

**FROM CLICKS TO BRICKS: EXPLORING MARKET
ENTRY STRATEGIES OF ONLINE FOOD RETAILERS
IN GERMANY**

**FROM CLICKS TO BRICKS: AZ ONLINE ÉLELMISZER-
KISKERESKEDŐK PIACRA LÉPÉSI STRATÉGIÁINAK
VIZSGÁLATA NÉMETORSZÁGBAN**

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ABSZTRAKT

A kiskereskedelmi ágazat Németországban jelenleg átalakuláson megy keresztül. Az egykor sikeres áruházak mostanában bezárják a prominens helyeken található üzleteiket, míg az online kereskedelemből indult omnichannel kiskereskedők egyre inkább terjeszkednek a bolti kiskereskedelemben. Egy korábbi kutatás arra összpontosított, hogy Németországban mely tisztán online szereplők (Online Pure Player) követik az Adding Bricks to Clicks (ABtC) terjeszkedési stratégiát, és a piacra lépés mely formáját választják. Az eredmények azt mutatták, hogy a vállalatok egyértelműen a saját kiskereskedelmi üzletek üzemeltetését részesítik előnyben. A korábbi vizsgálat azonban nem vette kellőképpen figyelembe az élelmiszer-ágazatot, annak ellenére, hogy a COVID-19 világjárvány miatt az online élelmiszer-kiskereskedelem fellendült. Jelen kutatás a trinaguláció elvét követve négy meglévő tanulmány adatainak kvalitatív tartalomelemzésére terjedt ki. A tanulmány pilot studynak tekinthető, amely az Ankerkraut, a KERNenergie és a mymuesli élelmiszeripari omnichannel kiskereskedőket vizsgálja és hasonlítja össze. Ezen, eredetileg online kiskereskedelemmel foglalkozó cégeket 37 korábbi, kvalitatív, félig strukturált szakértői interjú során említették. A fenti vállalkozások saját üzleteket üzemeltetnek, hogy erősítsék kiskereskedelmi márkájukat és taktilis termékélményt nyújtsanak. Üzleteik számát azonban az ilyen terjeszkedéssel járó magas költségek miatt néhány, fontos helyen lévő főüzletre korlátozzák. Hatékonyabban terjeszkednek offline, a bevált kiskereskedőkkel való együttműködésekén keresztül. Ezen együttműködésekkel kihasználják a partnerek már meglévő márkaismertségét és piaci jelenlétét, így jelentős növekedést eredményeznek és modellként szolgálnak az ABtC élelmiszerágazat legjobb gyakorlataihoz.

ABSTRACT

The retail sector in Germany is currently undergoing a transformation. Department stores that were once successful are now closing their branches at

prominent locations, while omni-channel retailers that originated from online commerce are expanding their position in brick-and-mortar retail. Previous research has focused on examining which Online Pure Players (OPP) in Germany pursue the Adding Bricks to Clicks (ABtC) expansion strategy and the form of market entry they choose. The investigation showed a clear preference for operating their own retail stores. However, the investigation did not sufficiently consider the food sector, despite the boost in online food retail due to the COVID-19 pandemic. The investigation involved qualitative content analysis on a dataset of four existing studies through merging and triangulation. This contribution presents a pilot study that investigates and compares the food omnichannel retailers Ankerkraut, KERNenergie, and mymuesli. These retailers were mentioned in the evaluation of 37 qualitative, guideline-supported expert interviews and originate from online commerce. The examined food retailers offer a curated range of specialty and delicatessen products in the higher price segment, adhering to specific product-price policies. They operate their own stores to strengthen their retail brand and provide a tactile product experience. However, they limit the number of these stores to a handful of flagship locations due to the high costs associated with such an expansion. More effectively, they expand their offline reach through collaborations with established retailers. These partnerships capitalize on the existing brand recognition and market presence of the partners, driving significant growth and serving as a model for best practices in the ABtC food sector.

INTRODUCTION

The German retail sector is currently undergoing a profound process of change, driven by increasing digitalization (Alexander and Blazquez Cano, 2020; Kulke, 2023). Furthermore, the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic has accelerated the pace of this predictable trend (Brüggemann and Olbrich, 2022; Heinemann, 2021). In particular, brick-and-mortar retail has been confronted with challenges,

while online formats have experienced growth (Müller, 2023). The food sector (e-food) represents a significant growth area within the online retail industry. This is due to the sector's immediate relevance to daily needs and the challenges of logistics and freshness. Online grocery sales in Germany have increased from EUR 1.59 billion in 2019 to EUR 3.97 billion in 2022. This illustrates the increasing importance and acceptance of online grocery shopping in Germany (Statista, 2024). The term "e-food" has also become a generic term for all online food retail business models (Wegmann, 2020). This encompasses online pure players (OPP), which are pure online retailers without offline stores, online supermarkets of traditional retailers, online marketplaces, manufacturers with direct end customer sales on the internet, and cooking box providers (Leischner, 2023).

Consequently, such OPPs confront the dual challenge of adapting their corporate and marketing strategies in the face of a highly competitive environment and of strengthening their brand loyalty and tapping into new customer segments through physical presence (Gauri et al., 2021; Maier et al., 2023). In the field of retail, it can be observed that OPPs are increasingly expanding into stationary retail (Mahrous et al., 2022) or further expanding their position in stationary retail (Jindal et al., 2021). This strategy of creating physical presences is referred to as "Adding Bricks to Clicks" (ABtC) (Jiang et al., 2020; Swoboda and Winters, 2020). It can be realized through integrative and cooperative market entry and implementation strategies (Swoboda et al., 2019; Zentes et al., 2017). Once an OPP expands its online sales channel to include a physical channel in the form of a brick-and-mortar store, it is reclassified as a former online pure player (eOPP) (Kudet, 2023). Despite the growing interest in the ABtC strategy (Gauri et al., 2021), there is a deficiency in the in-depth analysis of the forms of market entry utilized by OPPs when expanding into brick-and-mortar retail. While studies have demonstrated the potential benefits of such expansion (Liu et al., 2018; Timoumi et al., 2022) and examined the store concepts of eOPPs in offline retail (Deges,

2020; Kull, 2019), there is a lack of knowledge about the market entry forms of ABtC expansion of eOPPs, especially in the food sector. An increasing number of OPPs are currently implementing a multi-channel system by integrating offline sales channels (Kilian and Kreutzer, 2022; Mahrous et al., 2022).

Given this background, the research objective of this study is to explore which e-OPPs from the food sector in Germany have already carried out an ABtC expansion into bricks-and-mortar retail and what form of market entry was chosen. The aim of this research question is to develop a deeper understanding of the strategic orientation of (e)OPPs in the context of the dynamic retail market. The analysis of the choice of market entry form is an addition to the research discourse and offers initial approaches to operationalization for further research. As a contribution to practice, the identified market entry forms can serve as a model for OPPs that wish to expand.

THEORETICAL FOUNDATIONS

ABtC-Expansion

After successfully establishing their online business, OPPs are often confronted with a slowdown in the usual growth rates in online retail during the maturity or saturation phase (Bruhn, 2019). Consequently, ABtC represents a strategy for them to grow and differentiate themselves from their competitors. Operating physical stores provides an avenue for OPPs to add a relevant touchpoint to the customer journey, as well as to generate a number of synergies and competitive advantages (Crockford et al., 2013; Herhausen et al., 2015). Consequently, OPPs are increasingly directing their attention to this subject matter (Deges, 2020; Jindal et al., 2021). However, the advent of this novel sales channel presents OPPs with considerable challenges (Rumler and Grosser, 2022). The transition to a multi-channel retailer necessitates not only substantial investment but, above all, a strategic realignment at the corporate level, a closer integration of corporate and marketing strategies (Kreutzer, 2017; Meffert et al., 2019; Sundermann, 2018).

This transformation is considered extremely complex and difficult to reverse (Maier et al., 2023). One of the primary reasons for this discrepancy is that insights derived from other channel expansions cannot be directly transferred to physical retail, particularly due to the unique characteristics of the latter (Avery et al., 2012). The literature on ABtC research describes a range of motives and objectives. These include, for instance, increased turnover and earnings (Simone and Sabbadin, 2017), new customer acquisition (Westermann et al., 2018), retail branding (Liu et al., 2018), and the fulfillment of customer expectations (Knoppe, 2022) and the ability to offer customers a cross-channel service offering (Schramm-Klein, 2012). The choice of the ABtC transformation strategy by OPPs to become a multi-channel retailer represents a horizontal diversification strategy applied at the overall company level (Swoboda and Winters, 2020). Consequently, OPPs must select appropriate market entry and implementation strategies for this expansion (Swoboda et al., 2019; Zentes et al., 2013). In principle, they can choose between integrative and cooperative market entry and implementation strategies. These are described in research in the form of branching, mergers & acquisitions (M&A), joint ventures or franchising as well as combined strategies.

Types of market entry

Company-owned stores – Internal implementation and development involves the use of in-house resources and expertise to open stores independently, for example, through the establishment of chain stores (Swoboda et al., 2019). In the context of brick-and-mortar retail, a distinction is made between a variety of different store systems and strategies for branch expansion. A distinction is made between monotypical branchization (one branch network within a sector), multitypical branchization (several branch networks within a sector), multi-branch strategies (retail activities in different sectors), and special forms of branchization (combination of branch and franchise systems) (Kiefer, 2019; Liebmann et al., 2008). Consequently, the establishment of an independent store network

necessitates considerable time and effort to ensure comprehensive internal control of operations, as outlined by Swoboda et al. (2019). In the academic literature, this traditionally key growth strategy in brick-and-mortar retail is often associated with high costs and entrepreneurial risks (Möhlenbruch, 2012).

Cooperation – In contrast to integrative strategies, cooperative market entry and implementation strategies encompass all forms of collaboration between companies, organizations, and individuals with the objective of achieving shared interests (Becker et al., 2018; Greune, 1997). In the retail sector, the forms of entrepreneurial cooperation include joint ventures (joint enterprises involving at least two partners), buying groups (purchasing groups of retailers), and franchising (a distribution system for marketing goods and services) (Boehm, 2020; Brodersen, 2012; Berman et al., 2018). In order to compensate for their own disadvantages, or to enhance their competitive position, firms enter into collaborative arrangements with entities that hold considerable power in the market. These collaborations typically occur within a product-market strategy aimed at market expansion and development (Swoboda et al., 2019). Moreover, collaborations are less risky and more cost-effective than mergers and acquisitions (M&A) (Gauri et al., 2021).

M&A – External development represents an integrative form of a specialized growth strategy, whereby resources are acquired from another company through M&A (Zentes et al., 2017). Mergers and acquisitions (M&A) refer to the acquisition of a majority stake in another company or even just individual assets of this company (in this case, stationary branches) (Zentes et al., 2017). The buyer incorporates these operational and procedural elements into its own formats or concepts (Zentes et al., 2012). It is the hope of many retailers that M&A will enable them to grow more rapidly and expand their business more quickly. Furthermore, the search for suitable store locations may be rendered unnecessary (Burt and Limmack, 2001). Mergers and acquisitions (M&A) are often

accompanied by significant costs associated with the acquisition or operational integration, as well as a high level of risk (Swoboda et al., 2019). In certain instances, the anticipated benefits of M&A are hindered by incompatibilities between the merging companies' strategic approaches, competencies, resources and cultural norms (Zentes et al., 2017).

METHOD

This pilot study employs an exploratory approach, utilizing qualitative content analysis (Kuckartz & Rädiker, 2022) on a dataset consolidated out of four studies through merging and triangulation (Lüdemann & Otto, 2019; Yin, 1981). The first data source was a PhD project on the process of bricks-and-mortar expansion by pure online retailers (Kudet, 2024). The project comprised 37 expert interviews with leading consultants, academics and decision-makers from multi-channel retailers. These experts provided specific insights about food eOPP during their interviews, which were used within the article presented here to evaluate expansion strategies. The second data source was a study, conducted by Kudet and Szöke, to investigate the market entry strategies of previously pure online retailers, so-called online pure players (OPP), into physical offline retail (Kudet and Szöke, 2024). The dataset was necessary for the present article in order to facilitate the comparison between the strategies of food and non-food retailers. The third data source was a study labelled "E-Commerce in Germany 2022" by the EHI Retail Institute (2022). Additionally, data from freely available statistics on e-commerce from the Federal Statistical Office and from the Chambers of Industry and Commerce, annual reports, and press releases. Those last sources were employed with the objective to confirm existing as well as supplement missing data (Bitkom e. V., 2020; GfK GeoMarketing, 2022; IFH Cologne, 2020; Federal Statistical Office, 2022).

The aggregation of triangulated data from sources two, three and four resulted in a dataset comprising 244 companies. The dataset included information such as

the company name, URL of the online store, net sales in German e-commerce with goods and product segments, year of launch of the online store, year of expansion into offline retail, number of stores, assignment of the company to the category of retailer or manufacturer, and the type of business relationship (B2C or B2B). In a first step, a preliminary screening was conducted to identify and exclude duplicate records, as well as instances of insolvency or market exits. For instance, the British eOPP for household appliances, AO, exited the German retail market in July 2022. In a second step, the data set data set was refined in accordance with three inclusion criteria derived from the research question. (1) It was assumed that the companies in question operated within the German retail market. A preliminary distinction was made between retailers and manufacturers. Furthermore, it was necessary to define the (2) company size category as having an annual turnover of at least EUR 40,000,000. This threshold was selected on the basis that all companies above this level are required to publish their turnover data in annual reports. In accordance with the stipulations of the relevant German legislation (cf. §§ 326 in conjunction with 267, 267a HGB), a comparable obligation to report only exists for medium-sized and large corporations. Furthermore, the companies selected for the sample (3) were required to be eOPPs that had already expanded into the stationary retail sector in Germany. Further criteria for inclusion were that the companies had commenced business exclusively in online retail sales (i.e. without traditional catalogue mail order) at the time of the company's foundation, that they had opened at least one brick-and-mortar store no earlier than two years later, and that they were currently operating a physical store in offline retail. In contrast to traditional brick-and-mortar stores, which typically operate for extended periods, data on pop-up stores is challenging to obtain and lacks the reliability necessary for a comprehensive analysis. This is due to the fact that data on pop-up stores is often not published in a systematic manner on company websites and has a limited lifespan of a few days or weeks. It was therefore decided that temporary store concepts should be

explicitly excluded. As a consequence, companies such as Amazon, Infinite Styles, and Fashionette were not included in the analysis. Consequently, 16 eOPPs pertinent to the study were included in the sample (see Table 1: Companies relevant to the study without background colour). It is noteworthy that at this juncture, all food eOPPs met the inclusion criteria, with the exception of the turnover threshold. Only mymuesli AG with an annual turnover of EUR 38.7 million came close. In order to pursue the research question, five relevant food eOPPs had to be identified by triangulation with data from the first study (Kudet, 2024). Two companies were excluded from the subsequent analysis: Vineola (Bavarian House GmbH), as they only sell alcoholic beverages, and Chorcri (Berlin chocolate manufacturer), as the company ceased operations on 30 April 2023 (Lebensmittel Praxis, 2022). This resulted in the overview presented in Table 1, which enables a comparison between three food (highlighted in gray) and 16 non-food eOPPs.

Table 1. Companies relevant to the study

(1) Retail market in Germany				(2) Size	(3) Expansion of OPP			
Company	Product segments	Online shop	Established	Turnover	ABtC	Types of market entry		
			Year	Net, 2021, Online, in million EUR	Year	Branch store (independent)	Cooperation	Acquisition
Ankerkraut GmbH	Food, delicatessen	ankerkraut.de	2013	21	2018	4	> 5000	-
KERNenergie GmbH	Food, delicatessen	kern-energie.com	2010	5	2018	2	Delicatessens	-
mymuesli AG	Food, delicatessen	mymuesli.com	2007	39	2009	3	Kaufland, Rewe	
babymarkt.de GmbH	Baby articles	babymarkt.de	2003	125	2012	5	-	-
BIKE24 GmbH	Bicycles, clothing	bike24.de	2002	145	2015	2	-	-

computeruniv erse GmbH	IT, consumer electronics	computeruniv erse.net	1999	149	2011	1	-	-
Coolblue GmbH	All-rounder	coolblue.de	1999	89	2021	3	-	-
Cyberport GmbH	IT, consumer electronics	cyberport.de	1998	699	2003	11	Galeria Kaufhof (+)	-
DefShop GmbH	Clothing, textiles, shoes	def-shop.com	2006	61	2016	3	-	-
dress-for-less GmbH	Clothing, textiles, shoes	dress-for- less.de	1999	59	2019	1*)	-	-
Flaconi GmbH	Drugstore articles, cosmetics	flaconi.de	2011	359	2015	1	Thiemann	-
Home24 SE	Furniture, decorative items	home24.de	2009	337	2015	14	-	Fashio n For Home
Internetstores GmbH	Sport, Outdoor	fahrrad.de	2003	101	2018	6	-	-
kfzteile24 GmbH	Car, motorcycle	kfzteile24.de	2001	129	2006	3	-	-
Mister Spex SE	Optician	misterspex.de	2007	119	2011	65#)	400	-
momox AG	Clothing, books, CDs, DVDs,	momoxfashio n. com/de/	2006	335	2012	1*)	-	-
myToys.de GmbH	Toys	mytoys.de	1999	388	2006	19	-	-
Westwing GmbH	Furniture, household goods	westwing.de	2011	146	2022	1	-	-
Zalando SE	Clothing, textiles, shoes	zalando.de	2008	2.515	2012	13*)	Sephora (+)	Kickz

*) Outlets

+) Shop-in-shop concept

#) First independently operated store 2016

ANALYSIS AND RESULTS

A commonality among the three food e-commerce platforms, mymuesli AG, Ankerkraut GmbH, and KERNenergie GmbH, is their long-standing presence in the online business sector, with a minimum of 11 years of operation for all three. On average, the interval between the inception of their online store and their entry into the stationary retail market in Germany is approximately five years. With regard to the form of market entry in the ABtC expansion, it can be observed that

all food eOPPs operate independent stores and cooperations. However, none of the three companies pursued an M&A strategy during the period under review.

In-depth analysis of the business models of food eOPPs reveals a strategic orientation that differs significantly from the eOPPs identified in the previous study. This distinction becomes particularly evident when it is noted that none of the three food eOPPs operate as a traditional food retailer. A key strategy employed by these businesses is the pursuit of a specific product pricing policy. All three food eOPPs sell a similar range of specialities and delicatessen products in the higher price segment (second column of the table). These include individualized organic muesli, spices and delicatessen products or freshly roasted nuts. They also share the fact that they do not sell traditional products from manufacturers, but a curated range consisting mainly of their in-house products and highly refined products. Differentiation is based on quality and uniqueness, which is a unique selling point of the respective retailer brand. They also strive for a high touch-and-feel aspect of their products. They offer customers a direct product experience in their own stores, particularly in the case of nuts, spices and individualized organic muesli, where sensory experiences such as taste and texture are decisive for the purchase decision. This underlines the importance of a physical product presentation, as the customer cannot fully assess the product in the same way in online retail. Despite their strong online presence, bricks-and-mortar retail allows them to reach new customer segments and offer an immersive brand experience. The results of previous research, e.g. by Hudetz et al. (2011), Kollmann et al. (2012) and Lal and Sarvary (1999), are thus confirmed.

A primary comparison with the non-food eOPPs reveals a similarly low number of owned stores, with approximately three owned stores per company. It is noteworthy that the expansion strategies of the non-food eOPPs included all three forms of market entry, with branches representing the most prevalent form, followed by cooperations and company takeovers. In contrast, the food eOPPs surveyed demonstrated a clear preference for large-scale cooperations, and none

of the three companies pursued an M&A strategy during the period under review. It is evident that these cooperations are not of the same nature as the classic shop-in-shop format (e.g. Cyberport at Galeria Kaufhof) or Mister Spex (cooperation with hundreds of traditional opticians). Rather, the availability of part of the product range at other traditional retailers of an offline retail background can be observed. For instance, mymuesli products are available in large grocery chains, including Edeka, Rewe, and Kaufland. Similarly, Ankerkraut products are available in delicatessens.

This strategy involved the establishment of points of sale in high-traffic retail formats and locations without the necessity of opening new stores (Deges, 2020). This model enables companies to make their products accessible to a wider audience without having to invest in an extensive store structure themselves. The interviews indicate that the limited number of owned stores is an intentional strategy employed by companies to increase brand visibility through physical presence, while maintaining a focus on online retail. The relatively limited number of company-owned stores, which serve as flagship locations, suggests a deliberate concentration on key locations that primarily serve brand-building and the direct customer experience. This approach allows for a significant reduction in the costs associated with multichannel sales. This strategy not only reflects an adaptation to evolving market conditions but also the capacity to assert oneself in a competitive marketplace, to differentiate oneself from conventional retailers, and to reinforce brand identity. The extensive closure of mymuesli stores is a particularly clear example of this strategy in action. After building and consolidating brand awareness through its own stores, maintaining a nationwide brand presence in food retail across Germany is now sufficient to ensure the visibility of the brand (Randler, 2023).

CONCLUSION

The objective of this study was to investigate which food eOPPs in Germany have already carried out an ABtC expansion into stationary retail and which form of market entry was chosen. In conclusion, only three cases met the criteria for inclusion in the study, which also represents a significant implication of this study and has a considerable impact on the generalizability of its findings. In summary, only three cases met the study criteria. The assertion that a significant number of OPPs have expanded into brick-and-mortar retail (Kilian and Kreutzer, 2022; Rittinger et al., 2017) cannot be substantiated. All of the food OPPs examined operate independent stores and cooperatives, but did not pursue an M&A strategy in the period under review. The establishment of physical stores serves as a tangible point of contact for customers with regard to the retailer's curated and higher-priced specialty and delicatessen range. These stores offer an immersive brand experience, thereby contributing to the strengthening of the retailer brand. The focus on high-quality and specialized products enables these retailers to differentiate themselves through uniqueness and quality, which sets them apart from traditional food retailers with broader, price-oriented ranges. Despite the aforementioned advantages, the food eOPPs only operate a select number of their proprietary stores, primarily as flagship locations. This limited number of stores exemplifies a strategic approach of concentrating on key locations rather than attempting to establish a broad independent presence. The case of mymuesli illustrates that once the retail brand has been established, these locations can be closed and replaced by cooperations in order to reduce costs and continue to make the products available to a wide audience.

This study contributes to the existing literature on the choice of market entry forms and strategic considerations as part of an ABtC expansion strategy. It also supplements and confirms various research findings, such as the importance of cooperations as a low-risk entry into brick-and-mortar retail (Gauri et al., 2021; Berman et al., 2018). Cooperations permit OPPs to enhance customer frequency

through the partner's traffic and offer an advantageous alternative to opening their own stores. The role of physical stores in generating sales and acquiring new customers has also been substantiated (Avery et al., 2012; Gallino and Moreno, 2014; Pauwels and Neslin, 2015). These stores facilitate increased customer reach (Schröder, 2013) and serve as a crucial physical touchpoint, enabling direct customer communication and enhancing the customer experience (Bailey, 2020; Simone and Sabbadin, 2017; Anderl et al., 2016). Furthermore, physical stores facilitate retail branding and brand perception, particularly in large urban areas (Deges, 2020; Neiberger, 2020). They assist in enhancing customer loyalty and enable companies to bring their brand to life for customers. This work can therefore serve as a reference for further research on the topic of ABtC. The study also offers clear practical implications. Food eOPPs looking to expand can either use company-owned stores as a physical touch point, building customer trust and brand visibility or partner with traditional grocery retailers and a few independently operated stores. Additionally pop-up stores offer a cost-effective way for customers to experience products in person and transition from offline to online purchases. The limited number of food retailers included in this study is a significant limitation. Future research should expand the investigation to include a more representative sample of food-focused eOPPs. Furthermore, an in-depth analysis of the role of pop-up stores is essential as they may represent a flexible and lower-risk market entry option for eOPPs. Their potential impact on brand awareness and customer loyalty may prove to be highly valuable. Furthermore, additional research could examine the interactions between online and offline channels in greater detail, with a particular focus on the role of physical stores in supporting e-commerce growth and vice versa. By gaining a deeper understanding of the synergies and potential for competitive effects between channels, we can gain more nuanced insights into the optimal balance for eOPPs expanding into brick-and-mortar retail.

The German retail market has undergone significant changes in recent years, with customer needs and journeys evolving. Despite the rise of digital retail, offline retail continues to shape the industry, particularly within the food omnichannel retailers (Pratas and Amorim, 2022). These retailers offer customers a direct product experience in their own stores, particularly in the case of food, where sensory experiences such as taste and texture are decisive for the purchase decision. Their strategies seek to merge the boundaries between online and offline retail, increase brand visibility and direct customer experience through physical presence, while maintaining a focus on online retail and limiting the costs of expansion through a limited number of company-owned stores. This is done while maintaining a nationwide brand presence in food retail. The food retail industry is confronted with the challenge of creating a "phygital" shopping experience that combines both physical and digital interactions. Those retailers who are able to adapt their strategies to incorporate both online and offline channels are more resilient during times of crisis and gain a competitive edge (Gauri et al., 2021; Timoumi et al., 2022). This evolution in retail structures offers new market opportunities for omnichannel food retailers, particularly for the development of untapped market niches and the introduction of innovative business concepts such as flagship stores, pop-up stores, and showrooms. The future will determine whether physical stores will decline and transform into mere showrooms or serve as the integration point for various retail channels, thereby becoming the central element of the brand experience.

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