle (Vahs and Brems 2015).

At the same time, the food industry is one of the most important industrial sectors in Germany. In approx. 6,100 companies with 618,000 employees, the supply of goods is organised primarily by SMEs (Federal Ministry of Economics) in a dynamic sector (Ternes et al.: op. cit.) With a turnover of 139.4 billion euros in 2020, however, only five percent of the companies introduced product-innovative market innovations (Statista 2019). Increases in sales often only correlate with positive trends in household income and willingness to spend (GfK Consumer Index 2017).

One reason for this is that in the area of low-involvement products, which includes food, long-term market penetration is difficult to achieve (Liebmann and Gruber 2007; Kroeber-Riel and Weinberg 2003). In the dichotomous intensity of involvement going back to *Krugmann (1965)*, low involvement means that information is only passively or randomly absorbed, is therefore only processed very superficially and the product purchase is only made taking into account a few product features (Piper 2016). According to this reading, the consumer is only partially aware of the purchase itself. *Häusel (2004)* assumes that only 35 per cent of product purchases are firmly planned anyway, 65 per cent take place at the point of sale. The unconscious handling of food purchases also generates a negative effect. Every consumer in Germany throws away 75 kilograms of food per year and per capita (Study Food Waste 2021). In the course of a liberalised market in a global context, the great variety of products, consumer behaviour and the oligopolisation of the food industry, companies are thus faced with the challenge of either restructuring their product portfolios in a cost-cutting manner so that sufficient profit can be generated through the sales volume, or to vary their supply (Monopolkommission Deutscher Bundestag 2011). Product innovations are of particular importance here. This is because they can be used to address new buyers, occupy market niches or achieve higher margins. In view of the enormously high flop rate of more than 70 percent and the inherent investment risk, it is especially innovations that are successful in the long term that appear desirable (Bücking and Hengse: op. cit.; Kleinschmidt et al. 2013; Zentes and Krebs 2009). The following question therefore arises:

What are the factors that make a product innovation successful on the food market in the long term?

This paper is divided into five chapters for the purpose of the study. After the introduction, the second chapter provides a much-needed clear overview of the definition of innovation and its distinctions as well as the success factors in this context.

This is necessary in order to be able to precisely identify further factors to be worked out. Aspects of the product life cycle are also dealt with descriptively in order to create an explicative framework of necessary and time-shortened innovation dynamics.

The third chapter deals with the methodological approach and the theoretical foundation, while the fourth chapter examines and categorises selected and currently successful product innovations of KM companies in the food industry and identifies commonalities. The Products themselves and consumer perception are given special attention here. Beforehand, two arbitrarily chosen food trends, one new and one older, can provide the framework in which the need for product innovations can be explained at all.

In a final conclusion, the results are to be compiled, processed and the question of the thesis finally answered. Further suggestions for further work and research can be made.

For better understanding and easier reading, the second chapter concludes with a brief overview of the previously elaborated results. In this way, a common thread should lead through the work. In addition, the findings can be compiled more easily and the research process of the thesis can be better understood.

DEFINITION AREAS

The following chapter provides an overview of the working definitions to be used. It should be made clear in which way and with which linguistic consensus the research process of the thesis is accentuated. In addition, the results of the work can be better understood and scrutinised.

The aim is to create a synthesis from the content of the definitions that can identify product innovations in the food industry and also evaluate them with regard to the fulfilment criteria. To this end, the first step is a fairly general investigation based on existing studies. A basic assumption here is that success factors of products from the retail trade (EH) can also be transferred to the food retail trade (LEH), since these also belong to the institutional trade (Overmann 2008).

A fully comprehensive and uniform definition of the term "innovation" is not available in the literature (Hauschildt et al. 2016). Therefore, various approaches are presented here and made usable for the context of the work. An etymological derivation is not necessary, as this would not provide any insights. First of all, Schumpeter is considered, who elevated innovations as a research object into the scientific discourse and at the same time provides the theoretical foundation. He sees innovations as the implementation of forms of expression of economic dynamics: "...the doing of new things or the doing of things that are already done in a new way" (Schumpeter 1947: 14). According to the Austrian economist, five characteristics describe an innovation:

- 1.) A product is manufactured completely new or in a new quality
- 2.) The production method is so far unknown and therefore innovative
- 3.) A new sales market can be opened up
- 4.) New sources of raw materials that did not exist before can be uncovered
- 5.) Organisational realignment and restructuring of the company (Borbély 2008).

In the course of the work, aspects one, two and three will be examined in particular, as they are directly related to product innovations. The last bullet point in particular deals with content that is not directly linked to product innovations in the sense of organisational theory. If we move away from the consideration of the product itself, we can refer to the customer. A definition that takes into account the perception of consumers describes goods and services that are perceived as new as innovative (Kotler and Keller 2012). *Rogers* starts from the same basic assumption: "An innovation is an idea, practice, or object that is perceived as new by an individual or other unit of adoption. (...)The perceived newness of the idea for the individual determines his or her reaction to it" (Rogers 1983: 11).

In this sense, the analysis will show that already existing products such as chocolate or ramen dishes, reinterpreted, are considered innovative if either new customers are addressed or existing customers are sustainably motivated to buy.

In the context that economic success as the generation of profit takes into account the interconnection of perception and purchase, *Brockhoff* also postulates that innovative products are particularly characterised by specific material and immaterial performance features that lead to the satisfaction of the consumer's needs (Brockhoff 1999). In this context, an efficient market can be assumed, where a company is successful if it manages to offer goods that satisfy needs.

Schwarz consequently focuses on the importance of innovations for the competitiveness of companies: "Innovations create new opportunities on the market. (...) For a company, innovations are the ticket to future markets. They increase the attractiveness of the product range and upgrade a company in comparison to the competition" (Schwarz et al. 2013: 148). And Vahs and Brems (2013) also understand an innovation as "...the targeted implementation of new technical, economic, organisational and social solutions to problems" (Vahs and Brems 2013: 1). Through introduction and implementation, previously defined corporate goals could be achieved in a new way. Meanwhile, these do not necessarily have to be related to the aspect of profit maximisation.

This brief overview is intended to contain only a few selected examples. No claim to completeness is made. Instead, from the reference point dependency of general definitions for the underlying term resulting from innovation research, primarily three commonalities are elaborated. Thus, the attributes "novelty", "newness" and "change" find their way into the expanded definition of innovation. The dimensions of novelty could be: object-related innovation dimension (what exactly is new?), subject-related innovation dimension (for whom is something new?) and process-related innovation dimension (how is the innovation generated?). However, in the context of evolving consumer preferences, societal and demographic changes and social change in the context of a highly competitive market, innovation in the food industry is of utmost importance according to this reading (John 2013; Hofbauer and Wilhelm 2015; Saxena, Srivastava and Singh 2013).

Apart from process innovations, product innovations form the core of the narrower definition (Neumann 2006). "Product innovations are new or significantly improved products. These are characterised by a certain degree of novelty of the usage properties and a higher customer benefit compared to existing products" (Cicek 2013: 17).

Moreover, products and their sales are subject to a *product life cycle*, which is why the development and promotion of innovations is a prerequisite for increasing the efficiency, earnings and productivity of companies. In the basic tone of the capitalist order type of market economy systems, product innovations mean that the competitive position can always be secured when innovations reach corresponding sales markets and succeed there (Schlecht 2005; Vahs and Brems loc. cit.). This requires an innovation strategy, which can also be a basis for identifying corresponding success factors. We have specifically refrained from further dimensions of innovation, as in the course of writing this paper we prefer a purely nomological elaboration as an understanding of the question to be answered.

In summary, identification factors (novelty, newness, new sales markets) can now be worked out in this first part of the definition areas, which will be used in the course of the work to compare corresponding products in the food industry with each other.

As part of the corporate strategy, the innovation strategy forms all measures that serve to realise long-term innovation goals (Thom 1983). Technology, structure, organisation, process, timing and product strategies form the corpus of successful innovation strategies. The product development strategy can be given more attention than the other areas due to the question of the work. It ranks five concepts, depending on the riskiness of the time and financial investments made in the run-up to product innovations:

- 1.) Pioneer
- 2.) Early follower
- 3.) Modifier
- 4.) Stragglers
- 5.) Perseverant

In terms of the novelty of an innovation, the pioneer generates so-called "pioneer profits", as he is the only provider of a product and accordingly skims off consumer surplus. The disadvantage here, however, is the investment and sales risk, which can be classified as not insignificant due to the aforementioned flop rate of 70 percent (Disselkamp 2012; Vahs and

Burmester 2005). The "early follower", on the other hand, waits for the development of an innovation, adopts it and refines, expands or creates further innovations to compete with the original product.

The advantage lies in the lower R&D costs, the disadvantage in the quality and image expectations created by the first product introduced. The modifier, on the other hand, simply waits. His strategy is to focus on improving details and a strongly customer-oriented service of the company (Disselkamp: op. cit.).

"Advantages lie in reduced risk, higher returns and low R&D costs. Disadvantages are found in the ever-increasing barriers to market entry and price wars" (Disselkamp 2012: 6). If this subset of an innovation strategy is also interpreted under the umbrella of innovation orientation, the "(...) totality of all behaviours in the company that aim to generate innovative products and services and successfully place them on the market" (Reichmann 2012: 43) results in an essential driving force to link corporate success to new products. The latter categories only play a subordinate role, as these points are primarily conspicuous by their lack of any innovative power (Disselkamp loc. cit.). In terms of innovation strategy, company factors (pioneer, early follower, modifier) can be noted that favour product innovations. Therefore, the corporate context is always taken into account when selecting products.

SUCCESS FACTORS OF INNOVATIONS

In order to determine long-term success factors of product innovations in the food industry, it can be helpful to look at general success factors of innovations. Accordingly, the following overview presents a small general view of selected examples and studies, from which information can be derived for the present study. First of all, the market plays a central role, because many of the innovations in the product area of the last decades resulted from market-induced projects (Myers and Marquis 1969).

For example, in a study of General Electric, *Roberts and Burke* show a high degree of market orientation and thus verify a closely linked, targeted satisfaction of customer needs (Kleinschmidt op. cit.). *Globe et al.* (2013) examined ten basic innovations in the sense of Kondratieff and filtered the recognition of a technical opportunity, the identification of a need, professional research and development management, sound assessment of risks, comprehensive development resources and a technically oriented entrepreneur as success factors in the larger framework permeating society.

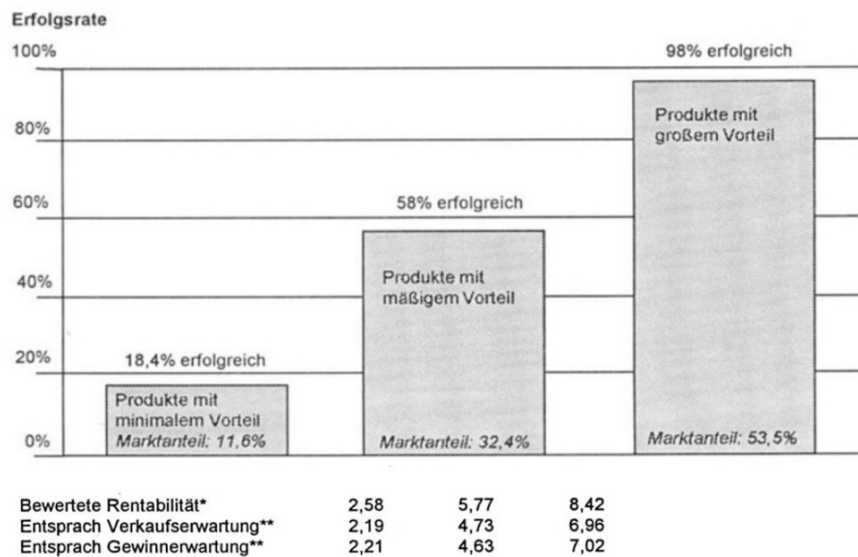
Special attention is paid to the NewProd III study conducted by *Cooper and Kleinschmidt* (1996), which can access an evaluation of 123 successful product innovations and 80 unsuccessful product innovations with the inclusion of 200 process variables. The results of this empirical innovation study provide insights into what generally constitutes an innovative product. Eight key factors are relevant, some of which can be used in this study. Thus, a company is successful if it offers a product that provides a unique benefit to the customer (I), is well-defined (II), offers synergy effects of a technological nature (III), can point to a corresponding quality of execution in terms of technical competence (IV), a successful quality of execution prior to product development (V), marketing synergies (VI), a high quality of execution of marketing activities (VII) as well as a general market attractiveness (VIII).

This list already implies a ranking of the impact significance of the success of innovative products. A critical evaluation of the cited study by the Institute of Business Administration at the University of Kiel concludes that innovative products are decisive for the success of new products due to their uniqueness, superior product features, and relevant demand features with simultaneously high execution quality of market-oriented activities (among other things, clear product definition and market synergy) as well as the market size itself (Rüdiger 1997). Following the research framework of the thesis, taking into account the

critique, points I, II and VI can be accentuated, as a further investigation would go beyond the scope of the thesis and this emphasis is aligned with that in chapter 2.1. For this reason, the proposed success factors will be dealt with in a little more detail next.

Regarding the uniqueness of the benefit (I), it can be stated that innovative products were significantly more successful in sales than me-too products¹. According to *Cooper* and *Kleinschmidt*, this is the decisive criterion when it comes to enumerating genuine segregation characteristics of output innovations (Kleinschmidt et al.: op. cit.). In this context, the study propagates that there is almost a one-to-one correlation between product superiority in the sense of customer benefits offered and the success rate on the sales market (ibid.).

Figure 1: Product advantage and innovation success



* Bewertete Rentabilität anhand einer Skala von 0-10, wobei 10 = akzeptierbare Mindestrentabilität weit überschritten, 0 = unakzeptabel

** Grad, zu dem das Produkt die Verkaufs- oder Gewinnziele erreichte, anhand einer Skala von 0-10

Source: Kleinschmidt et al.: op. cit.

Five emerging characteristics are common to all the successful products studied:

- Unique properties
- High product quality
- High problem-solving competence
- Lower price
- First of its kind on the market (ibid.)

Together with the previous explanations, these five points form the first product characteristic (innovative product competence), which must be taken into account when determining long-term success factors in the food industry.

The definition of the product (II) before the actual development process is the other important prerequisite for innovation success (Crawford 1979). "The target market, the product concept, the product requirements and benefits must be defined before development begins" (Kleinschmidt op. cit.: 13).

The focus is on the identification, adaptation and application of customer needs. Customer wishes should first be identified, then translated into functional customer requirements and final product adaptations made according to an identified adaptation need (Baumberger 2007). Since the survey methods of product innovation companies in the food industry are not dealt with in the context of this thesis, an analysis of the respective

¹ Me-too products are copycat products that often follow a successful innovation (author's note).

submarkets will serve as a basis for identifying success factors. This is possible because information about markets, prices, sales figures, product evaluations, trends and super-trends provide sufficient data to be able to check a corresponding second product characteristic (implemented coverage of specific customer needs).

Point six of the *Cooper study* does not necessarily oscillate around the product innovation itself, but around the framework conditions of the market launch. Ultimately, it is of little use to develop a highly innovative product but not to have access to any means of bringing it to the customer. Therefore, marketing synergies (VI) are given special attention at this point. Products that have established distribution channels and channels of distribution in known sales markets have an easier time (Kleinschmidt loc. cit.). In the cases where high marketing synergy was found, the success rate was 2.3 times greater, the profitability rate higher at 6.6 compared to 3.7 and the market share 14 percentage points greater than for products with low marketing synergy. Knowledge, skills and abilities in the company's sales organisation, high competencies in advertising, market research and customer service capacities are congruent with the requirements of the product. In an attempt to filter some categories for the identification of success factors in the sense of the work, marketing synergies can be classified with the company factors (marketing synergies). Finally, it remains to be observed under which temporal conditions innovations develop, diffuse and degenerate in markets (Kleinschmidt op. cit.; Kalke 2015).

First, however, a brief overview of the determinants that have been identified can be offered here, with which innovative products and their success factors can be identified and compared (Fig. 2).

Figure 2: Determinants for identifying success factors of innovative products in the food industry

Identifikationsfaktoren	Unternehmensfaktoren	Produktmerkmale
Neuheit Neuartigkeit Neue Absatzmärkte	Pionier Früher Folger Modifikator Marketingsynergien	Innovative Produktkompetenz Deckung spezifischer Kundenbedürfnisse

Source: own representation

THE PRODUCT LIFE CYCLE OF DIFFUSION RESEARCH

Since (market) diffusion research is an elementary component of innovation research, it can first be taken into account and show that factors already exist that reveal the connection between the success and failure of an innovation (Hofbauer 2004; Hofbauer 1992). The diffusion process itself is initially composed of the elements innovation, communication, time and social system. "Diffusion is the aggregated result of the individual adoption decisions of the members of the social system (individuals, groups, organisations)" (Hofbauer 2004: 6).

Market presence can be divided into five phases based on the product life cycle:

- 1.) Introduction phase: Only small sales volumes can be realised when entering the market. This is because innovators are initially only willing to buy novelties in small numbers. Profits are low to non-existent because high prices and high launch costs create an unfavourable demand and profit situation.
- 2.) Growth phase: Increasing market acceptance, purchases by the early majority, rising profits and the number of competitors characterise market activity. The benefits of the product must be demonstrated, technical innovations and product extensions prevent buyer churn.

- 3.) Maturity phase: The product becomes suitable for the masses and sales are maximised accordingly. As more and more suppliers enter the market, the margins from unit sales and unit costs decrease, as the increased supply leads to price reductions while demand remains constant. Product differentiation makes it possible to stand out from the competition.
- 4.) Saturation phase: Market saturation tendencies cause turnover to decrease. Only the later majority can be considered as demand. Further price reductions can only be compensated by a larger sales volume if product variations induce demand surges.
- 5.) Decline phase: Turnover continues to shrink, prices fall, profit margins narrow and in some cases the first losses are recorded. Observing the competition leads to the realisation that most suppliers are already changing the product market (Beyer 2021).

The product life cycle is a reaction model to market events and represents the sales and turnover development of a product over an unspecified period of time. It can help to measure the success of innovative products in the food industry on the basis of clear key data. The diffusion course, on the other hand, determines the number of adopters in the aggregate, which can provide additional information for assessment. Furthermore, an increasing shortening of product life cycles can be observed, which imposes a situation for companies to constantly bring new products to the market in order to counteract competitive pressure and predatory competition due to the constantly growing number of new products on the market. This temporal compression in turn induces the need for shorter innovation cycles. A study by the Münster University of Applied Sciences, for example, found that of 186 food companies surveyed, 80 per cent see an increase in private labels as a problem (Buxel and Sander 2009). This "product-USP dilemma" can be solved by expanding the budgets for new product development as well as marketing volumes. The split analysis shows that successful companies in the food industry are those that have implemented more new product ideas. Over time, these are the ones that have taken up the challenge of creating new products in shortened timeframes. It is also noticeable that a majority of the companies attach increasing importance to the placement on the shelf and the design of the packaging among the success factors of innovative product placement (Buxel and Sander, op. cit.).

This could be due to the circumstance of a temporally shortened innovation development phase in that visual incentives encourage new purchases, even without the contents of the goods being fundamentally changed. In the temporally compressed corset of permanent market presence, it would normally be necessary to work longer on the development of new products in their market diffusion in order to minimise the financial risks. In this aspect, the aforementioned orientation towards customer needs is once again of special importance.

OVERVIEW

This chapter collects and contextualises results from existing studies and relevant literature to synthesise a research methodology that can identify sustainable success factors of innovative products in the food industry.

To this end, general distinctions of innovations can first be addressed in order to filter out identification features that will be useful in the further course of the work in order to lift products to be examined into the object horizon of the investigation in the first place. In a second step, relevant information of a product development strategy can be filtered and narrowed down to generate company factors that can more accurately identify an innovative product development and classify the previously identified products as pioneer or other product category. Only when the corporate factors justify the identification characteristics can the investigation be taken further. In addition, basic company information can help to identify a trend towards innovation or not. The third and most important step is to identify already

existing success factors of innovative product development and to justify partial analytically why these can help to investigate further and newer products in the food industry in order to subsequently either derive new success factors or confirm already existing ones. The connection between market diffusion and product life cycle once again helps to get an overview of the conditions and necessities of innovations and to emphasise the time factor. In the following section, the methodology of the thesis is discussed. This order was deliberately chosen because the underlying scientific research methods can be directly located and justified in terms of content if a certain definitional basis is available.

METHODOLOGY AND THEORETICAL FOUNDATION

The basic core ideas of an investigative approach in the present work result from a comprehensive analysis and explication of the relevant professional literature in combination with findings of current studies. Conceptually, one can therefore speak of a literature-based work in the sense of nomological secondary research. The basic texts are sorted and summarised in a structured manner according to criteria of scientific validity and reliability. Since there are also different results in science, depending on the structure and emphasis of variables in research designs, for example, on the same objects of investigation, a weighting must inevitably take place in the context of the question to be answered. Based on this preliminary work, further investigations can then be initiated.

If the literature provides the foundation, the theory can be considered the building. First, however, it is important to explain the context of theoretical weighting. In recent years, the interpretation of fiscal and monetary measures of economic policy has been oriented towards demand-oriented, i.e. Keynesian approaches (Nowak 2021). In this context, the classic and founding father of innovation research, Joseph Schumpeter, may also be mentioned.

It explicates on two levels. At the macro level, exogenous factors of dynamic market environments are taken into account, in which the "process of creative destruction" can take place (Priddat 2017). The level that is more interesting for the work, however, is based on microeconomic correlations of the driving spring of an entrepreneur based in the basic assumption of methodological individualism.

"Innovation behaviour, understood as the market introduction of innovations in connection with a restructuring in the use of given resources, thereby occurs not only on the basis of a steady stream of inventions (inventions), but is at the same time also the starting point for the spread of innovations (diffusion) within the economic system. In Schumpeter's (sic!) view, the driving force of innovation activities is the entrepreneur (...)" (Döring 2012: 9).

This development-theoretical approach implies that in the context of the market, companies can only escape the "storm of creative destruction" (Schumpeter 1942: 5) if they themselves become innovative, i.e. "enforce product and productivity improvements" (Döring loc. cit.: 14). In this way, innovation-induced quality competition arises not only for market share but also for technological advantage, which manifests itself in the appearance of temporary monopolistic competition. This would only induce other imitators to siphon off profits (ibid.). In addition to cause-effect relationships of innovations in the sense of product innovations, the success factors that have been suffered to date can also be justified. In a meta-study on the categorisation of success factors of product innovations, which included 19 studies, three groups emerged: market-related success factors, technology-related success factors and organisation-theoretical success factors. A basic finding of the study is that "the already complex task of understanding the factors leading to success cannot be totally explained by one set of factors for all situations" (Balachandra and Friar 1992: 285).

Further predictors of innovative product success are distilled from a meta-study analysing 60 individual studies. The contents of the study coincide with the antecedents for

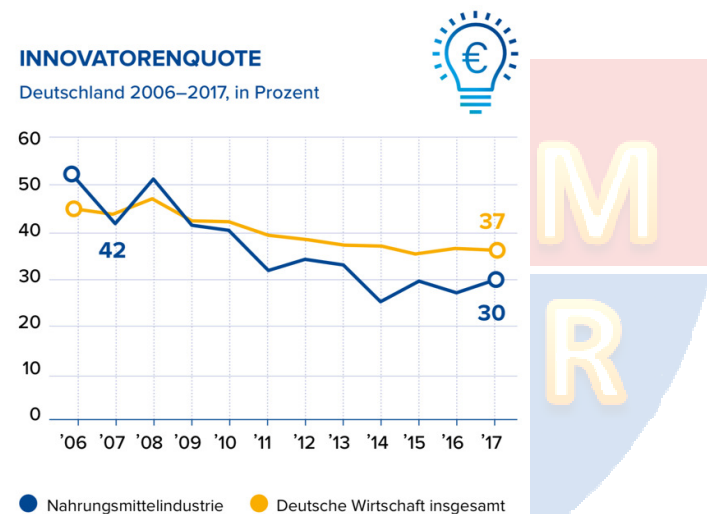
the identification and evaluation of success factors of innovative products in the food industry elaborated in chapter two (Henard and Szymanski 2001). Therefore, this framework will be used in the further course of the thesis.

PECULIARITIES OF THE FOOD MARKET

Despite new consumer desires, the success rate of innovative products in the food industry is low. The flop rate coincides with general statements about the flop rate and is close to 70 percent (Hengse and Bücking loc. cit.). The reasons for this lie in the fundamental scepticism of consumers towards new products in the FMCG (Fast Moving Consumer Goods) sector as well as in the lack of information about customer needs and preferences of the SMEs, 90 percent of which are present.

Nevertheless, the innovator rate of industry can be compared with that from other sectors of the economy. In the years 2006 to 2017, this rate correlates almost congruently with the German economy (cf. Fig. 3).

Figure 3: Innovator rate of the German food industry



Source: Leibniz Centre for European Economic Research

In order to be able to provide an insight into how innovative products successfully establish themselves on and in food markets and what the necessary success factors are, two food trends are outlined here to narrow down the scope.

Explicitly, the present work cannot address all existing and still current trends (Nestlé Study 2021; Rützler 2020). The following deliberately selected product range of innovative novelties in the food sector of SMEs should therefore provide an approach to better work through and heal the prevailing information asymmetries.

TRENDS IN THE FOOD INDUSTRY

Trend researcher Hanni Rützler still describes the trend cluster "good and healthy" as the most relevant in the food industry. The combination of healthy food and gustatory demanding consumption character can be derived here from the "old" megatrends of enjoyment and health as well as the beginning "new" trend of "snackification" (Rützler loc. cit.; Nufer 2014).

So it is no longer a contradiction to offer tasty and at the same time health-promoting food. On the contrary: nowadays, food can be varied, exciting, individual and healthy at the same time (Bauer 2017).

In this respect, "organic" is considered to be a trend that has already been going on for some time and in which some innovations have taken place (Gottwald and Steinbach 2011). The history of organic in German food, farm and organic shops can be summarised as follows:

"In the meantime, almost all food is available in organic quality. This applies not only to staple foods such as flour, bread and fish products (...), but also to convenience products. Industrially produced, pre-prepared foods, frozen or as dry goods (...) are booming in the organic segment" (Hayn and Ulmer 2009: 158).

Organic production in the agriculture and food sector contributes significantly to a social aspiration such as health. Furthermore, in view of the greater ecological awareness of recent years, the production conditions of consumers have also come into focus (Umweltbundesamt 2021). Organic subsistence farming is healthy for soils and water (Gottwald loc. cit.). In addition, products produced in this way are enriched with fewer harmful additives and are therefore also healthier for the customer (Flemmer 2014). "A major impulse for innovation in recent years has been to adapt products from the conventional food trade for the organic market" (Gottwald 2001: 57).

The way of portioning, presenting and actually making sense of food consumption is currently undergoing a fundamental change. Under the term "snackification", "traditional meals such as breakfast, lunch and snack are gradually being replaced. In the future food culture, every food, drink and dish can become a mini-meal: Snacking will become a new way of eating. This development challenges trade and gastronomy" (Rützler op. cit.: 24).

For example, according to a survey by Bookatable, burgers, ramen and bowls are very much in vogue (Presseportal 2021). The striking change in dining culture is also visible in the erosion of the classic meal. In the years from 2005 to 2015, the home-grown midday meal declined by 12.1 per cent. Among the 30,000 respondents, it can be determined that fixed consumption patterns tend to turn into a stress factor from a time-related point of view and that traditional eating rituals are therefore abandoned. The Gesellschaft für Konsumforschung (Society for Consumer Research) also states that in the 30-39 age group, only one in two still eats breakfast at home on weekdays. In principle, the first meal of the day is even becoming more mobile. The Food Report 2018 has already identified the trend "The New Breakfast". This means that more and more people are eating breakfast on the go. Among adults, moreover, only a third of those surveyed cook for lunch (Rützler 2014; Federal Statistical Office 2017). This may be due to the fact that household constitutions in Germany have changed significantly in recent decades. The four-person household is on the decline. One- and two-person households are more prevalent. "With the growing dominance of one- to two-person households, the traditional meal system is eroding. (...) Eating out of the house is more common, and food intake is no longer bound to fixed (meal) times. The sizes of the portions per eating occasion are smaller..." (Rützler op. cit.: 26).

Based on the trend patterns selected at this point, the next subchapter will identify two representative best practice examples and compare success factors. The focus will be on innovative food products from a medium-sized company and a smaller start-up that have found their way onto the shelves of supermarkets and delicatessens. The aim is to apply the research scheme developed in chapter two to individual randomly selected products. A claim to a complete market survey cannot and should not be made. The study is thus to be interpreted at best as an initiation for the comparison of further companies and innovations. Subsequently tenable statements can therefore only be derived in the context of studies already carried out in comparison with the examples of this work.

BEST PRACTICE I: ZOTTER

The turnover of organic food in Germany has developed rapidly over the years. In 2001, for example, sales amounted to 2.1 billion euros, while in 2020 the mark of 15 billion euros will already be just touched (Statista 2020). In 2019, the market share of organic food is 5.58 per cent. With a per capita turnover of 130 euros, Germany ranks above average in international comparison (Statista 2019).

Organic chocolate has also been one of the biggest growth drivers for several years. For example, general chocolate consumption in Germany almost doubled per capita from 1970 (5.25 kilograms) to 2016 (9.74 kilograms) (Trends in the Confectionery Industry). The share of organic chocolate in 2019, out of 2,321 tonnes of Fairtrade chocolate sold, is 57 per cent.

One of the most successful labels on the market is Zotter Schokolade GmbH, which was founded in 1999 (Zotter Biography 2020). 200 to 250 tonnes of organic cocoa beans and 150 tonnes of cocoa butter are processed with almost 400 other organic ingredients into more than 500 varieties of organic chocolate products every year. 200 employees in Riegersbrug/Styria and 20 employees in the subsidiary in Shanghai at 4,000 distribution points worldwide, 90 percent of which are in German-speaking countries, produce up to 60,000 chocolates a day using the hand-scooping method. Zotter is a bean-to-bar manufacturer that produces the chocolate from the cocoa bean itself. In 2019, a turnover of 24 million euros can be recorded. For comparison: in 2007, the turnover was still 12.66 million euros (Brix 2015). In Germany, the chocolate varieties are available in world shops, chocolate shops and in the Austrian supermarket Zotter, Wildner and Schober 2012). The company now generates almost ten per cent of its turnover through its online shop. The chocolate theatre opened by founder Josef Zotter on an area of 2,400 square metres in Shanghai records 270,000 visitors annually. Almost the entire assortment, imported from Austria, can be purchased there. The design of the chocolate packaging comes from the artist Andreas H. Gratze, who creates an individual visual language for each product either in comic style or in the high-quality style of abstract painting (cf. Figure 4).

Figure 4: Artfully designed - Zotter chocolate



Source: <http://society-blog.at/denn-so-ist-zotter-schokolade/>

In 2013, Zotter won the European Business Award in the sustainability category. The company also works together with the Slow Food scene. The conglomerate of 38 product innovations and modifications alone, all of which follow different trends and social developments (Zotter product launches), different manufacturing processes and are marketed

in a differentiated way, form the basis for Zotter's sustainable business success. The company can draw on a total of 365 different organic chocolate varieties (utopia 2021).

Applying the scheme developed in chapter two to identify success factors, it can first be stated that Zotter Schokolade has a novelty and novelty in the sense that, firstly, they have used a specially created manufacturing process for hand-scooped chocolate (process innovation) and, secondly, they have brought out a hitherto unknown and new product, namely organic chocolate. The organic pioneer in this field is, of course, Rapunzel founder Joseph Wilhelm, who introduced four varieties of 100% organic chocolate to the German-speaking market as early as 1987 (Biocompany). But already five years later and with a much broader product range of different flavours, Zotter chocolate diffused into the organic food chocolate market. Zotter thus categorises itself as an "early follower", which can already offer some modifications and extensions as novelties and thus partly also does pioneering work.

"Zotter, an Austrian company that was a pioneer in the organic and Fairtrade chocolate movement, uses the traditional confit technique to make premium hand-scooped chocolates in unusual and innovative flavour combinations" (Khaire, Aichinger, Hoffmann and Schnoedl 2011: 1).

By opening the chocolate theatre in Shanghai, Zotter can also tap into a completely new sales market (Brix loc. cit.). An exclusive distribution system in the premium segment - central listings in the large retail chains are deliberately avoided - can also point to a wealthy clientele. With the inclusion of many small retailers such as delicatessens, wine shops or confectioners, Zotter can supply over 8,500 retailers worldwide in addition to the full-range retailers (Spar) (Zotter et al.).

"As the only European direct cocoa processor that produces exclusively in fair trade and organic quality, Josef Zotter also ensures a unique selling proposition in the chocolate market" (Brix op. cit.: 9). Creativity and variety are also expressed, as already mentioned, in taste and packaging.

Communication with the media, transparent and informative presentation. Josef Zotter himself, as a dazzling entrepreneurial figure, stands as the face of the company in public. He proactively communicates the corporate philosophy. "The product must stand for quality and independence. It must be comprehensible why something has a high price. Then people are willing to buy it" (Interview Zotter 2012).

Thus, a high level of competence in the point "marketing synergies" elaborated in chapter 2 can be referred to. The unusual flavours, sustainable organic production and the customisable and artistic packaging make Zotter chocolate something special for the customer.

"We currently have 340 (sic!) different products in our range. That's not necessary, but it offers the customer a unique selection that he can't find anywhere else. And that is no longer a matter of course today, because the yoghurt range, for example, is now completely identical from Vienna to Vorarlberg. Unfortunately, diversity has been lost somewhere in the supposed oversupply - and diversity is the goal, we have to find and appreciate it again. The small structures and the special things" (Zotter 2012 o.p.).

Zotter serves the decision-making basis for purchase in the organic sector as well as in the taste sector. "The trend towards premium chocolate tablets was triggered by chocolatiers who (create) unusual chocolate creations of high quality in small manufactories away from industrial chocolate production with great attention to detail" (Zotter 2006: 120).

This is how Zotter initially addresses the health aspect. Research proves the high health value of dark chocolate, for example. The substances contained in raw cocoa such as "theobromine, caffeine, flavonoids, magnesium, calcium, iron, vitamin E, lecithin and polyphenols" (ibid.: 77) have been proven to have a health-promoting dimension. Away from the image of a fattener, Zotter chocolate thus offers a genuine customer benefit. The consumer's departure from discount orientation also leads to attributes such as raw material

sources and sustainable as well as organic production being an essential selling point. Thus, it is not the cheapest, but the most enjoyable and ecologically fairly produced that is at the forefront of customer needs. More conscious eating habits partly require a reorientation of packaging, weighting and denomination of chocolate (Kirig and Rützler 2007; Regal 2008).

A high degree of individuality in terms of taste and packaging, different, partly exotic flavours and sustainable organic production form the foundation of Zotter chocolate's success when it comes to classifying the satisfaction of customer needs. The third aspect elaborated in chapter two, "Innovative product competence" and "Satisfying specific customer needs", can be fully taken into account and accordingly an allocation in point fulfilment as success factors can be aimed for at this point.

In the overall view of the Zotter company, the products can be subsumed on the basis of the identification factors, the company factors and the product characteristics. As a best-practice example of a product range tested among 550 brands worldwide, Zotter "(...) remains at the top of the world's best chocolate manufacturers and (owns) by far the most innovative chocolatier of all" (Bernardini 2015: 839).

Success, however, stands and falls not only on the criteria filtered out in this paper, but also on the company's employees. "(...) Last but not least, I have to say that we are only so successful as a company because we simply have great employees, that is a team victory of 160 employees who produce top-quality Zotter chocolate every day" (Zotter op. cit.: 22).

BEST PRACTICE II: 3bears

"Snackification", i.e. the substitution of the breakfast, lunch and dinner triad with several healthy, varied, quickly prepared and nutritious mini meals (MiMas) during the day, initiates several food trends (cf. chapter 4.1). In the context of snackification, it is mainly about quick ready-made meals that can easily be eaten on the go or in the office. A success story that developed shortly before the identification of the trend towards MiMas and bowls (Rützler 2020) is written by the Munich-based company "3 Bears", based on the English fairy tale (3bears homepage). The founders Caroline and Tim Nichols presented their pitch on the Vox show "Höhle der Löwen" in 2017, in which they presented healthy, sugar-free porridge. Investor Frank Thelen and investor Judith Williams invested 150,000 euros in the company and paved the way for the product range to enter the food retail market. Only twelve hours after the show aired, sales of one million euros could be recorded (Zimmermann 2017).

Thus, the company's balance sheet total rose from 1200 thousand euros to 1400 thousand euros in 2017 and 2018, but fell to 900 thousand euros in 2019. The company can nevertheless point to healthy figures within its balance sheet, as 702 thousand in liabilities are offset not only by receivables of 574 thousand euros, but also liquidity of 142 thousand euros, stock worth 160 thousand euros and provisions, subscribed capital and reserves totalling 236 thousand euros (northdata). The company has grown from two to 25 employees and offers its products nationwide in about 5,000 supermarkets (lifepr.de). First of all, healthy company growth can be derived from this data.

Founder Caroline Nichols also won the "Founder of the Year Award" in the "Female Empowerment" category last year. Last year, she developed Germany's first "Pocket Porridge" for your pocket. According to the company, there has never been a ready-to-eat Porridge to Go before. Based on 635 customer reviews on the 3 Bears website (vegeconomist online) and 85 further reviews on Amazon, a very high customer satisfaction of 90 percent can already be extrapolated. Founder Tim Nichols reveals in an interview how popular porridge is with customers in general: "3Bears Porridge is available in four flavours, including our bestseller 'Cinnamon Apple'" (Interview Nichols).

Further: "One of the biggest challenges was to keep up with the rapid growth of 3Bears." Indeed, among the 2,163 Google reviews, another 90 per cent consistently indicate

positive reactions to the product's customer success. Convenience and taste are the main positive attributes reflected in the reviews. Furthermore, the absence of sugar and additives is an indication of the health benefits of the product.

Figure 5. Porridge Cinnamon Apple



Source: 3bears at <https://3bears.de/products/zimtiger-afel-porridge>

The topic of sustainability is not only considered in the ingredients of the products. "I'm really pleased that from now until the end of 2020 we will be switching completely to product packaging made from bio-based plastics for our bags for the porridge mixes and the packaging for 'Pocket Porridge'" (Nichols 2017 o.p.) How popular porridge is with customers is revealed by founder Tim Nichols in an interview: "3Bears Porridge is available in four flavours, including our bestseller 'Cinnamon Apple'" (Nichols interview). Based on this statement, the bestseller can be considered as an exemplary product for the identification of long-term success factors.

As the healthy porridge was one of the first to be introduced to the German market in the mid-2010s, 3bears can be classified as a "pioneer" in this respect in the company factors elaborated in chapter two. The modification of the dish with regard to organic and vegan ingredients also serves the long-lasting trend of health and convenience. This creates added value for the customers. As a result, the porridge can be attested an "innovative product competence" that meets the "specific customer needs" for quick cuisine and healthy food. The porridge is said to be prepared within three minutes. In addition, the product initiated a real porridge trend (2bears homepage).

Special features can also be seen in the point "marketing synergies". The presentation and ecological packaging of the product are optimally adapted to current trends. The product environment evokes associations of a healthy and uncomplicated lifestyle. The company's history also proves that there is special potential for scaling. New markets are opened up through marketing campaigns² and founder Caroline is constantly developing new flavour variations. Meanwhile, the 'Porridge Bears' can also deliver to 21 countries. In a brief analysis

² Cf. <https://3bears.de/pages/zahlung-und-versand> (18.3.21)

of the current job advertisements, multilingualism - English is a basic requirement simply because of the English origin of co-founder Tim Nichols - is expressly desired.

CONCLUSION

This paper deals with the identification and delimitation of long-term success factors of innovative products in the food industry. To do this, it is first necessary to filter out those criteria from the wide-ranging literature on the subject of innovation that make it possible, based on a valid scientific basis, to identify appropriate products. In the context, corporate philosophy and business development can be added as soft factors.

The company factors elaborated in the second chapter try to offer a classification of the product with the company distributing it. The factor of time plays a central role, because product innovations in the food industry can either be regarded as pioneer products or as "early followers" or as modified products. In both cases analysed, the tightrope walk from pioneer to "early follower" is up for discussion. Zotter Schokolade's organically certified and sustainable handmade process does not exist in the period under consideration, and the varieties and flavours are also revolutionary. Therefore, in this sense, the product organic chocolate can be considered a pioneer, although there is an organic chocolate from Rapunzel on the market first.

Caroline and Tim Nichols from 3bears, on the other hand, have set themselves the ambitious goal of making porridge known in Germany. The show "Die Höhle der Löwen" can be seen as a real initial booster. In the fourth season of the start-up and investor show, episode seven, which included the 3bears pitch, recorded the highest viewing figures of all episodes (Statista 2017).

So far, it seems to be difficult to offer healthy instant porridge. Following the trend towards snackification, 3bears is trying to offer an organic and vegan porridge as well as a completely new product innovation with the pocket porridge, which fulfils the criteria of a convenient and quick meal regardless of location. From this point of view, it is interesting to note that the company already has a somewhat longer history. Using the bestseller example "Zimtiger Apfel", an attempt is therefore made to apply success factors that can be justified on the basis of the development of a company to the product itself in the sense of a new trend. In the period under consideration from 2015 to 2021, the company 3bears grows to 25 employees, which indicates expansion as well as partial economic success.

Both products under consideration have in common that they can be based on an innovative, i.e. unique, product competence (cf. chapter 4). In each case, the aim is either to generate a unique benefit or, in the sense of "trend is your friend", to produce goods that can directly satisfy current aspiration levels.

The long-term aspect is served by referring back to older studies on the identification of success factors. If these are still relevant today, based on the two examples observed, long-term success factors can be assumed.

Conclusively, the following success factors can now be identified:

- Novelty and novelty of the food product;
- Classification as a pioneer or modifier in terms of introducing a product to partly new markets;
- Innovative product competence;
- Meeting specific customer needs.

The thesis provides a basis for further research on products in the food industry. It offers a valid research sample for the identification of success factors and for a better classification for product comparison. It can also confirm long-term success factors from other studies.

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