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Abstract

Specialty foods have become an essential part of the food industry as the growing *free from* market demonstrates. The *free from* market consists of products that do not include any common allergenic ingredients. Gluten free products are thus one of the main segments in this market. As different allergies and food intolerances continue to increase along with awareness of them, there is a need for specialty food products at an international level. In order to provide insight to the international expansion of specialty food products, this study was conducted as a qualitative study by using Provena gluten free product line by Raisio Nutrition Ltd. as an example.

The purpose of this study was to analyze how specialty food products can be turned into international products and brands. This purpose was further divided into two sub-questions: identifying the different factors affecting the international commercialization process and how these factors then need to be taken account in strategic planning. The theoretical framework of this study was built step by step by first identifying and analyzing the factors at three different levels: external, internal, and product level. Then different strategic issues were analyzed in connection with these factors. Finally, the actual commercialization process was described. The empirical data was collected by using semi-structured interviews. The findings based on the interview data were then added to the theoretical framework thus providing a model for international expansion of specialty food products.

This study demonstrated how all the phases of international expansion need to be considered and how all these phases are in connection. The factors provide the groundwork, strategic plans then guide the expansion to new markets and then the actual commercialization in each market considers the customers' viewpoint in order to make sure the products have prerequisites for success. In the case of specialty food products, partnerships and networking along with commitment proved to be essentially important considering the nature of these types of products. Especially cooperation with associations along with participation in different events and fairs in order to guarantee the overall visibility of the products was highlighted. In terms of marketing, focused marketing efforts along with some standardization of processes and packaging often tend provide good results. In general, it is important to determine the own competitive advantage that differentiates the products from the competing ones and then base the marketing and branding decisions to that distinctive factor. All in all, international expansion is a long and complex process.

Key words	brand creation, commercialization, food, international expansion, specialty goods
Further information	