Twitter Thread by Lel



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A thread about panic buying and stockpiling outrage. Availability (or lack thereof) of products in supermarkets is a complex and multi-layered issue.

Basically, it's not just people being cunts. 1/

CHANGING BEHAVIOUR. Many people acquire food from non-supermarket sources. Cafes, work canteens, restaurants, delis, service stations etc. 2/

When this decreases significantly, it takes a relatively small proportion of people in an area to buy one extra meal at the supermarket, to affect supply. 3/

BIGGER BASKETS. There are a LOT of people who shop 'little and often', buying only what they need for that day/possibly the next. The govt is now asking people to limit their trips, meaning products which would take a week to leave shelves will now be bought on a single trip. 4/

Again, it only takes a small proportion of people making this change to affect supply.

SPACE ON SHELF. It sounds obvious, but some products take up more space on shelf. Compare a tin of soup with an 18 pack of toilet roll. 5/

If there are 10 purchases of the soup, the shelf still looks full. If there are 10 purchases of the toilet roll, the shelf is empty.

RANGE. Using the same example, how many different brands and varieties of tinned soup are available in your average large supermarket? 6/

More than 50? And how many different brands of 18 pack toilet rolls are available - maybe 5 or 6?

Again, a category like tinned soup can survive an uptick in purchase fairly easily, in a way that a category like large toilet rolls packs cannot. 7/

So why can't the supermarket just order more stock? Well, supermarkets are run with a fairly iron grip, usually from the retailer head office (I should know, I worked in retail marketing/tech for 10 years). Supply is generally nailed down WELL in

advance. 8/

Sales are usually forecast at a product level using two scenarios.

1. How many units the product sells in each store, per day, when it’s at full price. (called Rate Of Sale)

And 2. How many units a product sells when it’s on promotion (generally significantly more). 9/

Suppliers eg Heinz work with their factories to produce those numbers. And they ensure they have enough raw ingredients to produce the products, based on those numbers.

These are decided weeks or months in advance. 10/

For a lot of product suppliers, it’s very tricky, and expensive, to find additional ingredients and produce stock, at the drop of a hat. In some instances, it’s not possible. 11/

Many suppliers and retailers do not have internal processes which are agile enough to allow for rapidly ramping up production and distribution.

However, I'm sure many of them have learned valuable lessons from the first lockdown (even if our government hasn't). 12/

So ... like I said, I want people to know that availability is a complex and multi-layered issue.

P.s. some people are still cunts, obviously. /END