Product innovation management in retail: an examination of product innovativeness towards performance and moderating role of commercial environment

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The paper explores the link between new product innovativeness and performance, as well as its moderation by commercial environment settings in retail. It analyzes the linkage and context built on marketplace and supplier characteristics as well as category management decisions as an integral commercial environment. The research employs a unique data set - new product introductions with their actual sales results as a performance indicator. The research concludes that the innovativeness – performance link cannot be evaluated unilaterally, confirming the role of the commercial environment as a moderator of the link. The commercial environment is associated with a favorable and non-favorable economic climate that leads to performance-related opportunities or barriers in the marketplace for product innovations.

Keywords: product innovation, new product performance, commercial environment

1. Introduction

It is acknowledged that the long-term survival of a business enterprise hinges upon its ability to launch new products in the marketplace successfully and is considered a competitive advantage that delivers sustainable business growth (Le Bas & Scellato, 2014). Research (Calantone & Montoya-Weiss, 1993) notes that a new product launch is considered to be the most demanding, expensive, and risky process out of all phases of new product development; it needs to be adequately understood in ever-changing business environments. This paper aims to advance knowledge in new product performance studies by revealing the role of the commercial environment in new product performance. A study by Garcia-Zamora, Gonzalez-Benito & Munoz-Gallego (2013) indicates that research on innovation has increased as innovation management has become an essential requirement for companies. This paper explores what leads to a higher propensity to innovate and commercialize? Why are some innovative products more successful than others, and what role does the commercial environment play in new product performance?

2. Theoretical background

2.1. Product Innovativeness and its linkage to performance

The essence of innovation, despite its type, is subject to the scale of novelty. This paper uses the typology of innovativeness, conceptualized by Garcia & Calantone (2002), which characterizes five levels of newness. A study by Damanpour (1996) concludes that different levels of innovativeness follow different performance patterns. While mentioned authors have highlighted the importance of proper innovation classification, other researchers (Kleinknecht & Van Der Panne, 2012) still argue that despite the use of classification, there are not enough research findings and consistency in the literature between product innovativeness and its performance linkage. Although previous studies have already explored the linkage, results remain contradictory. It is acknowledged by meta-analyses that outline innovativeness – performance research (Stanko, Molina-Castilo & Harmancioglu, 2015; Rubera & Kirca, 2012; Szymanski, Kroff & Troy, 2007; Henard & Szymanski, 2002). Findings on the linkage differ from negative positive to no effects at all. This indicates a clear research gap and the need for further clarification; it also suggests that innovativeness – performance linkage cannot be explored unilaterally. This research aims to address the role of moderators in the linkage between innovativeness and performance due to contradictive findings that exist to date. Based on Baron & Kenny (1986), moderators are used in research to explain existing inconsistent relations between variables. Paper suggests that contradictive findings may exist in the field because the innovativeness – performance linkage can not be evaluated unilaterally and employs moderation analysis to explain the inconsistency, suggesting that linkage is influenced by contextual situations that are expected to predetermine relationship towards performance, defined as the commercial environment.

2.2. Determinants of new product performance and role of commercial environment as performance predictor

As one of the phases of new product development, commercialization is essential to achieving an economic impact. Several classical meta-analytical studies (Cooper et al, 1994; Montoya-Weiss & Calantone, 1994; Henard & Szymanski, 2001; Evanschitzky et al, 2012) summarize factors that contribute to the success of a new product. A commercial environment, as a performance predictor, is defined as a dynamic external system in which a new product functions commercially (Gotteland & Boule, 2006). Studies that conceptualized the area define the commercial environment based on the following logic – i) studies related to marketplace effects on new product performance, ii) studies focusing on company-related characteristics and their link to performance, iii) studies focusing on external relations (retail and distribution channels) and its effect on performance. The paper aims to remain consistent with previous research highlighting the importance of understanding the commercial environment as integrity. A major body of studies in the field relates marketplace conditions with a positive or negative economic climate that is found to have a positive or negative effect on performance. Previous studies associate market potential and growth with an improved new product or business performance (based on Cooper & Kleinschmidt, 1993; Gatington, Weitz & Bansal, 1990; Cooper et al, 1994; Green, Barclay & Ryans, 1995; Carbonell & Rodriguez, 2006) which can be defined as positive economic climate, which leads to business opportunities. Yet competitive situation, its intensity, and turbulence are associated with a negative impact on the new product or business performance by the same body of research and also other studies by Steenkamp & Gielens (2002) and Augusto & Coehlo (2009) which can be defined as non - favorable economic climate and is perceived as a potential business threat. Previous studies conclude that a successful launch that leads to effective commercialization is a significant driver for new product success yet demands specific capabilities. It is associated with the company's strength in terms of market power, superior reputation, and more significant resources and capabilities that enable a company to gain a competitive advantage and achieve commercial success. There have been attempts by Gatington & Xuareb (1997), Augusto & Coehlo (2009), Garcia-Zamora et al (2013) to consider the role of company characteristics as a moderator, yet the area has not been fully explored. In regards to external relations, often new products are launched in cooperation with retailers, which creates additional challenges and barriers. Based on Calantone & Griffith (2007), new product performance is highly dependable on the ability to exploit external counterparts, such as retailers. According to a study by Fornari, Grandi & Fornari (2009), the role of retailers and the effect of assortment choice on product owners' strategies and performance have become significant – the success and failure of newly launched innovations have become more critical regarding distribution issues, as retailers gained a positional advantage as "gatekeepers" to consumers. However, the role of retail category variables, based on Everdingen et al. (2011) and Lamey et al. (2018), has received limited attention from scholars in the past research and hence lacks theoretical conceptualization. A prior study by Dhar, Hoch & Kumar (2001) explored factors that predetermine strong category performance, which is associated with category assortment, feature advertising, and the presence of a robust private label.

3. Conceptual research model and hypothesis development

In this research, two types of linkages are explored - the effect between different levels of product innovativeness and its performance and the moderating role of the commercial environment on the linkage between innovativeness and performance.

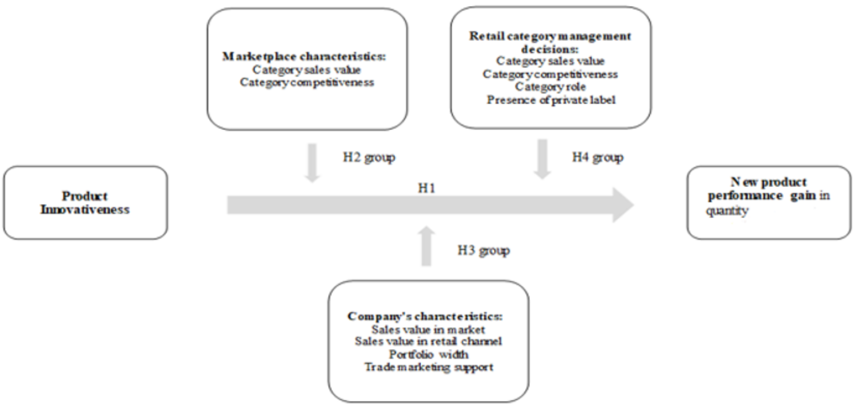

Figure 1. Conceptual research model 1

This paper hypothesizes that contextual factors (defined as commercial environment) moderate the link between product innovativeness and its performance, as outlined in Figure 1. First, this research addresses the link between innovativeness and performance. Afterward, three groups of commercial environment factors are distinguished as moderators. The paper associates higher innovativeness with improved performance outcomes due to several reasons – i) innovativeness is considered a key feature of a new offering that represents product advantage. Product advantage is subsequently associated with higher perceived value for the customer; thus, the higher perceived value, the better performance result is anticipated; ii) innovativeness plays a central role in differentiation compared to existing offerings in the marketplace. Suggested *H 1: Innovativeness is a direct predictor of performance.* The more innovative the product, the better the performance is anticipated. In this study, category sales value in the market and retail channel reflects a category of substitutable products that meet similar customer needs and is treated as a single unit and used to define market potential. The theoretical proposition related to moderating role of category sales value in the market and in retail sales channels follows previous conceptualizations, thus explaining: i) higher sales value in the market is a direct as well as moderating predictor of performance, associated with higher demand and positive economic climate; ii) with increasing sales value in the market, performance is also expected to improve; iii) sales value in the market has the potential to strengthen the link between innovativeness and performance, which is related to possible new product differentiation that allows creating a competitive advantage among the competition. Thus, *H 2a: Higher category sales value in a market should reinforce the link between new product innovativeness and its performance*, and *H 4a: Higher category sales value in retail should reinforce the link between new product innovativeness and its performance.* Category competitiveness is used as another important characteristic to define marketplace conditions. Contrary to market potential conceptualizations, studies (Tsai, Huang & Tsai, 2013; Steenkamp & Gielens, 2002) have acknowledged that competitive intensity is a considerable barrier to successful performance. Prior studies have mainly focused on the direct linkage between competitive intensity and performance. Only a few attempts (Kohli & Jarowski, 1990; Garcia-Zamora, Gonzalez-Benito & Munoz-Gallego, 2013) aimed to conceptualize it as a moderator. Studies relate more intense competition with more difficulties for innovation to make a breakthrough. Hence, worsened performance is anticipated due to high competition. Given the evidence that competitive intensity is shown to be a direct negative predictor of performance, it is treated as a performance barrier. However, in intense competition, higher innovativeness – performance linkage is more important for commercial success due to product advantage, which originates from higher innovativeness and allows competing more successfully; thus, the study suggests *H 2b: Higher category competitiveness in a market should enhance the link between new product innovativeness and its performance* and *H 4b: Higher category competitiveness in retail should enhance the link between new product innovativeness and its performance.* A company's characteristics are recognized as a new product success direct predictor (Herrmann, Tomczak & LaBahn, 2006; Garido-Rubio & Polo-Redondo, 2005; Cooper, 1998; Hultink & Robben, 1999), with a conceptually established direct linkage between company characteristics and performance. This research suggests that higher company sales value and portfolio width are indirect predictors of new product performance based on previous research findings. A company's characteristics, such as sales value in the market and retail channel, and company portfolio width, reflect a company's strength and its competitive position in the marketplace. The stronger the company's competitive position, the more it is associated with a superior reputation and greater resources and capabilities, which enable it to achieve commercial success easier. It is suggested that higher innovativeness – improved performance linkage is suppressed, as the role of innovativeness becomes less important due to overall good market acceptance of new products, which is conditioned by the company's superior reputation. A company's characteristics are expected to have a negative moderating effect on innovativeness – performance linkage. Thus, *H 3a: Higher company sales value in the market should suppress the link between innovativeness and performance, H3b: Higher company sales value in the retail channel should suppress the link between innovativeness and performance, H 3c: Larger company portfolio width should suppress the link between innovativeness and performance.* Paper also enhances the company's capabilities in terms of marketing investment in new products in the retail channel (Garrido-Rubio & Polo-Redondo, 2005; Cooper, 1998; Urban & Hauser, 1993). Bloom, Gudlach & Cannon (2002) indicated that companies that cooperate with retailers as potential outlets for their products are expected to pay various trade marketing fees. Trade marketing support for products on the shelves is recognized as an important part of the retail business revenues (Wilkie, Desrochers & Gundlach, 2002). A study by Everdingen et al. (2011) suggests that higher trade marketing support increases the chances of launching a new product more successfully, which results in anticipation of commercial success. Suggested *H 3d: Trade marketing support, invested in the retail channel, should enhance the link between innovativeness and performance.* This paper acknowledges the importance of retailers' assortment decisions regarding successful new product commercialization. Dhar, Hoch & Kumar (2001) explores factors that predetermine strong category performance as part of category management decisions and indicates that assortment, feature advertising, and strong private label contribute to successful category performance in retail. This research suggests that retail category management decisions, such as assignation to categories with specific roles and strategies (based on industry studies by Nielsen, 2006), and the presence of private labels, can affect the new product performance in diverse patterns. Regarding category management decisions, this research associates the destination category role with strategic importance to the retailer due to its definition to reflect the retailer's strategy and become a primary category provider to consumers. Therefore, products assigned to this category are expected to experience a direct "lift" effect, defined as a positive economic climate. The destination category role is expected to strengthen the link between innovativeness and performance, as innovativeness is more important for commercial success in this category role due to the competitive advantage of a new product. Thus, *H 4c: Product assignation to the destination category should enhance the link between new product innovativeness and performance.* Routine categories are usually used for transaction building, as well as cash and profit generation, and typically the retailer aims to become one of the preferred category providers for this category with a rather limited choice of assortments inside the category, which induces rivalry and the need to differentiate, inside the category. This research associate routine categories with high potential and high consumption rate categories that usually contain intense competition due to narrow assortments. Thus, higher innovativeness becomes more important due to the competitive advantage it can create and helps to differentiate from the competition. Routine categories are expected to have a twofold effect on new product performance. First, the high potential of these categories generates stable demand, which benefits the performance of new products. Secondly, limited assortment coverage induces rivalry inside the category, making innovativeness more important for differentiation. Suggested *H 4d: Product assignation to the routine category should enhance the link between new product innovativeness and performance.* The seasonal category role represents categories with varying yet high peak demands due to their seasonal importance. Retailers use this category role to create excitement, build traffic, and generate profit during the peaks. The seasonal category role is suggested to enhance the link to the performance of more innovative new products due to its importance to retailers. Thus, products assigned to seasonal categories are expected to experience a "lift" effect that impacts their performance. A higher level of innovativeness is expected to alleviate successful performance in this category role due to the ability to create a competitive advantage and differentiate from the competition. Suggested *H 4e: Product assignation to the seasonal category should enhance the link between* *new product innovativeness and performance.* Retailers mainly use convenience categories to build transactions and generate profit. This category role represents retailers' willingness to have a full assortment so the customer can find all necessities in one place. This category usually represents a limited assortment of commodity products but with higher prices and a higher profit margin for retailers and is also related to impulse buying behavior. The negative effect is possibly related to consumers' ability to purchase specific items elsewhere and impulse buying. Higher innovativeness thus becomes less important to achieve commercial success in convenience categories. Suggested *H 4f: Product assignation to the convenience category should suppress the link between new product innovativeness and performance.* Given the importance of private labels to the retailer, it is also acknowledged (Karry & Zaccour, 2006; Ailawadi & Keller, 2004) that these products pose a competitive threat to branded products and weaken their performance in the category due to rivalry moving from retail shelves to the overall marketplace. Thus, it is more complicated for new branded products to achieve commercial success in categories where private label is present. This research associates the presence of private labels with a negative effect on new product performance for several reasons. First, retailers adopt private labels in more attractive categories, which stimulates a more intense competitive threat in the category. Secondly, private labels impose copy-cat strategies over branded products which reflects in pricing, design and merchandising tactics to motivate consumers to substitute branded products with private labels. However, if the new product is innovative enough, it is more likely to achieve commercial success due to the additional value it can create, which leads to a competitive advantage compared to a less innovative product. This research suggests that it is easier for more innovative products to compete with commoditized private labels and higher innovativeness becomes more important in categories where private label exists to reach commercial success. Suggested *H 4g: The presence of a private label in the category should enhance the link between new product innovativeness and its performance.*

4. Research methodology

One of the aims and differentiation angles of this paper was the creation of a unique data sample to reflect the real-life market situation. The data sample was created using two data sources – primary and secondary data. Expert opinion evaluation was used as a primary data source to measure the level of innovativeness for a new product. Secondary data were used to quantify commercial environment elements and track product innovations' performance in the sample. Lithuanian pharmaceutical retail industry was chosen as the field for this study. The research was conducted with 1238 new assortment items; a six-month period was used to evaluate performance outcomes, based on Everdingen et al. (2011). The conceptual research model is tested by performing diagnostics, followed by regression analysis. Ordinary least squares regression modeling was chosen for several reasons (based on Wooldridge, 2002) - it is highly appropriate for explanatory variables of a fixed nature and stocasticity of explanatory variables.

The equation is used for measure of performance, defined as gain: *Y=sum of value in period 2 (4-6 months)/sum of value in period 1 (1-3 months), expressed in percentage.*

5. Empirical research results

Table 1 outlines and summarizes the main findings of Model 1 (adjusted R-squared of the model = 0.09). The regression analysis findings do not support a significant direct positive linkage between innovativeness and performance, although it is found that innovativeness is positively associated with new product performance. OLS analysis revealed several significant direct predictors of performance. Category turnover in the market is found to deliver a direct positive effect on new product performance. Category competitiveness in the market is found to deliver a direct negative moderating effect on new product performance. Supplier turnover was also found to be a direct predictor of performance, however twofold. Supplier turnover in the market was found to negatively affect new product performance, but supplier turnover in retail was found to have an adverse effect, as it induces a direct positive effect on new product performance. Category turnover in retail is found to deliver a direct negative effect on new product performance. Category competitiveness in retail is found to deliver a direct positive effect on performance. Category role convenience is found to be a direct negative performance predictor. Several moderators were found to have significant and positive effects on performance. Category turnover in retail enhances the linkage towards performance which does not align with direct effects delivered by category turnover as a predictor, where the significant and negative direct effect was observed. Retail category role convenience is also found to strengthen the linkage towards the dependent variable, which has an opposite effect as well as a direct predictor. Contrarily, several significant adverse moderating effects were outlined. Category turnover in the market is found to suppress the link towards performance yet, as a direct predictor, delivers a positive effect. Category competitiveness in the market is also found to weaken the linkage towards performance which is the same direction of effect in comparison to the direct effect of this variable. Supplier turnover in retail also delivers a negative moderating effect, while a positive effect is observed if analyzed as a direct predictor.

Table 1. Summary of OLS regression analysis for Model 1

Main effects	β-coefficient	p-value
Const	0.0194926	0.01637**
Innovativeness => Performance	0.00220154	0.76729
Category sales value in market => Performance	**0.00002824**	**0.00001*** **
Category competitiveness in market => Performance	**-0.00014827**	**0.00426*** **
Supplier sales value in market => Performance	**-0.00000469**	**0.01207** **
Supplier sales value in retail => Performance	**0.000094205**	**0.00005*** **
Supplier portfolio width => Performance	0.000042053	0.63615
Trade marketing support => Performance	-0.00000088	0.27306
Category sales value in retail => Performance	**-0.000466413**	**0.00002*** **
Category competitiveness in retail => Performance	**0.000560586**	**0.00466*** **
Category role destination => Performance	-0.024623	0.17444
Category role convenience => Performance	**-0.204255**	**0.00001*** **
Category role seasonal => Performance	0.0047426	0.85827
Presence of private label => Performance	-0.0177438	0.43128
Moderating effects		
Category sales value in market × Innovativeness => Performance	**-0.000012505**	**0.03899** **
Category competitiveness in market × Innovativeness => Performance	**-0.000110116**	**0.05516* **
Supplier sales value in market × Innovativeness => Performance	0.0000003084	0.86129
Supplier sales value in retail × Innovativeness => Performance	**-0.0000624779**	**0.00095*** **
Supplier portfolio width × Innovativeness => Performance	0.000126502	0.19367
Trade marketing support × Innovativeness => Performance	-0.000000191	0.79902
Category sales value in retail × Innovativeness => Performance	**0.000190475**	**0.05091* **
Category competitiveness in retail × Innovativeness => Performance	-0.00000791	0.97054
Category role destination × Innovativeness => Performance	-0.00235482	0.89545
Category role convenience × Innovativeness => Performance	**0.0740103**	**0.00619*** **
Category role seasonal × Innovativeness => Performance	0.0151514	0.46375
Presence of private label × Innovativeness => Performance	-0.0148921	0.41198

****p<0.01, **p<0.05, *p<0.1*

6. Conclusions and discussion

Research revealed several findings, summarized in *Table 2*: i) there is a direct positive but not significant linkage between innovativeness and performance, which only outlines a positive trend. This research thus concludes that the innovativeness – performance linkage cannot be evaluated unilaterally, and a more complex evaluation of the linkage is needed to bring clarity to the area of research. This finding also supported inconsistency in innovativeness – performance linkage studies, similarly to previous research in the area, yet proved the role of the commercial environment in innovativeness – performance linkage to be existent. Empirical research revealed several significant direct and moderating effects on the innovativeness – performance link: several direct positive significant and direct adverse effects towards performance; moderation analysis revealed that some variables delivered opposite effects as moderators in comparison with direct effects; some predictors were observed to have no significant effect as moderators yet were found to have a significant direct effect.

Table 2. Summary of hypotheses for Model 1

Hypothesis linkage	Proposed direction	Result
H1: Innovativeness => Performance	Positive direct	Rejected
H2a: Category sales value in market =>Linkage between Innovativeness and Performance	Positive moderating	Rejected
H2b: Category competitiveness in market => Linkage between Innovativeness and Performance	Positive moderating	Rejected* (opposite direction)
H3a: Supplier sales value in market => Linkage between Innovativeness and Performance	Negative moderating	Rejected
H3b: Supplier sales value in retail => Linkage between Innovativeness and Performance	Negative moderating	Supported*
H3c: Portfolio width => Linkage between Innovativeness and Performance	Negative moderating	Rejected
H3d: Trade marketing support => Linkage between Innovativeness and Performance	Positive moderating	Rejected
H4a: Category sales value in retail=> Linkage between Innovativeness and Performance	Positive moderating	Supported*
H4b: Category competitiveness in retail => Linkage between Innovativeness and Performance	Positive moderating	Rejected
H4c: Category role destination => Linkage between Innovativeness and Performance	Positive moderating	Rejected
H4e: Category role seasonal => Linkage between Innovativeness and Performance	Positive moderating	Rejected
H4f: Category role convenience => Linkage between Innovativeness and Performance	Negative moderating	Rejected* (opposite direction)
H4g: Presence of private label => Linkage between Innovativeness and Performance	Positive moderating	Rejected

**statistically significant result*

This research has presented a holistic view of new product performance predictors and distinguished four influential groups, such as product characteristics and other external predictor groups, such as marketplace, company's, and retailers' activities. Findings provided a scientific justification for the moderating role of the commercial environment on the linkage between product innovativeness and its performance and the importance of the commercial environment as a moderator to innovativeness – performance linkage.

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